



MATTHEW 1 AND LUKE 1

COME FOLLOW ME COMMENTARY

BY LYNNE WILSON

The Book of Mormon adds important details to the nativity narratives

Only in the Book of Mormon do we find prophecy foretelling the name of the virgin mother of the Messiah, and prophecy that she will be from Nazareth (Mosiah 3:8, 1 Nephi 11:13, 21). Four hundred years later, as the Nephites are further removed from the memory of their Judaic homeland, when Alma speaks of Jesus' birth, he uses a more general reference to the old world geography—"he shall be born of Mary at Jerusalem" (Alma 7:10). These details add to the reality that the text was ancient. A nineteenth century American would most likely claim Bethlehem as the birthplace not the larger city six miles away. These little details add to the historical account in the New Testament.

New Testament Birth Narratives Part 1

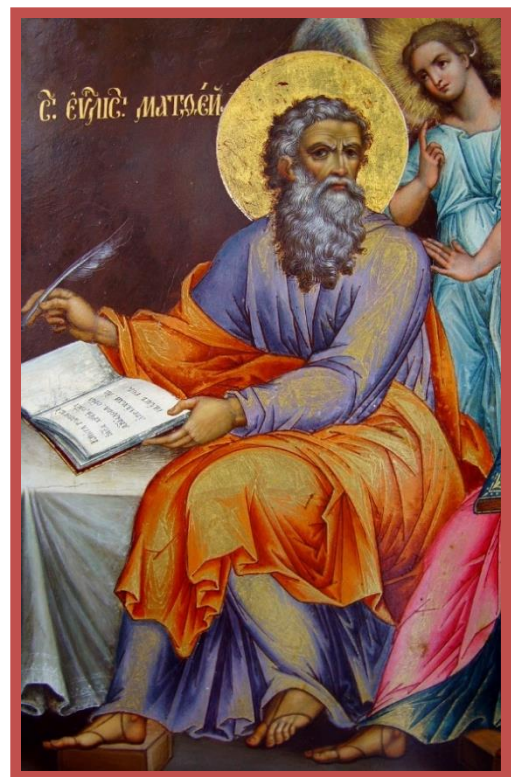
Only Matthew and Luke describe Jesus' birth stories. Matthew has Joseph as the receiver of divine dreams and the main character (with magi and Herod on the side). Luke has Mary as the visionary and main character (with angel Gabriel, Zacharias, Elisabeth, Gabriel, shepherds, Simeon and Anna as supporting figures).

MATTHEW

Matthew begins with a genealogy or “generations” in the KJV (which is Greek γενέσεως for “Genesis,” tying his opening to the first book of the Torah). Joseph’s genealogy is carefully organized around the number fourteen, as we read in Mt 1:17—

So all the generations from Abraham to David are **fourteen** generations; [-750 years]
and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are **fourteen** generations; [-400 years]
and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are **fourteen** generations. [-600 years]

The author wants to emphasize fourteen here and throughout his gospel,¹ even though his manipulated names and dates (omitting 6 kings, etc.) don't add up to fourteen as written. Fourteen was significant as it represented the name David in Hebrew orthography.² Therefore, with both names and numbers it shows that Joseph is a descendant of King David. (Luke also includes Joseph's genealogy, but not until chapter 3 for significant theological reasons we will discuss in chapter three.)



Saint Matthew the Evangelist. Image via Wikimedia Commons

I want to highlight two other interesting details about the genealogy. First, lineage was not a science and often skipped generations as we see here. Even though Joseph's follows kingly lines up to 598 BC (*Jechonias / Jehoiachin*, 2 Kings 24:8), we have no evidence that Joseph was the dauphin. Second, the genealogy includes the names of four women—all of whom had peculiar circumstance (including Ruth, the Moabite convert, and Tamar, who used adultery and incest carried on Judah's posterity, Genesis 38). I presume Matthew included them to add to the message that Israel includes variegated ancestors.

The rest of Matthew's birth narrative is organized around five prophetic scriptures and five dreams:



King David Playing the Harp by Gerard von Honthorst. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

SCENE	SCRIPTURE	CONTENT
Introduction	1:1-17	Genealogy
Scene One	1:18-25 (Isa 7:14)	First dream of Joseph
Scene Two	2:1-12 (Micah 5:1)	Magi go to Herod, then Bethlehem, and receive a divine warning
Scene Three	2:13-15 (Hosea 11:1)	Second dream of Joseph and journey to Egypt
Scene Four	2:16-18 (Jer 31:15)	Herod kills the male infants of Bethlehem
Scene Five	2:19-23 (Isa 4:3?)	Third and fourth dreams of Joseph and journey to Nazareth

We will look at Matthew 2, next week, and only touch on scene one here.

Matthew Scene One 1:18-25

Mt 1:18 The Greek word, “γένεσις/genesis” is repeated and translated as “birth” and “generations,” to connect the genealogy to the nativity narrative.³ The references to genesis, begetting, and Holy Spirit, in this verse all speak of the OT creation theme (Gen 1-2).

This verse tells of Joseph’s “μνηστευθείσης/ espousal / pledge.” This refers to the first of the two-part Jewish marriage ceremony. During the first part, a public ceremony was held where the fathers or guardians of the couple wrote out a marriage contract.⁴ This made the betrothal more than an engagement or party. It included vows as binding as the marriage—which could only be broken by divorce or widowhood.⁵ Usually, after a year, the second party occurred when the couple repeated their vows in the groom’s house, had another grand party, and the young couple lived in the groom’s family home (usually for a few years until the couple could afford their own place).⁶

At the time of the New Testament (NT), fathers (or guardians) arranged their daughter’s marriage before she turned twelve and a half.⁷ According to the Mishnah, the ideal age for a groom to marry was 18, but we find a many between 12–24.⁸ It was common to betroth someone in the same socio-economic class who shared familial ties.⁹

Mt 1:19 “To put her away,” was to divorce her. A Jewish fiancé/husband could divorce his wife for a range of reasons from burning supper and infertility. It was a religious duty to divorce a woman for adultery (and anything that suggested moral uncleanness). One could arrange a divorce either publicly or privately.¹⁰



Jewish Wedding in Morocco by Eugène Delacroix. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Mt 1:20 Joseph made up his mind to have a private divorce until an angelic messenger redirects him.¹¹ According to Jewish thought, a dream was a reliable source of information from God.¹² The fact that the announcement came to Joseph in a dream would dispose him to receive it all the more. The angel honored Joseph by calling him a “son of David.” Other than Jesus, Joseph is the only person in the NT, to receive this kingly title.

Mt 1:21 When a father named a baby, it represented his claim to the child, or adoption. The angel instructs Joseph to name Mary’s son after the prophet Joshua / *Yeshua* (in Hebrew: to save-*verb*, or salvation-*noun*) from *Yehoshau* (Yahweh helps), which is Jesus in Greek. The shared name suggests shared experiences.

JOSHUA

JESUS

Born in Egypt (Num 14:26–31)

He was born into the world or symbolic Egypt

Called to leave Egypt (Ex 3:7–10)

Called forth from Egypt (Matt 2:20)

40 yr purification in the wilderness (Num 14:27–33)

40 days of Jesus' purifying fast (Mt 4:2 Mk 1:13 Lk 4:2)

Defended plan go to the Promised Land (Num 14:27–33)

Defended Father's plan to for agency (Moses 4:2–3)

Named Moses' successor (Num 27:18, 23) and anointed with hands on his head and promised by God: "I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, not forsake thee" (Joshua 1:5)

Named the Father's chosen Son (Abr. 3:27), the Anointed one, or *Messiah*. "He that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone" (John 8:29)

Lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land (Deu 3:28; Josh 1:2, 3:5,13–17). Israel left their old life and entered into a new covenant, as a symbolic baptism, "all the people were passed clean" (Deu 3:17), walking through the river Jordan near Bethabara.

Will lead the way for all mankind to enter an Eternal promised land, starting with His baptism at Bethabara as an example for all to follow (John 1:28–34)

Fought and conquered enemies of Israel so that his people could enjoy the promises of their fathers (Joshua 4).

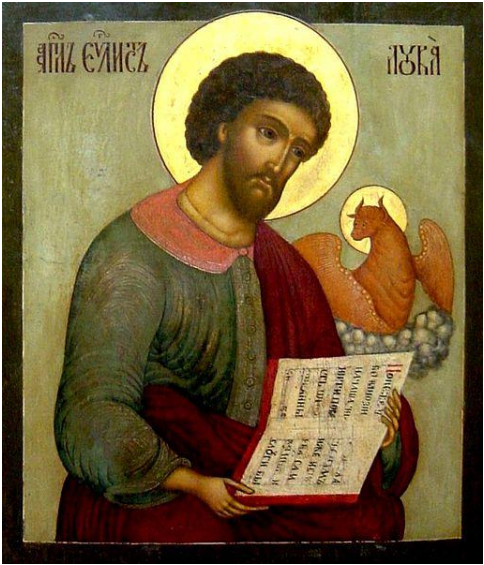
Defeated the enemy of all righteousness, even Satan and saved all of Israel (Rom 11:26–27)

He distributed promised lands to those children of Israel who survived the purification in the wilderness (Joshua 13–22). He established peace and a government as the Prophet / High Priest and Judge.

He will give promised kingdoms of glory to all mankind who pass their first estate, and judge their second estate (D&C 76). He will establish a government of peace and reign as the Prince of Peace, the Great High Priest, (Rev 22, Isa 9:6).

Mt 1:22 Matthew's organizing core begins with: "the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise..." (1:18), and then focuses the message, "to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet" (1:22). We find versions of this verse, or "fulfillment passages," 14 times throughout Matthew (see footnote 1). They illustrate how Jesus fulfilled OT prophecy of the Promised Messiah.

LUKE



Saint Luke the Evangelist via Wikimedia Commons

Chronologically, Luke’s nativity story comes first. He begins his gospel with a classical Greek prologue (1:1–4), and then changes styles to recount the story of Zacharias and Elisabeth (Luke 1:5–25; 56–79). Luke does not record an exact history or chronology, but shows how Christianity is the logical outgrowth of Judaism. Luke organized his first two chapters into parallel episodes of John the Baptist’s and Jesus’ birth—always highlighting Jesus’ supremacy. Jesus is shown as more than a man, he was more than a prophet, he was Jehovah, the great Creator of the World, the Son of God. In fact, Luke uses that title, “Son of God,” for Jesus seven times. John the Baptist and his parents resemble upright Israelites prophets bridging the Old and New Testaments.

Luke’s Parallel Structure of John the Baptist and Jesus

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Annunciation by Gabriel (1:5–25)

Greeting of Elizabeth to Mary (1:39–45)

Birth (1:57–58)

Circumcision, Naming (1:59–63)

Declaration of Destiny by Zacharias (1:64–79)

Conclusion (1:80)

JESUS

Annunciation by Gabriel (1:26–38)

Greeting of Mary at Elizabeth’s home (1:46–56)

Birth narrative & Declaration of Destiny by Angel (2:1–20)

Circumcision, Naming (2:21)

Presentation at the Temple (2:24)

Destiny Declared by Simeon & Anna (2:29–38)

Conclusion (2:39–40)



Replica of Herod's Temple. Image via Wikimedia Commons

Luke Scene One: Annunciation to Zacharias in the Temple

Lk 1:5 While Herod came from three Semitic groups (he was half Idumean and Nabatean, and feigned allegiance to the Jewish Law of Moses), it was his Roman citizenship, and ambition that propelled him into political power. In 40 BC the Roman Senate appointed Herod the Great as King of the Jews, but the Jews rigorously fought his position for three years. In 37 BC, he crushed the Jews into submission in order to control Palestine. His jealous, brutal reign caused his Jewish subjects to detest his leadership. History remembers his reign most from his paranoid jealousy (which led him to murder thousands), and his grandiose building programs.¹³ In contrast to this despised king (and the Roman Caesar in chp 2:1), Luke introduces another king through the voices of a priest and priestess, Zacharias and Elisabeth, in the sanctuaries of the temple and their home.¹⁴

Lk 1:6–7 Luke emphasizes their righteousness three times, because the society assumed that infertility was God's punishment for sin—even though, many noble OT mothers were barren: Sarai or Sarah (Gen 25:21), Rachael (Gen 29:31), Samson's mother (Judg. 13:3), and Hannah (1 Sam 1:2).¹⁵ These “look-a-likes” connect the NT infancy narrative with the OT patriarchal narratives of Israel. Elisabeth and JHpst fit the pattern of past prophets. As planned, “All things were types of things to come” (Mosiah 3:13, also Hosea 12:10). Luke teaches the readers that the origins of JHpst (and Jesus in the next scene), involves a new creation, or a restoration of the covenant made with the patriarchs. The nativity account creates a bridge between the two testaments.

Lk 1:9 The OT outlines the Aaronic and Levitical temple service.¹⁶ The OT explains that priests served in the temple from age 30–50 years old (Numbers 4:3, 23, 35). In Ex 29:29, Aaron and his descendants are told to wash, anoint and consecrate or purify themselves before they serve. After they washed, they donned special white linen temple clothes within the precincts (Lev 16:3–4). They were also to repent and purify their actions and words (Ezekiel 44:17–27). As with most things religious, there is symbolism behind the priestly clothing. It replaced the daily garb to figuratively transport the priest from this world to heaven.

Five weeks a year the priests service in Herod's temple (one week for each Pilgrimage: Passover, Pentecost, and Feast of the Tabernacles, plus two other weeks bi-annually). Each morning before dawn and again in the early afternoon, the priests gathered in the “Hall of Polished Stones” to assign the daily temple assignments by “lot.”¹⁷ The privilege to light the incense within the sanctuary was given only once in a lifetime.¹⁸ So this is Zacharias' special day. The incense symbolized Israel's accepted prayers and was the most solemn part of the day's service.¹⁹ Performing this intercessory act was the only time a priest entered the sanctuary or Holy Place.²⁰ It was there, near the veil, that the angel Gabriel came to make his announcement to Zacharias.²¹

Lk 1:11–21 We have five angelic annunciations in the Bible (Ishmael, Isaac, Samson, JBPst and Jesus). In each one the angel begins with fear not, calls them by name, and prophecies of the birth of a son, and often gives the baby's name and a sign.²²

Lk 1:22 When Zacharias²³ finally came out of the Holy Place, those at the Temple were waiting to offer the priestly benediction, but “*he could not speak unto them.*” His silence was a louder witness of his vision than his voice would have been. The KJV “speechless” in Greek can include both deaf and dumb (Luke 1:62).

Lk 1:24 Elisabeth, like Sarah, felt God's grace in answering her prayers for a child. Her heartfelt rejoicing after decades of humiliation, was kept within her home though as her culture encouraged women indoors most of the time.

Scene Two: Annunciation of Jesus, Luke 1:26-38

Lk 1:26 Nazareth was a relatively unknown little rocky town on a hill in the middle of Galilee. The roots of the name mean “branch.” Only in the Book of Mormon is there a prophecy that foretells the virgin mother of the Messiah will be from Nazareth (1 Nephi 11:13, 21). Archeologists estimate the population was only a few hundred.

Lk 1:27 Luke emphasizes Mary's chastity by his choice of “παρθένου/ *parthenos* / virgin,” not merely “*pais* / girl” or “*paidiske* / maid. It sounds as if Mary was also Davidic, but perhaps that is through marriage. Later we learn she has a relative who is Aaronic, Elisabeth.

Lk 1:28–31 Gabriel addresses Mary/Mariam with honor and peace and to fear not. Mary found favor with God by obedience, a soft heart, purity, and by developing faith, hope, and charity. She is the greatest woman born.

Lk 1:31–33 Gabriel tells Mary to name the child Jesus (see 2 Nephi 25:19). Gabriel’s message rings with OT scripture and the Messianic role outlined by the prophet Nathan in 2 Sam 7:9–16 (also Isaiah 9:7; 2 Sam 7:8–16; Amos 9:11). We have to assume that Mary’s questioning came from a different heart than Zacharias’ questions, as the outcome is different. Many English translations state her question as, “I am still a virgin.” It was humanly impossible, but Gabriel explains the powerful Holy Spirit can work miracles. Mary believes, “with God nothing is impossible.” The “holy thing” becomes the “Holy One of God” in Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34; and John 6:69; and the “Holy One” in Acts 3:14. Jesus is set apart and consecrated to the service of God as the Holiest of all born on the earth.



An Angel Fortells Christ's Birth. Image via LDS Media Library

Lk 1:35 Luke tells us that there was never a moment on this earth when Jesus was not the Son of God—unlike much biblical debate over the subject.

Lk 1:36 Elisabeth is the only blood relative we know of Mary’s (unclear kinsman, cousin, aunt?). Elisabeth points to OT examples of barren women like Sarah, Rachael, and Hannah.

Lk 1:37 This message of great faith sounds like Genesis 18:14 “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?” and Job 42:2 “I know that thou canst do everything.”

Lk 1:38 Mary submits herself as a “*doule* / handmaid” (involuntary or voluntary female slave). She expresses her humility as the slave/servant of the Lord (also see Zephaniah 3:14–17, and Zechariah 9:9). Female slaves at the time were considered a type of concubine who could bear children for their master.²⁴ With one-third of the Roman empire as slaves, Mary knew the implications of this word.²⁵ She is the first NT mortal voice of the Christological message.

Lk 1:39 A young maiden was not allowed to travel alone in Judea, or even go out all.²⁶ We presume she traveled with a local caravan or pilgrimage. It demonstrates her faith in Gabriel’s message and her courage and determination to fulfill her new calling “with haste.” The Judean hill country (1 Sam 1:1) is in the south and extends from the coastal plain inland and eastward. As a priest, Zacharias was encouraged to live within a day’s journey of the temple.

Elisabeth’s Witness

Lk 1:40–45 Gabriel promised that the baby John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb (Lk 1:15); additionally, Elisabeth is filled with the Spirit. She expresses unrestrained joy as she prophesied of Mary’s child as “Lord.” The first two mortal witnesses of Jesus’ birth were women. This is contrary to Hebraic tradition that did not allow a woman to bear witness.²⁷ Those who are blessed of God (or fortunate) can also refer to all who believe the Lord will fulfill his promises.

Mary’s Magnificat

Lk 1:46–55 Mary’s becomes the spokeswomen for all down trodden who come to God.²⁸ Her poetic response is a mosaic of OT phrases from Isaiah 12:2, “God is my salvation;” Psalms 24:5, “God of his salvation;” Psalms 136:23, “Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth forever;” 1 Sam 1:11, “if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid;” Leviticus 11:44, “I am holy;” and etc.²⁹

Lk 1:56 Mary returns to Nazareth, after three months, shortly before Elisabeth delivers. The timing seems odd, but was probably scheduled around a group of people departing to Galilee.

Birth of John the Baptist (JBpst)

Lk 1: 57–5 The healthy and miraculous arrival of Elisabeth’s son fulfilled Gabriel’s promise that the birth would bring rejoicing. Her “relatives” rejoiced with her and for her. God’s mercy is credited for her the baby’s birth (1:14).

Lk 1:59 A son’s circumcision was a “token of the covenant” (Genesis 17:4) and performed on the 8th day—even if it were a sabbath (Leviticus 12:2–3). D&C 84:27–28 tells us a little more about this great day. John was “ordained by the angel of God at the time he was eight days old unto this power [the Aaronic Priesthood?] to overthrow the

kingdom of the Jews, and to make straight the way of the Lord before the face of his people, to prepare them for the coming of the Lord, in whose hand is given all power.” The priesthood that holds the keys of the ministering of angels was bestowed by an angel.

Lk 1:60 Elisabeth intervened against the customs of the day. She exerts her faith in Gabriel’s promises.

Zacharias Testimony and Prophecy

Lk 1:63–79 After Zacharias testifies by writing, he is “immediately” allowed to verbally witness again.

Seventeen of the 19 uses of the word “immediately” in the NT are in Luke. The timing is a large part of the divine healing. Miracles are precisely timed to show God’s control of the elements and this healing is no exception. Zacharias’ first use of speech is appropriate—no frustration for the curse, but rather gratitude for the healing. While his previous words doubted, his next words spoke of his faith. He offers a hymn of praise known as the “Benedictus,” another mosaic of OT phrases and the Eighteen Benedictions.³⁰ (Zacharias’ blessing parallels Elisabeth’s in Luke 1: 42.) Filled with the Holy Ghost, Zacharias proclaims the restoration of the glories and offices of the temple, culminating with work for the dead.³¹

Lk 1:80–81 Luke parallel’s the experiences of John the Baptist and Jesus by summarizing their growth. When examining them we find Jesus’ character is even greater than the prophet John. Luke’s transition technique removes one person from the scene to give the spotlight to another. ❖

Header Image: *The Annunciation* by John Scott. Image via the LDS Media Library

ENDNOTES

¹ The gospel of Matthew cites 14 Old Testament (OT) prophecies and points out their fulfillment (Mt 1:22; 2:5, 15, 17, 23; 3:3; 4:14, 8:17; 12:17; 13:14, 35; 21:4; 26:56; 27:9).

² In ancient Hebrew, orthography used numbers for meaning. David’s name, *D-W-D*, was 14. Biblical Hebrew numbers are written as letters of their alphabet. (It would be the same in English if A=1, B=2, C=3, and so on.) So, the name *dwd* would be, D=4, W=6, or 4+6+4=14. From the 5th C BC the accepted *gematria* of David’s name was 14.

³ Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1993), 123.

⁴ *Mishnah*, “Ketubot,” 4:4–4:5

⁵ Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel according to Luke I–IX* (New York: Doubleday, 1981).

⁶ Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. 22 vols. (Detroit, NYC, San Francisco: Thomson Gale, 2007), 13.565.

⁷ *Mishnah, Yebamoth*, 13.1. Rabbi Hillel (60 BC to 20 AD), wrote that a girl of twelve-and-a-half “may exercise right of refusal four or five times” in the selection of her husband. In reaction to this limit, the more lenient rabbinic school of Shammai retorted, “The daughters of Israel are no [such] ownerless property!” Shammai allowed the underage girl to stay in her father’s home until “she is come of age,” meaning the onset of puberty.

⁸ *Mishnah*, Abot 5:21 A. 689. The ideal age for young man’s marriage was eighteen. Caesar Augustus imposed a tax or fine for any female over 20, and male over 25, who were not married yet. Jackson J. Spielvogel, *Western Civilization 7th ed.* (Belmont, CA: Thomson & Wadsworth, 2009), volume 1, 152.

⁹ The book of Jubilees recommends marriage with a cousin (Jub. 4:15.16, 20, 27, 28, 33; 11:7, 14)

¹⁰ Divorce could not be completely private, because it required a “writ of repudiation” before two witnesses (Brown, *Birth*, 128).

¹¹ D&C 130:5, “There are no angels who minister to this earth but those who do belong or have belonged to it.”

¹² Alfred Edersheim, *Jesus the Messiah* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1898), 155. In reference to Proverbs 19:23, Rabbi Zera claims that three things showed God’s favor: “A good king, a fruitful year, and a good dream” (quoting ‘Ber. 55 b).

¹³ Herod’s building project included eight major fortresses (Masada, Machaerus, Herodium in Perea, Alexandria, Cyprus, Hurcania, and the Herodium southeast of Bethlehem), two elaborate Hellenistic cities (Augustus, and Caesarea Maritima). His crowning jewel, the Temple of Jerusalem (the rebuilding was begun in 20 BC and wasn’t completed until AD 62). Technically, this first King Herod ruled all Palestine, not just Judea.

¹⁴ Luke intrudes Zacharias as a priest (not the high priest). At the time of Jesus, the priesthood was divided into offices:

1. The reigning High Priest
2. The Chief Priests: The captains of the temple
 - a. The leaders of the 24 weekly divisions or “courses.”
 - b. Custody of the Temple: Temple overseers
 - c. Temple finances: Three treasurers
3. The Priests: 24 weekly courses each of four to nine daily courses with about 7,200 priests
4. The Levites: 24 weekly courses, each divided into:
 - a. Singers and musicians
 - b. Temple servants and guards with about 9,600 Levites

¹⁵ We find OT hints of this (Gen 16:4, 11; 29:32; 30:1; Lev 20:20–21; 1 Sam 1:5–6; 2 Sam 6:23), but by the time of the late second temple, the oral laws recorded in the Mishnah a husband’s religious duty to divorce his wife after 10 years of infertility.

¹⁶ David Noel Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 804. Levites or descendants of Levi were more numerous and took care of the more secular tasks of running the temple—acting as the temple police, gatekeepers, tax collectors, janitors, fire keepers, and musicians. They served at the temple between the ages of twenty-five and fifty, according to Numbers 8:24–25 (or age twenty, according to 1 Chronicles 23:24).

¹⁷ A “lot” was a private small stick placed in a dish. The one that fell out was supposedly chosen by God to serve that day.

MORNING LOTS

1. Cleanse the altar and to prepare its fires for the burnt animal offering.
2. Sacrifice the lamb, toss the blood, cleanse the candlestick and altar incense, and carry the animal up the ramp to the altar.
3. Burn incense and offer the priestly prayer
4. Places the meat offering on the altar.

EVENING LOTS (at the 9th hour or 3pm) Only the incense was offered as “a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations” (Ex 30:7–8). The afternoon lighting was “the time of prayer” (Acts 3:1).

¹⁸ *Mishnah*, Tamid 5:2–6:3. Before the “incense” lot was chosen the priests offered a blessing, recited the Ten Commandments, and the *shema* (Duet 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Num 15:37–41) as a confession of their faith.

¹⁹ *Mishnah* Tamid 6:3 and 7, describes a priest entering the sanctuary or Holy Place, then taking the incense from a bowl, onto the burning coals, and scatter it. After offering the incense, he “prostrated himself and went out.”

²⁰ Leviticus 16. The high priest alone went through the veil into the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement.

²¹ Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos* (Salt Lake City, UT: Foundation of Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1992), 42. “Civilization is heirocentric, centered around the holy point of the temple. ...The temple is also an observatory. That is what a *templum* is—a place where you take your bearings on things” (Ibid, 15,19).

²² Genesis 16:7–12; 17:1–21; 18:1; Judges 13:3–21; Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:11–37; Luke 2:9–12.

²³ This the most common name in the OT, spelled both Zachariah and Zechariah. Do not mistaken this priest with the 9th Century BC high priest who was slain between the temple alter. See Lynne Hilton Wilson, “The Confusing Case of Zacharias,” *Religious Educator* 14, no. 2 (2013).

²⁴ Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament* (NYC: Crossroad Publishing, 1998), 23.

²⁵ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Bartchy, “Servant” 4.420, 545. Tim G. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins, 2003), 183.

²⁶ Judaeus Philo, *Special Laws III*, 7 vols. (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1967), 3.169, 171 “Marketplaces and council-halls, law-courts and gatherings, and meetings where a large number of people are assembled, and open-air life with full scope for discussion and action – all these are suitable to men both in war and peace. The women are best suited to the indoor life which never strays from the house . . . A woman then, should not be a busybody, meddling with matters outside her household concerns, but should seek a life of seclusion.”

²⁷ Josephus, *Josephus Complete Works: Antiquities of the Jews*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, Reprint, 1978), IV.8:15. Skolnik, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 21.161.

²⁸ Brown, *Birth*, 335, 357

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 337; Exodus 6:6; 34:6; II Sam 7:15; Deut 4:34; Isa 13:11; 41:8, 44:1, 45:4; 1 Chr 29:18; Gen 50:4; Jer 17:11; 1 Sam 2:5–7;

³⁰ Skolnik, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1.73–74. From the time of the Second Temple, male and female Jews offered a set of eighteen benedictions, which began by referring to God: 1. of the patriarchs, 2. of nature, and 3. sanctification. The prayer then petitioned God for: 4. understanding, 5. repentance, 6. forgiveness, 7. redemption, 8. healing, 9. food, 10. gathering of exiles, 11. restore His righteous reign; 12. against heretics, 13. mercy for the righteous, 14. Jerusalem, 15. the messianic king, 16. hear our prayers, 17. return God’s presence to the temple, and 18. thanks to God for all his mercies. The prayer had slight variations for certain Sabbath services or holy days.

³¹ Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos*, 43.



MATTHEW 2 AND LUKE 2

COME FOLLOW ME COMMENTARY

BY LYNNE WILSON

The Book of Mormon and the Nativity

Without the Book of Mormon's witness, biblical scholars have doubted Matthew and Luke's nativity stories as they discuss different ideas, contradict each other at times, and have no second source within the Bible. Yet, we find references to Jesus' nativity narratives scattered across the Book of Mormon. This study guide highlights several details that confirm Matthew and Luke's accounts, including: 1 Nephi 1:8; Mosiah 3:15; Alma 7:10, 25:15; 3 Nephi 1:13. With the Book of Mormon as a second witness, the world has two prophetic voices confirming Jesus' birth.

LUKE 2

Luke develops his message by using his structure to compare and contrast the parallel accounts of John the Baptist (JBpst) with Jesus' birth, naming, circumcision, and growth. In every case, Jesus is shown superior.

Table 1:

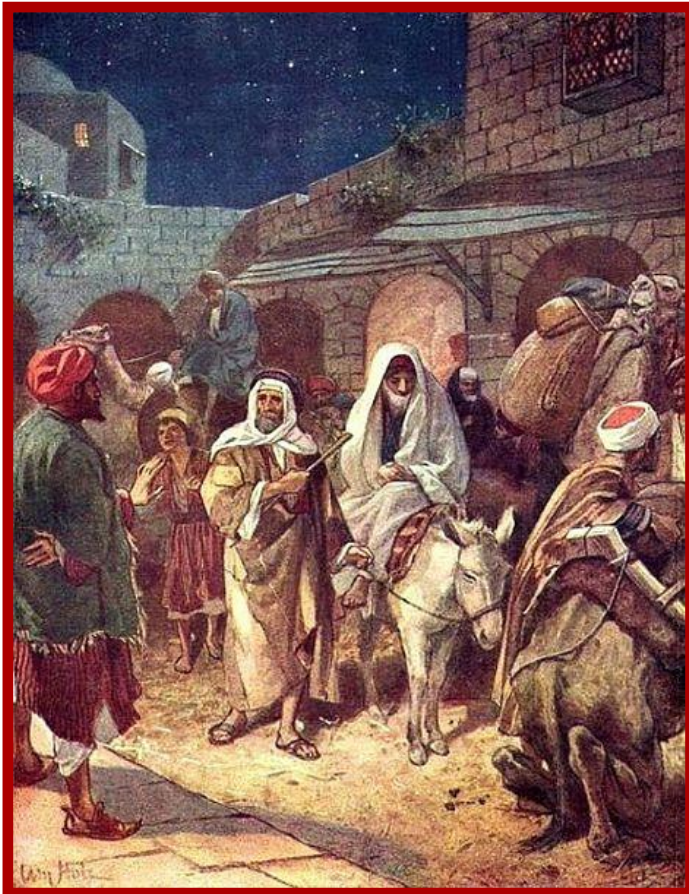
Luke's Parallel accounts of John the Baptist and Jesus' Birth, Circumcision, Naming, and Infancy

JOHN	JESUS
1. Notice of Birth: (1:57) d) Joy over John's birth (1:58) f) All astonished (1:65-66)	1. Jesus' Birth a) Census brings Joseph with Mary to Bethlehem (2:1-5) b) Mary gives birth to Jesus; swaddles him in a manger (2:6-7) c) Angelic declaration of destiny to the Shepherds (2:8-14) d) Joy over Jesus' birth (2:15-18) e) Mary treasured all this in her heart (2:19) f) Shepherds return, all who hear are astonished (2:20)
2. Circumcision + Naming (1:59-66) a) Circumcised + named (1:59-64) c) Neighbors' reaction (1:65-66) d) Zacharias' prophecies (1:67-79)	2. Circumcision, Naming and Presentation in Temple (2:21-38) a) Circumcised and named (2:21) b) Presentation in the Temple (2:22-24) c) Simeon and Anna's Reaction (2:25-27, 36-37) d) Simeon's prophecy (2:29-32) e) Anna's prophetic testimony (2:38)
3. Conclusion: Growth of child (1:80)	3. Conclusion: Growth of child (2:39-40)

Mary and Joseph Travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem (Lk 2:1-7)

Lk 2:1-2 By citing the decree of Caesar Augustus, Luke not only gives us this historical context, but also sets up a great irony. In 27 BC, the Senate and people gave Octavian, the title Augustus Caesar until his death in AD 14. His

adopted father, Julius Caesar, was posthumously proclaimed a god by the senate in 42 BC, so Augustus used the title “son of god” as part of his official nomenclature on coins and inscriptions throughout the empire. His victories put an end to the violent civil wars and brought peace to the Roman world (or *Pax Romana*), thus, he was called “savior of the whole world.” Also, his birthday was adopted as the beginning of the new year. As a biblical scholar observed, “It can scarcely be accidental that Luke’s description of the birth of Jesus presents an implicit challenge to this imperial propaganda, not by denying the imperial ideals, but by claiming that the real peace of the world was brought about by Jesus.”¹



Joseph and Mary arrive in Bethlehem by William Hole. Image via Wikimedia Commons

the route was well known, as these Jews made pilgrimages to Jerusalem each year.⁴ Just five miles south of Jerusalem was David’s birthplace, Bethlehem. Those who studied the Jewish scriptures knew that the promised Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem was at least 90 miles, but most travelers added several more miles to circumvent the dangerous Samaria.⁵ In the Old Testament (OT) the “city of David” refers to Jerusalem (see 2 Sam 5:7, 9). In the New Testament (NT), “the city of David” always refers to David’s birthplace, Bethlehem (Luke 2:11). This is an interesting observation when taking into account the Book of Mormon prophecy that the Jesus “shall be born at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers” (Alma 7:10).

Lk 2:5-6 The text emphasizes that Mary’s pregnancy fulfills Gabriel’s annunciation. A literal translation suggests that Mary and Joseph were at Bethlehem for some time before the child is born: “It happened, in their being there,

Luke uses the official Roman rhetoric for the Empire: “*oikoumene* / all the world,” or “inhabited earth,” called for an enrollment or registration for taxation (see NAS, NIV, JB, RSV). Although no census of the whole Empire is known under Augustus, it sets the stage for the Savior for all the world to count and redeem all the world.² Herod the Great acted as a client king in Palestine from 40 to -4/0BC, and paid tribute to Rome.

Lk 2:3 The Romans did not require enrollment in one’s ancestral city. Imperial authority delegated the provinces to carry out their census.³ It was an old Hebrew practice to enroll by families in their ancestral districts (women, including Mary, would be counted only if it were a poll tax).

Lk 2:4 Israelites always went “up” to Jerusalem and its vicinity (Ezra 1:3), in part because it was a holy place, as well as being 2,564 feet above sea level. The

(that) the days of her giving birth were (ful)filled.”⁶ Yet, an apocryphal source has the babe delivered in a cave before they reach Bethlehem.⁷ The timing of the miracle adds to the miraculous event.

The Book of Mormon adds an extra detail to the story. The day before the Savior was born the prophet Nephi received a revelation as recorded in 3 Nephi 1:13, “the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world.” The voice is an example of divine investiture of authority for another to speak for God, as Jesus’ spirit was in utero at that time.⁸

Lk 2:7 The only author to include Jesus’ birth is Luke, the “beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14). He gives us an opportunity to peek through a window of antiquity and look on this sacred scene. The birth process has the elements of pain (often nigh unto death), blood, agony, water, life and exquisite joy. These all echo Jesus’ suffering for our Eternal lives. The two are combined by St. Athanasius: “He was made human that we might be made divine.”⁹

Luke does not describe the birth process, but focuses on how and where Mary laid the baby (and repeats it three times 2:12 and 16, for emphasis). Being swaddled, or “wrapped him in strips of cloth” (NIV), was a sign of parental care (Ezekiel 16:4; Wisdom of Solomon 7:4). Some see this foreshadowing Jesus being wrapped in a linen shroud before burial (Luke 23:53).¹⁰

The Greek word, “*phatne* / manger,” can mean a stall for tying up animals, or trough for feeding them. Troughs were either a low rock shelf in a cave, or a moveable large rock with a section carved out for feed. The manger was emphasized as a fulfillment of Isaiah 1:3; “The ox knows its owner, and the donkey knows the ‘*phatne* / manger’ of its lord, but Israel has not known me” (Septuagint, LXX). This also foreshadows Jesus’ mission: “the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head” (Matt 8:20), and his last supper—which was also in a *katalyma* / inn / guest room (Luke 22:11).



The Virgin and Child in Swaddling Clothes by Albrecht Dürer. Image via Wikimedia Commons

The Greek word, “*katalyma* / inn” usually represented a place where travelers could lay down their baggage while stopping over-night. Public inns were not snug or comfortable like modern hotels, but more like a khan, where groups of travelers spend the night under one roof.¹¹ They were often low structures built of rough stone, generally only a single story. They were usually square enclosures, some with arched recesses around the courtyard. The recessed area was a step or two above the courtyard and often paved with stone where travelers stayed on cots or mats. Their animals could be tied in the courtyard below until the paved area of the inn was full. If travelers filled

the covered area, the animals were kept outside or in a cave, so that more people could roll out their mats in the courtyard.

In the hill area of central Palestine, the limestone rocks are filled with caves, and entire khans were found in caves.¹² If the early accounts of a cave as the birth location are correct, then Isaiah 33:16 can also be interpreted as a prophecy of the Lord's birth, "He will dwell in a high cave of strong rock" (LXX).

Archeologists have found one khan in Bethlehem. The problem was not of insufficient space but of a proper place. The courtyard probably could have fit another mat among the throngs. But Joseph and Mary's needs were different than just a traveler seeking a place to lay down. Divine intervention prevailed in finding their lodging away from the crowds for Mary's delivery. We see an ironic pattern throughout Christ's ministry and beyond as so few find room in their hearts for Him.



Angels announcing Christ's birth to the shepherds by Govert Flinck. Image via Wikimedia Commons

Angels Visit Shepherds (Lk 2:8–14)

Lk 2:8 The fields where the shepherds kept watch was approximately two miles from Bethlehem (also referred to as the "tower of the flock" or Migal Edar, Genesis 35:21; Micah 4:7, 5:2). The Mishnah explains that animals found between Jerusalem and Migdal Eder were used for temple sacrifices.¹³ The symbolism of the sacred sheep who will leave the shepherds' fields to be anointed and sacrificed in the temple, is a poignant type of the Anointed One who

will also leave Bethlehem to become “the great and last sacrifice, yea ... infinite and eternal” (Alma 34:10). Isaiah prophesied, “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7).

God chose to announce the news of the birth of the Messiah to the lowly populace of the area, not to the political or religious leaders. Shepherds were often considered dishonest and outside the Law. According to the early rabbis, herdsman were ineligible to judge or act as a witness, because some grazed their flocks on other people’s lands.¹⁴ Just like the situation of Elisabeth’s and Zacharias’ barrenness, or Mary’s and Joseph’s questionable conception, we are once again presented with a group who are social outcasts and ostracized. Ironically, they are shown to be righteous, humble, devote followers of their God. Jesus himself chose to adopt the symbol of “the good Shepherd” (John 10:11, 14; also see Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 5:4).

Sheep were out in the fields between March and November. The shepherds were “watching the watches of the night,” to protect them, or during the lambing season to help with the birthing process.¹⁵ These shepherds may have gone from the birth of their lambs to the birth of the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29).

Lk 2:9–10 In the OT, “an angel of the Lord” describes God’s visible presence among men.¹⁶ The glory of the Lord in the OT is the “*shechinah*,” or the cloud of brightness (Exodus 16:10, 24:16). It symbolizes the Divine Presence. In the NT, an angel is a messenger. Outside of the Nativity scenes, “an angel of the Lord,” appears only in the Gospels during the Lord’s Passion and at the empty tomb (Luke 22:43; Matthew 28:2,5). The angel terrified the shepherds—which is the standard reaction to angelic appearances in scripture (Luke 1:12–13, 29–30; Isaiah 60: 1, 5; etc.).

The angel’s message to “all people” contrasts with Augustus’ edict to “all the world” (Luke 2:1). The angels’ announcement for “all people” is not an exaggeration, but is for the entire human history, including the gentiles, all living and dead.¹⁷

Lk 2:11 The angel announces the messianic hope through the birth of a baby. This includes the fulfillment of Isaiah 9:6, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” The author re-emphasizes that Jesus’ birth (not Augustus’) marks a new beginning of time. Luke uses the phrase, “this day/*semeron*,” twenty times. It gives an eschatological sense that the last time is at hand.¹⁸ The angel also introduces two other titles: Savior and Christ the Lord. Christ is Greek for Messiah (in Hebrew), which translates to Anointed One in English. The atmosphere and language of Luke’s nativity narrative speaks of the promised messiah.

Lk 2:12–13 As with the annunciation pattern, the angel gives a customary *sign* (Luke 1:20, 1:35–36). The birth also fulfills the sign given to King Ahaz through Isaiah: “the Lord himself shall give you a sign, Behold, a virgin shall conceive” (Isaiah 7:14). King Benjamin taught in Mosiah 3:15, “many signs, and wonders, and types, and shadows showed he unto them, concerning his coming; and also holy prophets spake unto them concerning his coming.”

The scene climaxes as a numerous heavenly host bursts into view. The glorious and profound benediction to the shepherds' vision fulfills Isaiah 6:3, "The whole earth is full of his glory." The shepherds hear angels praising God "in the Highest," which literally means, "in the highest heavens." The Greek emphasizes the plurality of heavens, and God's dwelling in the highest of those heavens.¹⁹ Restored scripture echo this truth starting with Lehi who also "saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God" (1 Nephi 1:8; also D&C 76:70–96).

Lk 2:14 Earlier the angel promises that the good tidings are for all people, so in this sense, God's favor toward man is universal and inclusive; all are deserving of His good favor. Elder James Talmage asked, "What a consummation to be wished—Peace on earth! But how can such come except through the maintenance of good will toward men? And through what means could glory to God in the highest be more effectively rendered?"²⁰

Another way to analyze this beautiful couplet is as poetry. There are three parallel elements in each line: a noun, a location, and a directional phrase. The glory given to God is poised with the peace given to man. Heaven and earth are balanced and become one in the heralding of Jesus' birth. "Glory" and "peace" are parallel; "in the highest" and "on earth" are parallel; and "to God" and "among men favored" by God, (people whom he favors).²¹

Glory in the highest to God, and
Peace on earth among men favored (by Him)



Adoration of the Shepherds by Gerard von Honthorst. Image via Wikimedia Commons

Shepherds Visit the Babe (Lk 2:15–20)

The first scene told of a promised baby born in Bethlehem, whom Mary wrapped in strips of cloth and laid in a manger. In the second scene angels tell the shepherds of the baby's birth and are given a sign to find the baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger. Now Luke's account climaxes as the witnesses arrive at the manger. The shepherds' pilgrimage of a couple of miles led them up a terraced hill to the craggy summit crowned with the town of Bethlehem to find the swaddled babe in a manger.

Lk 2:15–17 The shepherds “*came with haste*.” Immediate obedience, motivated by spontaneous trust, reoccurs as a theme in scripture (Luke 1:39, etc.). In contrast to the state of Israel that Isaiah described in chapter 1:3, “The ox knows his master, and the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand” (NIV), here Israel symbolically comes to know the manger of their Lord. This is not only the zenith of the shepherds' lives, but also the zenith of world history up to that point.

The text claims the shepherds shared the good news, yet, strangely, nowhere in the rest of the Gospels outside of these nativity chapters can we find any references or hints to suggest Jesus had a miraculous birth or was born in Bethlehem (John 1:45; 6:45; 7:41–2; Luke 3:23). Mary and Jesus are the only two found in both the infancy narrative and the ministry texts.²²

Lk 2:18 Again Luke develops a parallel phrase with JBPst's naming and circumcision (Luke 1:66). The neighbors who witnessed his birth also “marveled” (Luke 1:21, 63; 2:33). Luke organized the two births and naming accounts to be as interdependent, just as their lives will develop interdependently.²³

Lk 2:19 Mary's silence is amplified as she, “*synterein* / kept, preserved, treasured” in her heart. The depth of her pondering contrasts to the shepherds' reaction, who “made known abroad” (2:17).

Lk 2:20 The shepherds become the first missionaries as they spread the message of their witness. Yet, they are only intermediaries, as the message they proclaim is far more important than they themselves.

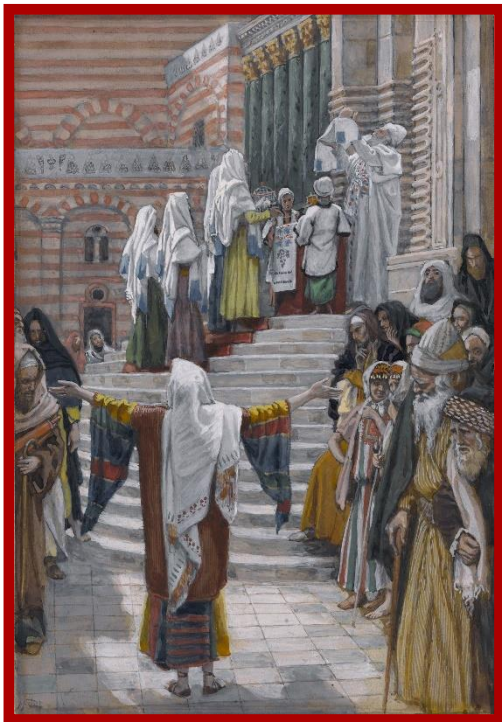
Jesus' Circumcision and Naming (Lk 2:21)

Lk 2:21 Luke repeats, “When the days were accomplished” three times: 1) Jesus' birth (2:6), 2) Jesus' circumcision, and 3) Mary's purification (2:22). The repetition connects the three events. The law of Moses dictated circumcision customs (Leviticus 12:2–3). For JBPst, it was the center of his birth scene, while for Jesus, the circumcision is almost a side note. It is certainly viable to view John as the last of the old-covenant prophets, and thereby giving his circumcision more importance as part of that covenant given to Abraham's seed. All that happened during John's naming and circumcision adds importance to the old covenant setting. On the other hand, with Christ came the new covenant and a new definition of circumcision of the heart (Colossians 2:11, Galatians 3:24). The poet John Milton saw Jesus' circumcision with symbolic importance for what lay ahead.²⁴

“He who with all heaven’s heraldry whilere
Entered the world, now bleeds to give us ease.
Alas! How soon our sin
Sore doth begin
His infancy to seize!”

In the parallel account, when JBPst’s is named, it caused a stir among the people (Luke 1:59–66), while Luke only mentions it for Jesus, and moves quickly ahead to the temple.

At the Temple (Lk 2:22–40)



The Presentation at the Temple by James Tissot.

Lk 2:22–24 Luke has five references to the Mosaic Law running through this scene (2:23, 24, 27, 39). The reference to Mary’s 40-day purification period (Lev 12:3–4) underscores the message that the future greatness of Jesus is made possible through obedience to the Law of the Lord.²⁵ The law required a sacrifice as part of the purification of the mother after childbirth (not for redemption of the firstborn as Luke mistakenly records). A woman was ritually unclean for seven days before the circumcision and 33 days after her delivery of a male (and doubled to 80 days for a female). The number 33 immediately remind us of the span of Christ’s mortality. Symbolically, $33 + 7 = 40$, represents complete, whole, or perfection (Exodus 24:18; Numbers 14:34; 2 Samuel 5:4; Hebrews 3:17; etc.).

Luke goes into some detail to explain the Jewish customs. His wording is from the Septuagint (LXX) of Leviticus 12:8. Luke’s explanation suggests that his audience was unfamiliar with the details of Law of Moses. Rather than sacrificing a costly lamb, the Law provided a less expensive option for the purification sacrifice—a pair of turtledoves or pigeons (one was for a sin offering, the other for a burnt offering, Leviticus 2:18).

Mary and Joseph would have passed through the court of the Gentiles, around the three-cubit (or five-foot) stone partition that enclosed the sacred space, through the “gate of the women,” or else “the gate of the firstlings,” into the 200 square foot Court of Women. The Court of Women was not exclusively for women, but rather it was the last place Israelite women were allowed to proceed in the temple precincts. This was the common place of study and worship, though the men and women were separated. The females and children were allowed to worship along the perimeter under a colonnade. Against a wall were thirteen chests, in the shape of a trumpet, for charitable contributions.²⁶ This is where the young couple would have paid for their offering of two doves.

Lk 2:25–27 Simeon is described with four noble characteristics: 1) “just /righteous / holy” (also see Luke 1:6, 2) “devout” or respectful and careful about religious duties, 3) “longing expectancy” or faithfully and patiently waiting for the fulfillment of God’s promises, and 4) a recipient of the Spirit of God.²⁷ The Spirit’s inspiration directs him to the temple courtyard. In this way, Simeon represents all Spirit filled Israelites who wait for the Lord’s promises. Luke explains that Simeon happened to be in Jerusalem—in contrast with Zacharias whose priestly duty brought him to the Temple (1:8–9).²⁸

One of the motifs of this scene is that both the Law and the prophets are fulfilled in Jesus. Malachi 3:1 prophesied, “The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His Temple.” Luke parallelisms continue as Simeon, and next Anna, act as double witnesses of Jesus’ divinity.

Simeon’s Servant Song



Simeon in the Temple by Rembrandt. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Lk 2:28–32 The scene includes the beautiful diversity of Simeon at the end of his life holding a child that is just beginning his life. Simeon’s prophecy has become famous in the mass as its Latin first words, *Nunc dimittis*. The poem speaks of joy and peace by highlighting the watchman and the aged. Simeon describes himself as a “servant / *doulon*,” just as Mary does in Luke 1:38, “handmaiden / *doule* / servant / slave.” As a devoted servant Simeon addresses God as his “mighty Master.” Simeon’s message testifies of God’s foreknowledge and carrying out of His plans. He quotes portions of scripture including Isaiah 52:10; 42:6; 46:13; and 60:1. He includes gentiles as well as Israelites as those who will be blessed from this child’s life.

Lk 2:33 Mary and Joseph marvel that Jesus will save both Israel and the gentiles (third use of marvel, 1:21, 63, 2:18).

Lk 2:34–35 Simeon blessed the parents and prophesies of Mary’s lot too. The four lines each have a theme of judgment.

“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel,
and to be a sign that will be spoken against,
so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.
And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” (Lk 2:34–35)

Simeon predicts that a rebellious people are about to dissent. The “fall / *ptosis* / failure” figuratively means, downfall or crash. The foundations of hell will crash with “this child’s” life. Jesus was “set or appointed” to overcome “the fall” of mankind. Simeon is referring to “this child,” the embodied Jehovah, who was placed since the fall for the rising of all mankind. This child, the Redeemer, will rule as King and judge over the fallen of the earth. It can also infer an individual downfall.

The word “*anastasis* / rising” is often translated “resurrection from death, rising again” or figuratively “a moral recovery (of spiritual truth).” This child has been set or prepared since the fall to provide “a moral recovery of spiritual truth,” and a physical resurrection.²⁹ The “rejected (or opposed) symbol” refers to the future. Jesus will be rejected as a sign (Isaiah 53:3).

Lk 2:35 There are several interpretations of what the sword that pierces means.³⁰ The JST clarifies this: “a sword shall pierce through *him to the wounding of thine* own soul.” It implies that Mary is not exempt from mortal pains, and the sorrows of motherhood. From the Garden of Eden, the devil is allowed to have power to bruise the heel of Adam’s posterity, God promised that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent or Satan (Genesis 3:15) Mary’s son, Jesus, is the only literal seed of woman who can crush Satan’s head.

The Prophetess Anna Witnesses



The prophetess Anna by Rembrandt. Image via Wikimedia commons.

Lk 2:36–38 The female and second witness in this scene is the prophetess Anna (or Hannah in Hebrew), whose name means, “Grace or Favor.” She has several unique traits: She is from the tribe of Asher, a prophetess, over one-hundred-years-old, and speaks as a female witness. In the late second temple, Jewish women were not allowed to speak as a legal witness—but that is changed by Jesus and in Christianity where women are regularly shown as witnesses.³¹ Anna is the forerunner of the Jerusalem Christian community in her fasting and prayer in the Temple setting (Acts 2:17, 46). Luke also uses his numbers carefully by offering his audience three double witnesses plus Mary, for a total of seven voices proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah. These witnesses embody all devout believers waiting for the fulfillment of the covenants of Israel.

Conclusion and Return to Galilee

Lk 2:39 Luke’s conclusion prepares the reader geographically and theologically to move from the infancy to the next stage of Jesus’ life. Luke follows the Holy Family from the purification at the temple back “to their own city Nazareth.” This appears to contradict Matthew’s nativity agenda that has the family living in a house in Bethlehem and then flees to Egypt before moving to Nazareth. However, if we read, “all things according to the law,” as a broad conditional, then Luke’s timing could include more (i.e. the prophecies had to be fulfilled “out of Egypt have I called my Son.”) The Law and the prophets were all “a type of his coming” (Alma 25:15). Luke’s goal was to record his theology, not a complete history. Furthermore, he probably did not know the details from Matthew’s account. A possible timeline of these events would be:

Table 2: Timetable of Nativity Events

LUKE	Shepherds come to Bethlehem	Circumcision 8 days old	Mary's purification 40 days old			Return to Nazareth
MATTHEW	Star seen at its rising/east			Magi come	Flee to Egypt	Return to Nazareth

Lk 2:40 This verse is identical to what was said of JBpst in 1:80, up until the word, spirit:

JBpst: And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit

Jesus: And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him

With each of Luke's parallel accounts, Jesus is endowed with extra wisdom and grace from God. Luke witnesses that Jesus has superiority to all things—including the prophets and Law of Moses. Jesus' "favored by God" connects the infancy of Jesus to his ministry.

MATTHEW 2

Scene 2: Arrival of the Magi (Mt 2: 1–12)

The second of five scenes in Matthew's nativity introduces the visit from the magi in parallel episodes:

JERUSALEM

1. Magi go to Jerusalem after seeing a sign by a star (2:1–2)

2. Herod asks scribes where Messiah will be born (2:3–6)

3. Herod instructs magi to find the child and return (2:7–8)

BETHLEHEM

1b. Magi go to Bethlehem led by a star (2:9–10)

2b. Magi find Messiah and offer royal gifts (2:11)

3b. Dream directs magi *not* to return to Herod (2:12)

Mt 2:1 In addition to being David's hometown, the word Bethlehem means: "House of Bread" in Hebrew—making it doubly relevant for the birth place of the "Bread of Life" (John 6:35). Bethlehem in Judea was a small agricultural town perched on a rocky outcropping 2,704 feet above sea level, just five miles south of Jerusalem. At the time of Jesus' birth, the population was about 300. Not too far away, on the highest hill just southeast of Bethlehem, King Herod built an imposing castle, the "Herodium" that dominated the region. Bethlehem is mentioned 41 times in the OT. References include (a) where Ruth and Boaz met (Ruth 1, 2:4, 4:11), (b) where David's ancestral home was, (c) where David was anointed by the prophet Samuel as king over God's people (I Sam 16:1-13; 17:12, 15; 20:6, 28), (d) and where was the traditional site of Rachel's tomb (Gen 35:19, 48:7). It was well known by Micah's prophecy as the birthplace of the promised Messiah: "Out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be ruler of Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." (Micah 5:2). In first century Judaism, the scriptural relationship between Bethlehem and the Messiah was well known. It was not just Herod's chief priests and scribes who knew of this scriptural reference to the Messiah's birthplace. In John 7:42 the people of Jerusalem ask, "Has not the Scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" Rabbinical teaching unhesitatingly points toward Bethlehem as the birthplace of Messiah ben David.

Herod the king



Herod the Great. Image via Wikimedia Commons



Image via public domain pictures

Herod represented three of the Semitic races, two by birth (Edomite and Ishmaelite), and the third by his feigned allegiance to the Law of Moses (Jew). Nonetheless, his conceptions of governmental policy were completely Roman, and his ideal of life and enjoyment were entirely Greek. At twenty-five, energetic and athletic, Herod became the governor of Galilee and subdued the unrest there. In 40 BC he went to Rome where Antony and Octavius appointed him King of Judea. However, the Jewish people did not welcome him as their king. He fought the Jews for three years, married Mariamne I, a princess from the Hasmonean family (only to kill her later as he realized she and her children had more of a right to the throne than he did). Finally, in 37 BC he gained possession of Jerusalem.³² A masterful politician, Herod maintained favor with the Roman rulers, but his devout Jewish subjects utterly despised him. He was most known for his paranoid jealousy that led to a brutal reign, and his grandiose building projects.³³

Magi or Wise men

Matthew uses the Greek word, "*magoi* / magi / astrologers / wise men" that may refer to traveling magi of Babylon, astrologers known among the Medes and Persians, Zoroastrian priests, or any other Arabian group of wise seekers. The text suggests they are not Jewish,³⁴ as does Isaiah 60:3, "And

the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.” There were several traditions as to their number. Augustine and Chrysostom say that there were twelve. Three developed to represent the three known continents and triple gifts. Apocryphal literature gives them names and countries and personal appearances. Practical logic tells us that such a journey through the deserts east of Judah would have required a good-sized company for protection of the valuable gifts, and animals to carry supplies and tents for such a journey.

Mt 2:2 Herod the Great was pathologically jealous, so the suggestion of a new king was interpreted as a personal challenge. Furthermore, the assertion of the wise men “we have seen his star” (past tense) was a legitimate claim for the birth of a king in that era. The magi appear not to know the prophecy where the new King should be born. There is the possibility that they stop at Herod’s palace for political decorum. The text does not say that, though. The text suggests they do not know the Jewish scripture outlining the birthplace of the “King of the Jews.”

His star

Following a star to a special location was common to the ancient world and adds historical probability to the story. Jews, like most ancients, believed in the influence of the planets upon the destiny of man. The Greeks and Romans considered that the appearance and disappearance of heavenly bodies symbolized the births and deaths of great men.³⁵ Since the astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) made careful astronomical studies of peculiar celestial phenomena in the decade before Jesus’ birth, studying possibilities of the star of Bethlehem has fascinated astronomers. The Adler Planetarium in Chicago presented the three most probable candidates for the “the star of Bethlehem.”³⁶

1. A supernova or “new star:” The explosion of a distant star that gives out a great deal of light for weeks.
2. A comet moves in elliptical paths around the sun, sometimes with a tail or reappearing several days later
3. A planetary conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars was in 7 to 6 BC.

The star had been prophesied in the OT as well. “I shall see him, but not now... there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel” (Numbers 24:17). The Book of Mormon also verifies this tradition of many signs in the heavens. Samuel the Lamanite promised “great lights” and many signs and wonders in the heavens to precede Jesus’ birth (Helaman 24:2–6).

in the east,

Matthew’s describes a star that was seen: “*anatole* / a rising of light / at its rising.” *East* is only by implication and it does not describe a traveling star.

Mt 2:3 Luke uses the same word for “troubled” when the disciples see Jesus walking on the water (terrified might be the better translation). The people of Jerusalem knew the consequences if Herod suspected a rival to his title and throne. This evokes a parallel in history was Moses’ birth and continues on several incidences.

Table 3: Parallels Between Moses' and Jesus' Births

1. Fathers received dreams of the sacred mission of the unborn sons (Mt 1:20-21; Josephus, *Ant.* II, IX.2)
2. Wicked leader forewarned by scribes of Hebrew birth that will be a threat (Mt 2:4-6; *ibid.*, IX. 3)
3. Wicked leader and people filled with dread at hearing of Hebrew deliverer's birth (Mt 2:3; *ibid.*, IX.2-3)
4. Wicked King (or Pharaoh) seeks to destroy the infant (Mt 2:13-14; Ex. 2:15)
5. Lord commands to go to Egypt (Matt 2:13; Ex 4:19)
6. Wicked King slaughters male children (Matt 2:16; Ex 1:22)
7. Kings die (Matt 2:20; Ex 1:22)
8. Lord commands to return to Palestine (Matt 2:23; Ex 12:4)



The Adoration of the Magi by Matthias Stom. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Mt 2:4 The Chief Priests were the captains of the temple. The scribes—also known as lawyers (NEB) and teachers of the law (NIV)—developed the Mosaic and oral laws in detail and applied them to the circumstances of their time. They represented the Sanhedrin, or leadership body of the Jews. At the time of Jesus' birth, Herod the Great had decimated the Sanhedrin to a mere shadow of its former (and future) existence.

There is an interesting interplay with the titles for Jesus here (in the KJV). The magi have just asked for information about the new “King of the Jews.” Herod asks his people for information about “the Messiah / Christ.” The same two titles are interchanged in Matthew's passion when the chief priest demands, “tell us whether thou be the Messiah?” (Matt 26:63). Yet the Romans crucify him as “King of the Jews” (Matt 27:37).³⁷

Mt 2:5 Matthew refers to the prophecy in Micah chapter 5:2. We see an anomaly in the Jewish leader who has access to the prophecy, is not willing to travel five miles to see the newborn king, while of the magi are willing to make a long journey to find, believe, and worship. This verse is the second of fourteen Matthew's fulfillment passages:

Table 4: Matthew's Fulfillment Passages in the Nativity Narratives

VERSE	FULFILLMENT PASSAGE	NT SCRIPTURE	OT SCRIPTURE
1:22	Now this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the prophet saying	Matt 1:23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel	Isa 7:14 Behold a virgin shall conceive, and Bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.
2:5b	For thus it is written by the prophet,	Matt 2:6 Thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.	Micah 5:2 Beth-lehem Ephrath, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel.
2:15	That it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,	Matt 2:15 Out of Egypt have I called my son.	Hosea 11:1 When Israel was a child then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.
2:17	Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,	Matt 2:18 In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.	Jer 31:15 A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.
2:23	That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets,	Matt 2:23 He shall be called a Nazarene.	Possibly lost scripture, or a <i>branch</i> from “ <i>netser</i> ” citing Isaiah 11:1, 2–6; or 60:21

Mt 2:6 The KJV “rule my people” is also translated, “*poimaino* / to tend as a shepherd” in the NEB, JB, NAS and NIV. This phrase is the same from 2 Sam 5:2 “You shall be shepherd of my people Israel” (RSV and NIV). So, Matthew may have referenced both Micah and Samuel.

Mt 2:7–8 The magi ask Herod, “*akriboun* / inquired, ascertained...the exact” with a technical term used in astronomical observations. Herod is specifically asking for the year, month and day the star came up over the horizon in verse two. King Herod “secretly” (RSV, NAS, NIV) inquired of the magi in preparation for order in 2:16 to massacre all the boys “of two years of age and under.” Matthew refers to the baby Jesus eight times as “*paidion* / young child, half-grown boy or girl, or infant.” Matthew and Luke are focusing on different times in Jesus’ young life, and their choices of words verify that. Luke uses “*brepfos* / babe or infant” for the newborn babe until the circumcision and purification in the temple.

Mt 2:9–10 The star that the magi saw at its rising has reappeared now over Bethlehem. The scriptures describe a star that they saw once reappearing to led them from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.



Detail of *The Adoration of the Magi* by Edward Burne Jones.
Image via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Mt 2:11 Matthew has the holy family living in a home in Bethlehem with no reference to the first months of Jesus’ life as Luke does. The magi’s worshipful behavior shows them to be sincere believers of the Messiah. God has allowed them to be Special Witnesses of His Son. No other witnesses mentioned in the nativity of the Christ, except perhaps Joseph and Mary, sacrificed more than they did—travel time, costs, and hardships of such a journey.

The Magi bringing gifts is foreshadowed in Isaiah 60:6. “the multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah: all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord.” Psalm 72 may also be a dual prophecy. The gifts include symbolic messages:

1. **Gold** / *zahab* is the precious metal that the early Christians saw as a gift for a King.
2. **Frankincense** is a fragrant gum resin exuded from the Boswellai tree, at that time found only in South Arabia, Ethiopia, Somaliland, and India. Frankincense was used for perfume, temple incense (Ex 30:34–38), and temple offerings (Isa 43:23; 66:3; Jer 17:26; 41:5). Early Christians saw it symbolizing the divinity of Jesus
3. **Myrrh** is a valuable aromatic gum that grows in Arabia, Abyssinia, and India. It shared uses of frankincense and was additionally used in embalming (Mark 15:23; John 19:39). Early Christians also saw myrrh as representing the human nature of Jesus and lineage of Shem (Deuteronomy 4, 11; Numbers 15).

Mt 2:12 The magi foil Herod by following the direction from their divine dream and leave Bethlehem “another way.” The Magi return to their own country (singular).

Scene 3 (Mt 2:13–15)

Mt 2:13–14 Another divine dream opens another scene. Joseph will also foil Herod by following heavenly instructions to leave Bethlehem as well. Joseph takes his family across the southern border of Judea into Egypt. The border of Egypt and Palestine at that time was a line from the Mediterranean coast, just south of the city of Gaza, through Beersheba, to the Dead Sea south of Masada. We are not told how far the family went into Egypt, but they may have only had to walk 38 miles south of Bethlehem. The third of fourteen fulfillment citations refer to this.

Mt 2:15 Nowhere in Matthew’s Gospel are his OT quotations so closely placed as in 2:15–23 where they constitute about one third of the content. Where this OT quotation comes from is not clear—it may be Hosea 11:1 or Numbers 24:7–8. On the most fundamental level, the Hosea passage refers to the Exodus of Israel from Egypt.



Scene of Flight in Egypt by Gentile da Fabriano. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Scene 4 (Mt 2:16–18)

Mt 2:16 Herod’s slaughter of the babes around Bethlehem harkens to the time of Moses’ birth when all the Israelite baby boys were killed (Ex 1–2). Once again, the History of Israel portends of Jesus’ life (Hosea 12:10). If the population of Bethlehem was only 300 at this time, and if the whole the region numbered about 2000, the annual birthrate in the region would be thirty. Thus, the maximum number of male children under two years of age would scarcely have numbered more than 20.

Mt 2:17 Again Matthew’s message is enhanced by use of scripture. This scriptural prophecy belongs to Jeremiah 31:15, which refers to scattered Israel in terms of Rachel weeping over her lost children. Nevertheless, as God ultimately broke the power of tyrants who persecuted Israel in Egypt and in the Exile, so will He frustrate the power of this tyrant, King Herod. Of all the Old Testament quotations in Matthew’s infancy narrative, this is the most difficult to imagine being applied to Jesus in circumstances other than those described by Matthew.³⁸

Matthew's last three Old Testament quotations (2:6, 2:15, and 2:18) offer an overview of the history of Israel in geographical miniature. By mentioning Bethlehem as the city of David, Egypt as the land of the Exodus, and Ramah as the mourning place of the Exile, Jesus' early life is summed up in the history of these prophetically significant places. "All things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him" (2 Nephi 11:4).



Massacre of the Innocents by Peter Paul Rubens. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Scene 5 (Mt 2:19–23)

Mt 2:19 The challenge of dating Herod's death has been debated for centuries. Josephus marks Herod's death shortly after an eclipse of the moon and before a Passover.³⁹ Scholars debate it between 6 BC and AD 6. Herod's death date is used to date the Lord's birth year. The Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 10:4, "six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem) gives us a clue.

King Herod died at his luxurious palace in Jericho, at age 70. Josephus describes the repulsive details:

Herod's distemper greatly increased ... by God's judgment upon him for his sins . . . it brought upon him a vehement appetite to eating, which he could not avoid to supply with one sort of food or other. His entrails were also exulcerated, and the chief violence of his pain lay on his colon; an aqueous and transparent liquor also had settled itself about his feet, and a like matter afflicted him at the bottom of his belly.⁴⁰

Only five days before his death he had made a frantic attempt at suicide, and had ordered the execution of his eldest son Antipater. Knowing that no one would lament his passing, he came up with a plan so that many would weep. He commanded all principal men of the entire Jewish nation to come to Jericho—under pain of death. As they arrived, he locked them in the hippodrome, and secretly gave orders to his sister, Salome, to kill them at the moment

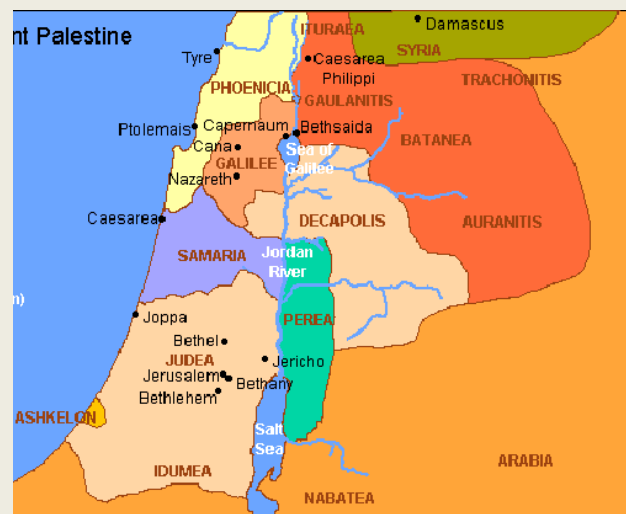
of his death—ensuring that the nation would mourn at his death.⁴¹ To Salome’s credit, she did not follow through with his orders, but freed the men and allowed them to return home.

Mt 2:20–21 Joseph has another divine dream to notify him that Herod has died and he can return. Matthew’s passage is almost verbatim from the LXX record of the Lord’s words to Moses, pertaining to the Pharaoh’s death in Exodus 4:19, “for all those who were seeking your life are dead.” Matthew included the plural “they,” in reference to those seeking to kill Jesus. We see the same plural at Jesus’ death when wicked men seek to kill Jesus is just the same as in the nativity. Just as that death freed Moses to begin his mission of returning the Children of Israel to the Promised Land, so the death of Herod enables the Holy Family to return from Egypt to the Promised Land where Jesus will fulfill his mission.⁴² The child who returns from Egypt is Emmanuel, “God with us” (Mt 1:23), just as the author describes Jesus’ return from the tomb with a similar message, “I am with you always” (Mt 28:20).⁴³

Mt 2:22 Less than a week before Herod’s death, he changed his plans again and split his kingdom for three sons to rule⁴⁴

1. Archelaus received Judea and Samaria or Idumea
2. Herod Antipas received Galilee and Perea
3. Philip received east and north of the Sea of Galilee

Archelaus was even more brutal and dictatorial than his father. He began his reign by massacring 3,000 people. Matthew including that Joseph avoided Judea correctly reflected political history. Matthew’s context sounds as if Joseph’s first thought was to return to Bethlehem of Judea (2:1), possibly because he and Mary had a house there (2:11). “Galilee of the Gentiles” was named because Phoenicians and Arabs always inhabited Galilee. At the time of Jesus there



Mt 2:23 In Mt 2:20, 22 and 23, there are three neatly balanced geographic phrases with a narrowing coverage: 1. “the land of Israel,” 2. “parts of Galilee,” and 3. “a city called Nazareth.” Joseph receives divine direction to all three locations.⁴⁵ Matthew introduced Bethlehem as the hometown for the Holy Family. Without Luke, it appears the family was Judean. Matthew makes an effort to explain why they went to Nazareth.

Matthew's fifth "fulfillment citation" stems from the name *nazoraios* / Nazarene. We do not find close fit to this prophetic scripture, but the Catholic scholar, Raymond Brown has found five possibilities:⁴⁶

1. **Geographical.** Nazorean is primarily applicable to Jesus because he dwelt at Nazareth. Jesus is referred to by the adjective, "Nazarene" four times in Mark, twice in Luke, within the dialect of Galilean Aramic, it is quite defensible to derive Nazarene from Nazareth.
2. **Holy.** Isaiah 4:3, "shall be called holy," or Judges 16:17, "I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb." Yet Jesus was clearly not a Nazarite.
3. **Religious Group.** "The sect of the Nazarenes" is used in Acts 24:5 in reference to the rising number of Christians or followers of Jesus.
4. **Vow.** Derived from *Nazir* meaning "one consecrated or made holy to God by a vow." Jesus does not fit the requirements for the vow of a Nazarene, yet He was consecrated to God's service from the womb (Matt 1:21).
5. **Branch.** Derived from "*netser* / branch." Jesus is the Messianic branch of the House of David, "There shall come a rod out of the stem of Jesse and a *Branch* out of his roots" (Isaiah 11:1, also see :2-6; 60:21). The word "*netser* / branch" became synonymous with the Jewish hope of the Messiah.⁴⁷ Jeremiah also records the Lord saying: "I shall raise up a righteous shoot for David; as king he will reign and govern wisely" (23:5). The Suffering Servant Song of Isaiah 53:2 compares the servant to a "sapling," and a "root."⁴⁸

Matthew's first Old Testament quotation concerned the conception, birth, and identity of the prophesied child; the last citation concerns his mission and destiny. Matthew is now ready to leave the hallowed nativity and move onto his ordained Mission and divine Passion. ❖

Header Image: Adobe Stock

ENDNOTES

¹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1993), 415. The late Father Brown's research is still the standing authoritative source on Jesus' birth accounts in the Bible.

² *Ibid*, 395. Jews were exempt from military service, so a census of the Jews in Palestine was only for taxation information. The total taxation for the Jewish people was between 30 and 40 percent. Rome needed taxation to afford the luxury of magnificent buildings and "*panem et circenses* / bread and circuses," for the people. An infamous census in the Old Testament is credited to King David, who "numbered the people of Israel" (II Sam 24 and I Chr. 21:1). The census incurred the wrath of God in the form of a three-day pestilence. Ironically, the place in Jerusalem where the pestilence stopped became the spot for the building of the Temple (II Chr 3:1). By mentioning a census in Judea, Luke evokes the memory of the city of David and of the Temple.

³ Joseph Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: The Gospel according to Luke I-IX* (NYC: Doubleday, 1981), 400.

⁴ The three great annual pilgrim feasts were Passover, Pentecost or the feast of Weeks, and the feast of the Tabernacles, and (Ex 23:14-17; Lev. 23:4-8, 15-21, 33-44; Deut 16:1-16).

⁵ There were three main routes: 1) straight south through Samaria, 2) along the eastern banks of the Jordan River, to the fords of Bethabara near Jericho; or 3) to the west by the sea coast, past Carmel and Caesarea to Joppa and across to Jerusalem.

⁶ Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 407.

⁷ *Protevangelium of James*, although it is not a trustworthy source on other accounts as it contradicts our scriptural accounts.

⁸ Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 1.349. First Presidency under Joseph F. Smith in a formal doctrinal statement said, “The body of man enters upon its career as a tiny germ or embryo, which becomes an infant, quickened at a certain stage by the spirit whose tabernacle it is.”

⁹ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione / On the Incarnation of the Word of God*, 54.3, PG25, 192b.

¹⁰ Brown, *Birth*, 399.

¹¹ Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 408. *Katalyma* is a compound of *kata* / down + *lyein* / loose, suggesting a place where one “lets down” one’s harness or baggage for the night.”

¹² Brown, *Birth*, 400–401. The oldest Armenian version and apocryphal literature describe a cave as the birthplace, as does Justin the Apologist, and Jerome. Origen, one of the early church fathers, lived in Palestine after AD 216, and wrote: “If anyone wants further proof to convince him that Jesus was born in Bethlehem... he may observe that in agreement with the story in the Gospel about Jesus’ birth, the cave at Bethlehem is shown where he was born, and the manger in the cave where he was wrapped in strips of cloth.”

¹³ *Mishnah, Shekalim* 7:4.

¹⁴ Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem at the Time of Jesus* (Fortress Press, 1969), 374.

¹⁵ Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 409. Four-night watches: 6:00PM–9:00PM, 9:00PM–0:00, 0:00–3:00AM, and 3:00AM–6:00AM

¹⁶ Compare Genesis 16:7, 13; Gen 22:11, 14; Exodus 3:2 and 4; Judges 6:12 and 14; Hosea 12:4,5; and Isaiah 63:9.

¹⁷ F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (NYC: Doubleday, 1980), 128.

¹⁸ Brown, *Birth*, 402.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 403. Heavens is also used as a plural in D&C 131:1 in describing the different degrees or glories attainable after this life: “In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees.”

²⁰ Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 79.

²¹ Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 411. Brown, *Birth*, 404–405.

²² Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3; John 2:1,3,5,12; 6:42; 19:25–27.

²³ Brown, *Birth*, 406.

²⁴ John Milton, *The Complete Poems of John Milton* (Cosmo Classics: New York, 2010), 42.

²⁵ Luke 2:23 refers to the redemption of the first born which required the payment of five shekels. Secondly, in verse 24, Luke mentions the purification of the mother after childbirth. This confusion is another example of Luke’s unfamiliarity with the details of the Old Testament and its laws. This is another reason why many assume that Luke was not born and raised Jewish. Also see Ex 13:11–16; 22:29b–30; Lev.27:26–27; Num 3:13; 18:17–18.) Even after the Levites held full priesthood responsibility, the firstborn sons were still distinguished as particularly the Lord’s and had to be formally exempted from the Lord’s service by paying a redemption tax (Num 8:15–18; 18:15, 16).

²⁶ Alfred Edersheim, *Temple and its Ministry and Services as they were at the time of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1886 reprinted 1987), 48. The poor used the third “trumpet,” to pay for a sacrifice of two turtledove (Shekal. Vi.5) Nine of the trumpets were for required sacrifices while three were voluntary gifts. When temple worshipers heard a type of organ music in the Temple courtyards, it meant that the incense was about to be rekindled on the golden altar, in the Holy Place. It signaled them to present themselves on either side the Nicanor Gate looking into the bronze altar of sacrifice (197).

²⁷ Luke mentions the Holy Ghost or Spirit three times in verses 25–27 in reference to Simeon. These three times parallel the three references in chapter one in conjunction with Zacharias (Luke 1:15, 17, 41). The Spirit, or Holy Ghost, is mentioned only in the Nativity accounts, (1:15), at the Baptism (Mark 1:9–12) and does not reappear until after the death and resurrection of the Lord (John 20:22). The Holy Ghost has been a functioning member of the Godhead before the foundations of the world. The “Holy Ghost fell upon Adam” from the time an angel revealed the plan of redemption to him (Moses 5:9). Furthermore, “the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit, were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us” (D&C 130). For more information see *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* vol. 2.650.

²⁸ “Simeon” was one of the twelve sons/tribes of Jacob/Israel (Num 1:23). His name is a diminutive of “God has heard” which was shortened to “Simeon,” or in Greek, “Simon.”

²⁹ Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 429.

³⁰ Brown, *Birth*, 462.

³¹ Josephus, *Antiquities*, IV.8:15. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 21.161. For Christian changes see Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ’s Emancipation of Women in the New Testament* (Good Sound Publishing: Palo Alto, CA, 2015), 30–34.

³² Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIV. 16:4, XV. 1:2.

³³ Herod built eight major fortresses (Masada, Machaerus, Herodium in Perea, Alexandria, Cypros, Hurcania, and the Herodium southeast of Bethlehem), two elaborate Hellenistic cities (Augustus, and Caesarea Maritima), and his crowning jewel, the Temple of Jerusalem (the rebuilding was begun in 20 BC and wasn’t completed until AD 62). His fame as a builder extended far beyond Judea. He repaved the main street of Syrian Antioch and equipped it with a colonnade. He erected pagan temples and other public buildings in Athens, Sparta, Rhodes and other great cities of the Greek world.

-
- ³⁴ The magi's lack of scriptural knowledge of an otherwise well-known Jewish tradition, in addition to the fact that they refer to "the King of *the Jews*," not "*our King*" are two of the reasons why most scholars think the magi are foreigners (Matthew 2:2).
- ³⁵ Virgil, Aeneid II 694, reports that a star guided Aeneas to the place where Rome should be founded. Finding meaning from constellations or heavenly signs was accepted practice. Josephus, *Wars*, VI. 5:3m, speaks of a star that stood over Jerusalem and of a comet that continued for a year at the time of the fall of the city. He says, "God has a care for men and by all kinds of premonitory signs shows His people the way of salvation," and relates this to a Jewish belief that "someone from their country would become ruler of the world."
- ³⁶ The Chicago planetarium production on "The Star of Bethlehem," based their research in part on Ernest Martin, *The Birth of Christ Recalculated* (Pasadena, CA: Foundation Biblical Research, 1980).
- ³⁷ Brown, *Birth*, 182.
- ³⁸ Brown, *Birth*, 223. Jeremiah 31:16–17 describes Rachel receiving an answer from God that her children are going to come back from the land of the enemy. In Jeremiah, it is a message of joy and hope, none of which appears in Matthew. Later rabbinic writings gave Rachel credit for an intercessory role in behalf of her descendants. (Brown, 206)
- ³⁹ For a thorough look at possibilities tied to Josephus dates, see Martin's *The Birth of Christ Recalculated*, 10-100.
- ⁴⁰ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVII. 6:5. The quotation continues, "Nay, further, his privy-member was putrefied, and produced worms; and when he sat upright, he had a difficulty of breathing, which was very loathsome, on account of the stench of his breath and the quickness of its returns; he had also convulsions in all parts of his body, which increased his strength to an insufferable degree." and "lay in savage frenzy awaiting his last hour."
- ⁴¹ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVII. 6:6
- ⁴² 1 Corinthians 10:1–6, Paul also saw the history of Israel leaving Egypt typifying Jesus' life and mission.
- ⁴³ Brown, *Birth*, 214.
- ⁴⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVII. 8:1.
- ⁴⁵ Albright, *Matthew*, 22. Matthew's nativity account shows a traveling family (Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth), and again during Jesus' ministry he travels around. "Whether Jesus traveled as a child with Mary and Joseph we do not know ... It is clear that when Jesus visited his own home territory (Matt 13:53–58 and parallels) he had been away so long that he was almost unknown. John 7:5 represents members of his own family as being hostile to him."
- ⁴⁶ Brown, *Birth*, 208–213.
- ⁴⁷ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 3rd ed. (McLean, VA: MacDonald. reprint from 1838), II, 723–24.
- ⁴⁸ Brown, *Birth*, 212–219. Raymond Brown continues: "The strongest positive indication lies in the fact that the branch which will blossom from the root of Jesse is the child Emmanuel whose forthcoming birth had been announced in Isa 7:14, 'Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.' Since Matthew applied the latter passage to Jesus in 1:22–23, it is not unlikely that he was still thinking in terms of the Isaian description of the Davidic royal child."



JOHN 1

COME FOLLOW ME COMMENTARY

LYNNE WILSON

The Book of Mormon offers a second witness to John's testimony

This is needed as biblical scholars have debated the authorship and timing of the writing of the Gospel of John for centuries. As it stands alone in many of its ideas and prophecies, scholars find a myriad of ways to interpret it. Yet, the Book of Mormon answers much of that debate. For example, the authorship is identified by the resurrected Lord in 3 Nephi 28:6. The authorship of the Book of Revelation is given by an angel to Nephi as well (1 Nephi 14:24–25). Doctrines found in the Gospel of John are also confirmed in the Book of Mormon (e.g. the Godhead is defined differently the trinity, compare John 17:11 with 3 Nephi 11:27 and 36; or premortality John 1:1–4, Rev 12:19, and Alma 13:3). I will point out these and other clarifications offered in the Book of Mormon as we study the text of John 1.

INTRODUCTION

John's Gospel stands on its own without much shared source material from the other three "synoptic" Gospels. One of the major differences between John and the other Gospels is that it records three years of Jesus' ministry—counted by three Passovers (the synoptic gospels have everything telescoped into one Passover). The first half of John's gospel covers Jesus' ministry all over Palestine. The last half includes the last week of Jesus' life (with an extended account of the Last Supper, passion, trial, death, resurrection), and His 40-day ministry.

GOSPELS	EXCLUSIVE INFORMATION	COMMON INFORMATION
Mark	7%	93%
Matt	48%	52%
Luke	59%	41%
John	92%	8%

Authorship

John means "Jehovah is Grace". Traditionally (and probably originally), the author was the beloved apostle, a "Son of Thunder," brother of 1st James, possible cousin of Jesus and nephew of virgin Mary.¹ He has influential Jerusalem connections (John 18:15); and according to Bishop Irenaeus (AD 180), John was also a priest and wrote the Gospel in Ephesus.² The author claims to be an eye witness (John 13:23; 3 Nephi 28:6), although he never mentions his name nor the name of Jesus' mother (and his culture never spoke the name of God out of respect). Tradition records that Domitian, the 8th Caesar, tried to kill John several times (by dipping him into boiling oil, etc.) before banishing him to the isle of Patmos. Revelation 1:9 claims that John wrote book of Revelation there (also see 1 Nephi 14:24–28). In AD 96, John was released from his isle imprisonment and returned to Ephesus. We believe he is still working to build the Kingdom of God on earth.



St John the Evangelist by Vladimir Borovikovsky (ca. 1804). Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Theme

To show Jesus as the messenger of His Father (with 41 “I AM” avowals). It is known as *The Spiritual Gospel*.

Sub-Themes

1) Higher Law vs. Lower Law (i.e. dark vs. light); 2) Godly Love (used 75 times throughout the gospel); 3) Rejection (of Jesus, and of the old Law in favor of a restoration); 4) Old Testament themes (Sabbath, etc.).

Text

The text is made up of 7 discourses and 7 miracles (the number seven is used symbolically to mean: complete, whole, perfection). John wrote to baptized disciples who seek a higher understanding of the Gospel. He carefully constructed his account to teach a specific message. John prepared his gospel more as a teaching tool of theology or gospel principles, rather than a history or biography. We find some doctrinally powerful JST changes that are not mentioned in our KJV Bibles (JST John 1:1–34 in the Bible appendix, but not all the JST changes are there).

PROLOGUE

Outline

- 1:3–9 Relationship with Light
- 1:10–13 Agency
- 1:14–17 Grace for Grace

These verses have been identified as: “a jewel in the crown.”³ Note the parallels with the book of Genesis, as John begins a *new* covenant on the foundation of the old covenant. Look for creation themes in the prologue.



Messier 106 by the NASA Hubble Space Telescope. Image via Flickr.

John 1:1–2

Note the JST adds [*in italics*]: “In the beginning was the *gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the Word*, and the Word was with [*cut—God, and the Word was God*] *The Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was God.*” I see multiple possibilities for what is meant by “in the beginning,” including: Genesis, premortal life, our second estate, and John’s telling of Jesus’ story. All have important symbols of beginnings.

Jn 1:1 In the KJV text, the first use of “was” is written in the Greek imperfect tense, to specify an ongoing, continuous state. A more complete translation with this tense would be “*In the beginning, the Word already existed as the Word in a timeless state*” (i.e. is eternal). The original text speaks of the Godhead that Joseph restored.



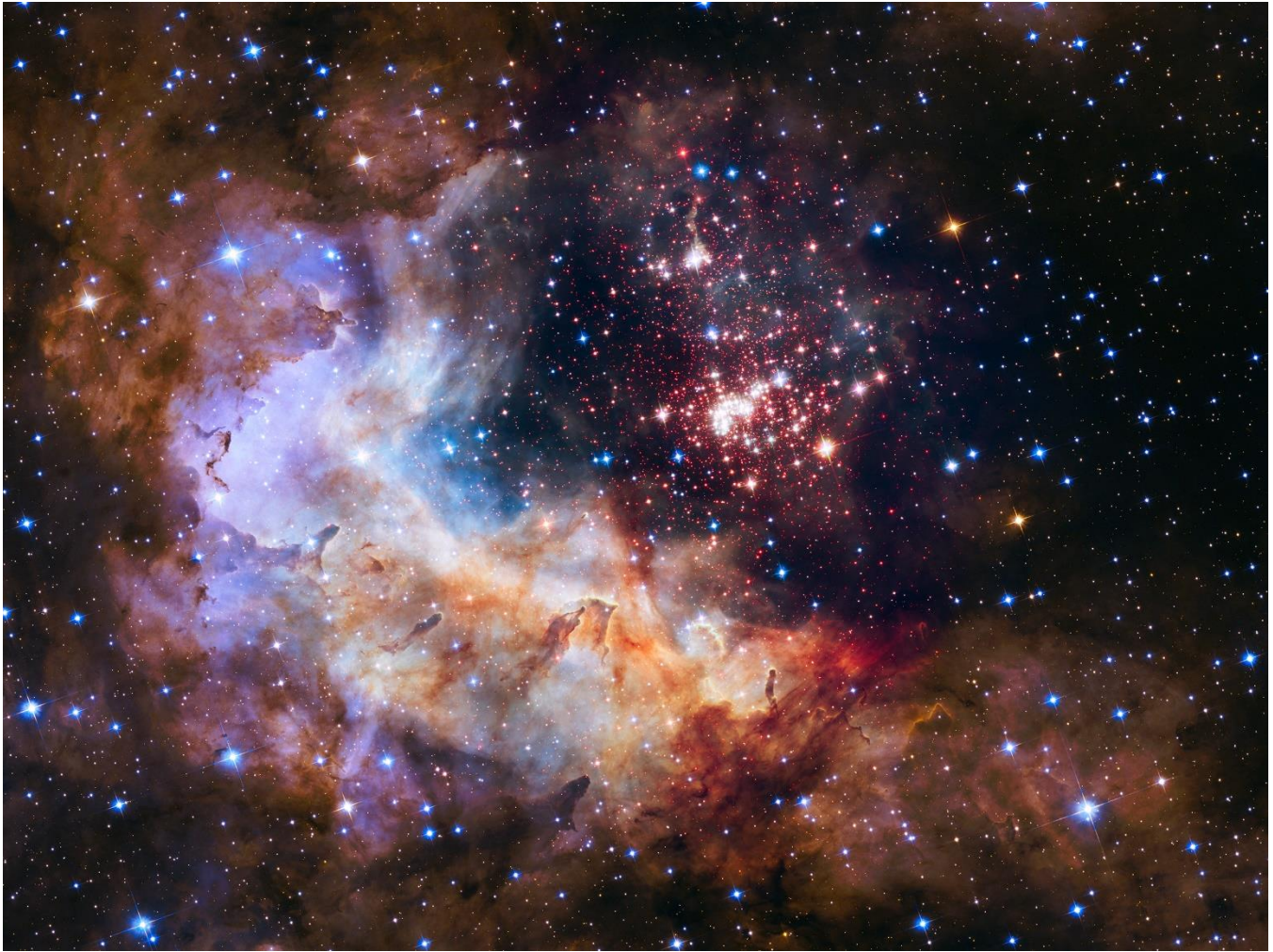
Messier 104 The "Sombrero Galaxy" by NASA Hubble Space Telescope. Image via flickr.

Jn 1:1 “*word*” or “*logos*” has 3 pages of definitions in my Greek Lexicon. Hugh Nibley translated this verse: “In the beginning was the *Logos* {counsel, discussion} and the *Logos* [counsel] was in the presence of God, and all things were done according to it. . . .”⁴ *Logos* is used as a dynamic Divine force which creatively accomplishes His work on earth. John 1:14 identifies *Logos* as the Son. John portrays Jesus as with God from the beginning interacting with God as an expression of the Father’s will and “messenger of salvation” (D&C 93:8; John 14:9–11).

Jn 1:1 “*was with God*” In Greek the word order is reversed, which suggests a separate personality but nearness towards God. The absence of a direct article suggests the *logos* had already achieved the same attributes and character of Godhood. This verse testifies of a premortal existence and a separate Godhead.

Jn 1:2 In the KJV an extra “the” is missing from the original: “The same was in the beginning with [the] God” which emphasizes the distinct separate nature of the two beings. Was John trying to clarify this misunderstood doctrine of the Godhead already? (Sadly, the Corinthian saints had a problem with it.)

John 1:3–9 Relationship with Life and Light



Westerlund 2 by the NASA Hubble Space Telescope. Image via Flickr.

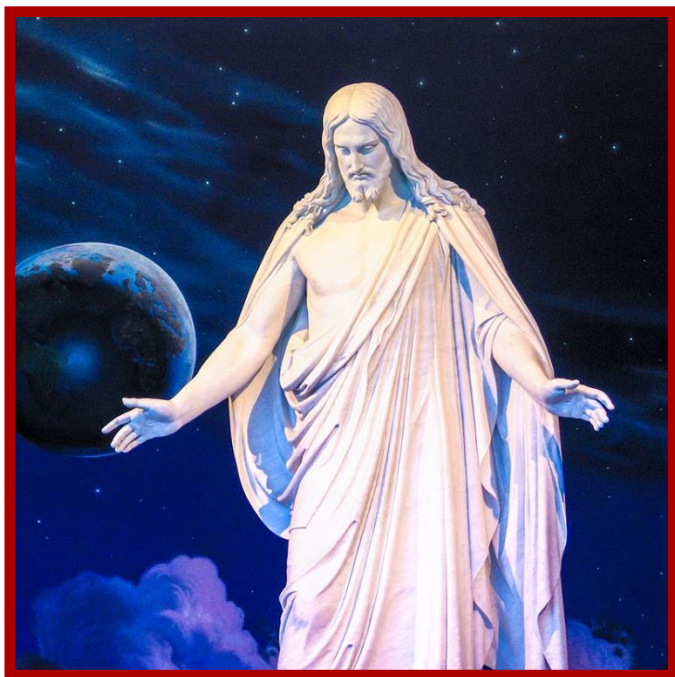
Jn 1:4 JST “In him was the [cut life] *the gospel*; and *the gospel was the life*, and the life ...” We find images from Genesis again (i.e. life, light, darkness, coming forth of a man from the presence of God), but not in the same way. John’s spiritual account of the creation and mortal tabernacle show how men become begotten of God and receive his authority and new life through Him.

Jn 1:5 John identifies *logos* with the light which identifies the rivalry between *the Word* and the Prince of Darkness. He personifies the individual Jesus as light to encapsulate the struggle between good and evil. The opposites of light and darkness, are shown to emphasize that darkness (including: death ignorance, selfishness, etc.) which did not and cannot overtake the Light. The word “*comprehend*” in Greek means to seize with hostile intent, to overtake (also John 12:35). The word “*shineth*” is in the timeless present tense; while *comprehended* is used for a given point in time. This can also be translated that there was a time when the darkness attempted to overtake the light (i.e. war in heaven). John uses “*The Light*” to define our Savior’s victory over darkness.

Jn 1:7 JST “The same came *into the world* for a witness...of the Light, to bear record of the gospel through the Son, unto all, that...” John the Baptist (JBpst) is the example of a ray of light shining in the darkness; JBpst reminds humanity of the Light.

Jn 1:9 The source of Light is also the Creator in some inestimable way (see D&C 88:7, 45, 87). Christ is our light within and without.

John 1:10–13 Rebirth of our use of Agency



Replica of Christus by Bertel Thorvaldsen. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Jn 1:10–11 These two verses introduce the theme of rejection. The first half of John’s Gospel (chps. 1–12) speaks of darkness or evil forces rejecting Jesus. The Greek definition for “knew” and “received” additionally means: perceive, recognize, acknowledge, and accept. The true light of the world came into the world—which He had created—but the world of darkness, evil and sin, did not know its Creator. Even with prophets and prophetesses past and present testifying of the Messiah’s coming, they did not recognize Him and rejected Him.

Jn 1:12–13 Yet some did believe. The second half of John’s Gospel deals with the salvation of these believers, the new chosen people that Jesus calls “His own” (John 13:1). Those who are born again, God

called His children. In the beginning God breathed the spirit of life into Adam; now He breathed His Spirit of new life on His disciples. We need a *new personal creation* to be born again and replace the old creation rejected by God.

John 1:14–18 Process of Grace to become His sons and daughters to partake of His Fullness

Jn 1:14 This describes the relationship between the God of the Old Testament (OT), Jehovah, as the Word, Jesus. The phrase “*dwelt among us*” is also translated “*in our midst*” or, “*became flesh and set up his Tabernacle in our midst.*” This was the sign from Sinai, God’s pact with Israel! They saw visible light over the Tabernacle representing the presence of God. And inside the Tabernacle’s Holy of Holies, the mercy-seat, was a place for God to dwell among His people. John explains that the God of the OT is *not* found in the temple now, but in the *flesh* as Immanuel, “God with us.” In the new covenant, Jehovah or the Word receives a body of flesh and blood.

“Full of grace and truth.” Exodus 34:6 uses a version of this favorite description for God. John uses it to characterize God’s new covenant. In John’s Gospel we find Jesus replacing old institutions with a new restored version of grace and truth in the higher law, Temple, and feasts.

Jn 1:15 JBpst interrupts the poetry of the text to testify of Jesus’ Eternal place. If you don’t know the doctrine of the premortal life (John 1:1–4), it can sound like a riddle. Jesus is the Firstborn, and first in spirituality.

Jn 1:16 The JST reads: “*For in the beginning was the Word, even the Son, who is made flesh, and sent unto us by the will of the Father. And as many as believe on his name shall receive of his fullness. And of his fullness have all we received, [cut—and grace for grace] even immortality and eternal life, through his grace.*”

The word “Grace / *charis*” is also translated “favor, thanks, and pleasure,” but usually means the divine power of salvation. Just as Jesus’ new creation is to replace the old, now the new covenant replaces the old covenant.

Jn 1:17 JST “For the law was given [cut by] *through* Moses, but [cut grace] *life* and truth came through Jesus Christ. *For the law was after a carnal commandment, to the administration of death; but the gospel was after the power of an endless life, through Jesus Christ, the Only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father.*” This is a perfect example of John’s theme of His Higher Law vs. the Lower Law. The JST here explains that the higher law or law of Christ’s gospel gives power for exaltation. What powerful doctrine! Embracing Jesus’ teachings and ordinances will provide the opportunity for exaltation or life with God.

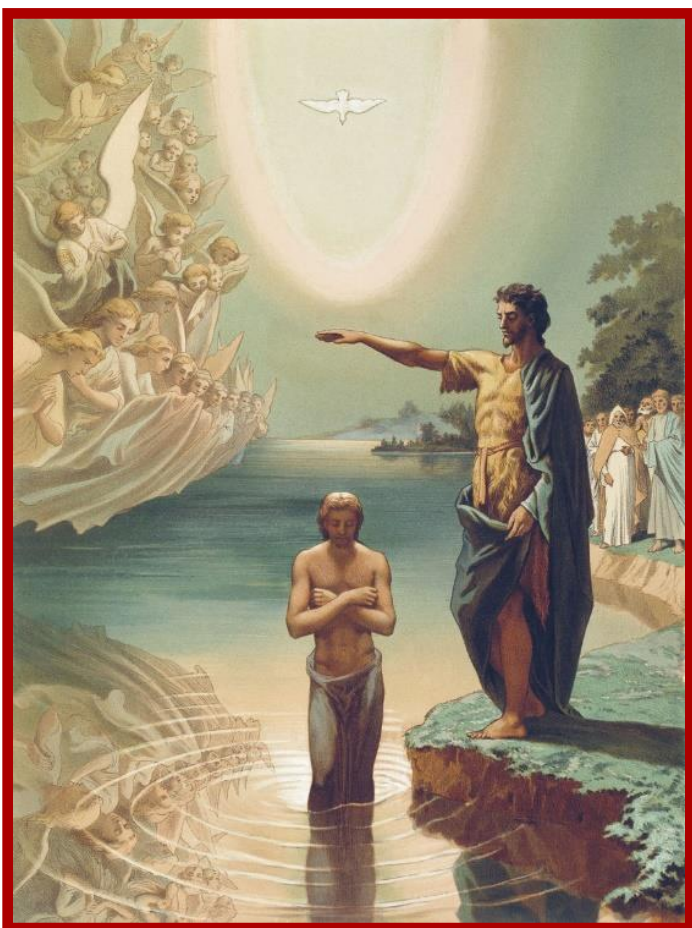
Jn 1:18 The JST clarifies, “*And no man hath seen God at any time; except he hath born record of the Son; for except it is through him no man can be saved.*” The JST teaches that every time the Father appears, “he hath borne record of the Son.” The process of receiving God’s grace allows all repentant humans to see God (John 6:46; Rev 22:3). For OT examples of people seeing God see Gen 28:13 (Jacob); Ex 4:1 (Moses); Isa 6; Ezek 10; Daniel 7:13.

II. JOHN THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist (John 1:19–27) preaches repentance near the River Jordan, testifying that the Messiah is Coming

At eight-days-old an angel ordained JBpst for his mission (D&C 84:24–28). JBpst began preaching in the 15th year of Tiberius’ reign (Lk 3:1). Many scholars calculate this as a sabbatical year (a year to let the land rest, Lev 25:5). This would have enabled farmers to have time to travel to hear JBpst preach (God’s timing is the miracle).

Jn 1:20–22 The Jews were anticipating multiple future great prophets. The JST adds a little clarification to these questions about Elias. The role of Elias is multifaceted; check out the Bible dictionary definitions. Here it is probably the Greek spelling of the name Elijah who would come again to restore keys. The reference to “that prophet” (Deut 18:15–18) is usually accredited to two people. Either the future prophet and Promised Messiah ben Judah, or a prophet sometimes referred to as “messiah ben Ephraim or Joseph” the restorer.⁵ Many Jews saw JBPst as a prophet, but wanted to know which one—what was his role? JBPst disclaimed the traditional roles. Other Zealots at that time led many Jews into the political arena and some wondered if JBPst were doing the same. Politically and spiritually Israel was ripe for a revival or restoration. Most of the Jews lapped up anything new and expected their Messiah soon, but they disputed what kind of a Messiah. The majority hoped for a conquering king.



Baptism of Christ by Grigory Gaagarin. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Jn 1:23 JBPst quotes Isaiah 40:3, claiming to fulfill this significant prophecy. This is one of the rare passages that all four gospels quote. It reinforces that the early Christian church felt JBPst’s message was very important.

Jn 1:26 The word baptism is significant. There were lots of washings including mikvah immersion baths in the Jewish tradition. A Greek dictionary describes *baptizo* as: “1) to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge (of vessels sunk); 2) to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water, to wash one’s self, bathe; 3) to overwhelm” and then adds, “Not to be confused with *bapto*” which was only a dip.

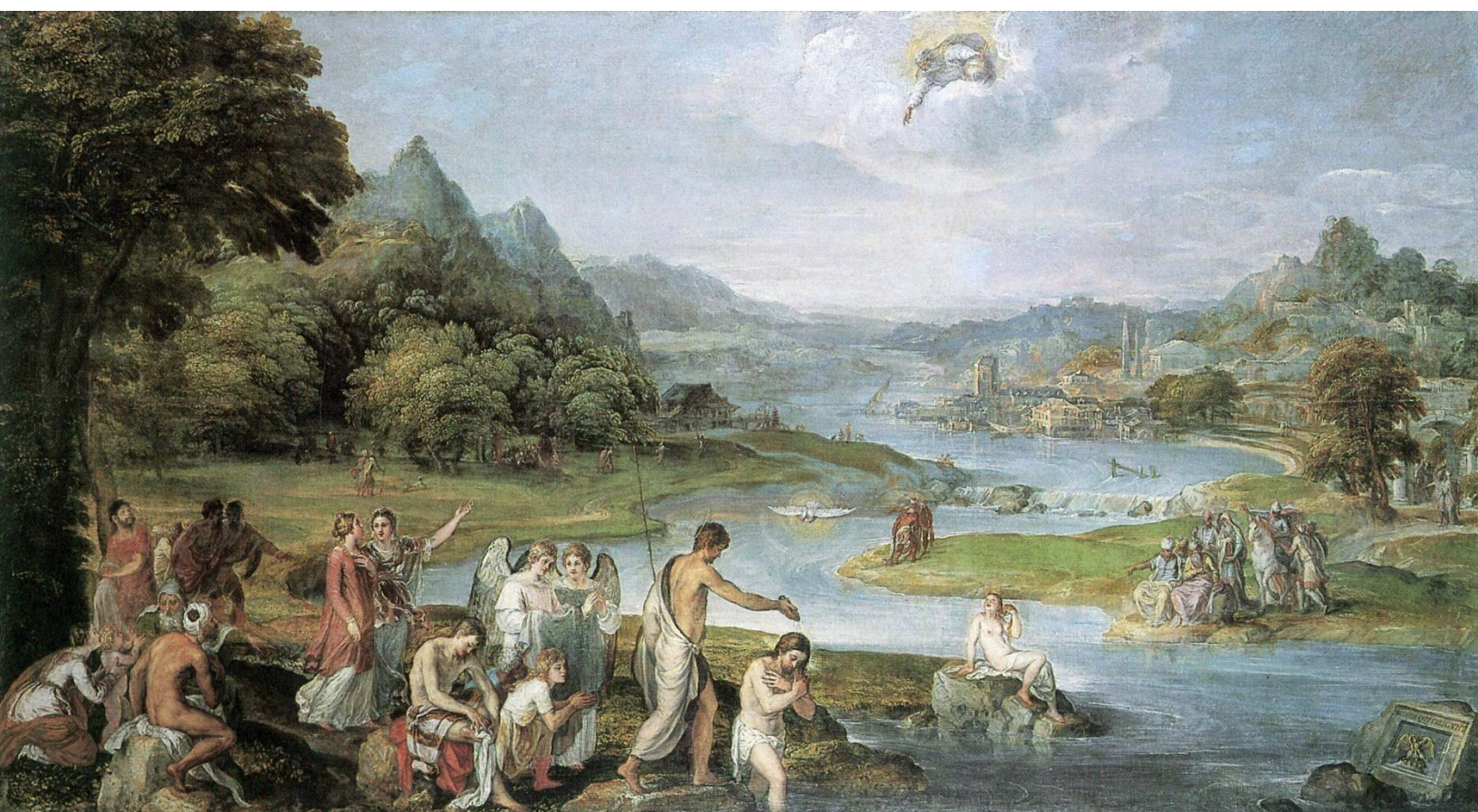
The clearest example of the meaning of *baptizo* comes from a Greek recipe for making pickles. The poet and physician Nicander, who lived about 200 B.C., used both words *bapto* and *baptize* in his text.

To make a pickle, the vegetable should first be

‘dipped’ (*bapto*) into boiling water and then ‘baptized’ (*baptizo*) in the vinegar solution. Both verbs concern the immersing of vegetables in a solution. But the first is temporary; and the second (baptizing the vegetable) produces a permanent change. When used in the NT, this word more often refers to our union with Christ than to our water baptism. Mark 16:16 reads “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;” The mere intellectual assent is not enough. There must be a union with God, a real change, like the cucumber to the pickle!⁶

Jn 1:27 This idea of unlacing shoes has cultural significance. Foot washing was a job left for children or slaves/servants. With half the population of Jerusalem as slaves, plus women and children who shared similar duties, there were plenty of people to wash feet. Even when a master teacher (like Socrates or Gamaliel) had disciples who wanted to perform all the servant's responsibilities to spend more time with their teacher (helping him dress, eat, wash, etc.), the foot care was too menial and filthy of a task and was to be left for slaves/servants/children/woman alone. JBpst tells his disciples that he is not even worthy to begin to start a slave's task for Jesus.

III. BAPTISM OF JESUS



Baptism of Christ by Lambert Sustris (1591). Image via Wikimedia Commons.

John 1:28–34

One of 6 events that each of the four Gospels record (1) baptism, (2) cleansing of the temple, (3) healing royal official's son; (4) feeding 5,000; (5) triumphal entry; (6) passion.

Jn 1:28 JST moves this verse to fit in after vs. 34. In the NT, only John tells us the location of the baptism—Bethabara (and Nephi!) or possibly Bethabara, house of the ford" the ancient ford of the Jordan on the road to Gilead. It is the important point where Joshua divided the Jordan River and the children of Israel entered into the promised land, also where Elijah and Elisha parted (2 Kings 2:1–8). Certainly, Jesus' baptism was the greatest parting of these waters! Elder Nelson asked, "Is it significant that this sacred ordinance was performed in virtually the lowest body of fresh water on the planet? Could he have chosen a better place to symbolize . . . that He literally descended beneath all things to rise above all things? Could it be that Christ chose this location . . . as a silent commemoration of the crossing of those faithful Israelites . . . as a symbol that baptism is a spiritual crossing to the kingdom of God?"

Jn 1:29 The use of the title "Lamb" is the perfect OT symbol for the Passover or Pascal lamb (Exodus 12:22–24) so that Alma and Paul both use it as well (2 Kings 2:68; and undoubtedly several other good Jews who saw Jesus as the great and last sacrifice for all mankind).

Jn 1:30 This pre-existence theme in the NT is seen clearest (only?) in John. The restored church is the only Christian denomination to teach a premortal life for mortals.

Jn 1:31 John doesn't mention anything about Jesus' and JBpst's births. None of the Gospels ever mention anything about the birth narratives outside of Matthew 1–2 and Luke 1–2. Here JBpst sounds as if Elizabeth and Zachariah never took John to see Jesus; with annual Passover gatherings this is unlikely. The JST crosses out the word "not" here and again in verse 33. Even with just the English, we can read it as referring to a spiritual knowledge or witness that came from the Spirit. It sounds as if JBpst had instruction from heaven.

Jn 1:32 Jesus fulfilled the prophecy by JBpst seeing Jesus' baptism with the Spirit descending. The Holy Spirit, or in Hebrew *Shekhinah*, was frequently depicted in the form of a dove in rabbinic literature. "The medium was the message and it couldn't have been lost on a Jewish audience. It was clear evidence the heavens were open again."⁷ In the *Teaching of the Prophet J. Smith* we read, "[JBpst] had the privilege of beholding the Holy Ghost descending in the form of a dove or rather in the 'sign' of the dove, in witness of that administration...The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world as a witness for the Holy Ghost, and the devil cannot come in the sign of the dove. The Holy Ghost is a personage and does not confine itself to the form of a dove, . . . but the sign of the dove was given to John to signify the truth of the deed as the dove is an emblem or token of truth and innocence."⁸ The sign or form of the dove is also found in Abraham, facsimile 2, figure 7. Signs and tokens are best understood in the Temple.

Jn 1:33 JST "And I knew him [cut not; but he that] *for he who* sent me to baptize with water . . ."

IV CALLING DISCIPLES

John 1:35–51 Disciples come to Jesus from JBpst as Jesus manifests himself

Jn 1:35 Following John's number of days adds to his message. This is the third day he mentions (1:29). Count up John's days because he uses numbers to testify as well as words.

Jn 1:36–38 Only in John's Gospel do we learn some of Jesus' disciples were first JBpst's disciples. The two listed were Andrew and another unnamed disciple, probably John the Beloved (as the author is nameless).

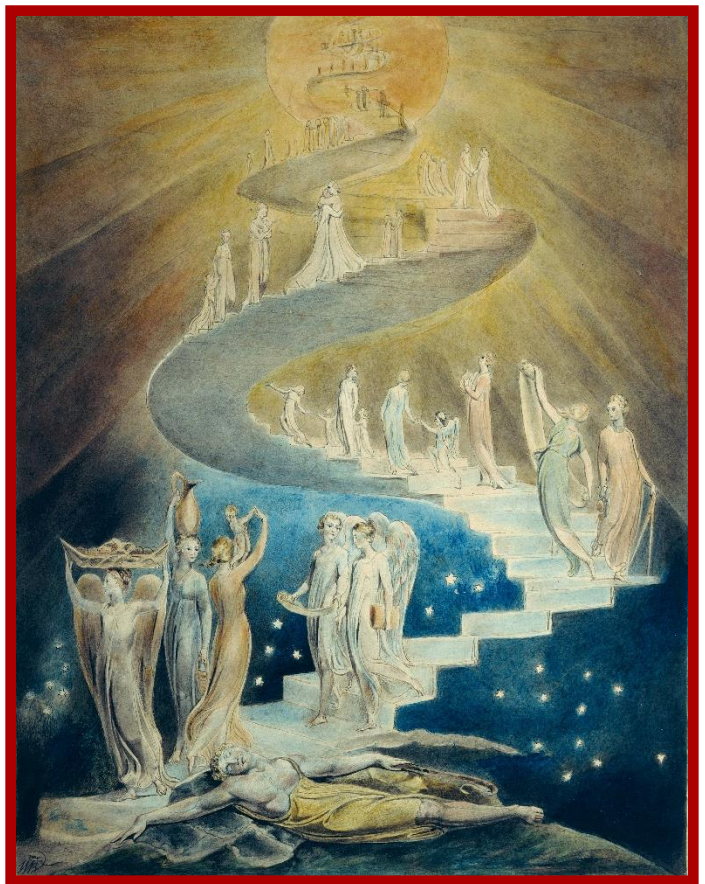
Jn 1:38–39 The dialogue "what seek ye" and "come and see" is our modern missionary message. These are also the key phrases we need to implement in becoming disciples of Christ.

Jn 1:40–41 Simon Peter. As the exciting news spreads it is important to remember that Christ is the Greek form of Messiah (Hebrew) or in English "the Anointed One." There were many "anointed ones," but the title "Messiah ben Judah" usually referred to the Promised Savior and Redeemer of the world.

Jn 1:42 JST adds at the end of the verses *"a seer, or a stone. And they were fishermen. And they straightway left all and followed Jesus."* Jesus gives new names to many. This name is inimitable in that there is only one other with the name Rock. Jesus gives wonderful names, "sons of thunder, Beloved, Rock," always lifting the one as he goes. The name Peter (*petros*) means "small rock"; Christ is using a subtle word play here.

Jn 1:43–44 Most of these disciples are all friends from the same town, Bethsaida ("house of fish").

Jn 1:45–50 Nathanael acknowledges Jesus as Son of God and King of Israel.



Jacob's Dream by William Blake (1805). Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Jn 1:48–49 Elder McConkie sees this experience as “Jesus here exercises his powers of seer-ship from the fragmentary account. It is apparent that Nathaniel had undergone some surpassing spiritual experience while praying or meditating or worshipping under a fig tree. . . The guileless Israelite, seeing this manifestation of seership was led to accept Jesus as the Messiah.”⁹

Jn 1:50 “The Son of man” is interpreted by LDS usually to be the Son of God (Moses 6:57; “Man of Holiness is my name”). “Son of man” is used to refer to the prophet Ezekiel himself and many times humans in the OT, but in the NT it always means Christ. Most Christians see it as emphasizing the humanity of Jesus or Adam’s seed. ❖

Header Image: Butterfly Nebula by the NASA Hubble Space Telescope. Image via Flickr

ENDNOTES

¹ Raymond Brown, *The Anchor Bible, The Gospel according to John 1–XI* (NYC: Doubleday, 1966), xcvi; Also compare Matt 27:56; Mark 15:40 with John 19:25.

² Eusebius, *History*, V 24:3

³ Kent P. Jackson, Robert L. Millet, *Studies in Scriptures: The Gospels* (SLC, UT, Deseret Book: 1986), 127.

⁴ Hugh Nibley, “Beyond Politics,” *BYU Studies*, 1974; 15:1.

⁵ Alan J. Avery-Peck, ed., *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism: Ancient, Medieval, and modern*, David Mitchell, “Messiah ben Joseph in the Babylonian Talmud” (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2005: 77–90). ISBN 9004144846.

⁶ King James Bible Dictionary, G907. Also, James Montgomery Boice, *Bible Study Magazine*, May 1989.

⁷ Jackson, Millet, *Studies in Scripture*, 5:481.

⁸ Andrew Ehat and Lyndon Cook, ed, *Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991), 160. The original scribe’s spelling reads, “. . . Holy Ghost is a personage in the form of a personage — does not confine itself to form of a dove — but in sign of a dove.” Edited spelling taken from, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 275.

⁹ Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:134.



MATTHEW 3; MARK 1; LUKE 3

COME FOLLOW ME COMMENTARY
LYNNE WILSON

The Baptist and Baptism: “Prepare Ye the Way”

This supplemental study guide is to be read along with each verse or section of scriptural text. If you read them side by side, it can fill in historical, literary, and theological details.

The Book of Mormon Highlights John the Baptist (JBpst)

The Book of Mormon adds another witness to JBpst’s preaching and baptism of Jesus in 1 Nephi 10:9, 11:27; 2 Nephi 31:8. I find JBpst’s message to be one of restoration. The Book of Mormon overlaps with the themes from JBpst. For example, the Isaian citation, “prepare ye the way of the Lord,” is found 3 times in the NT and 10 times in the Book

of Mormon. John the Baptist has special significance to the restoration as the one who brought the keys of the Aaronic Priesthood (D&C 13). The biblical sections on JBPst are also augmented in the JST of the four Gospels.

THE GOSPELS INTRODUCE JBPST

At the time of the NT, a group of Jewish purists, who separated themselves from society to maintain their spiritual purity, left records of their beliefs. The Essene Messianic expectations in Qumran included waiting “until the coming of a prophet and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel.”¹ Christianity proclaims that JBPst and Jesus fulfilled those roles.

Mk 1:1. The Gospel of Mark² begins with a short sentence that puts a spin on the opening of Genesis, “[In] the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Then the second sentence speaks of JBPst ministry. (Luke begins with JBPst’s miraculous birth, Lk 1:5–24, 39–66; Matthew begins with Joseph’s genealogy and part of Jesus’ nativity narrative, and John begins with the premortal *Word*, who was God.). Here are a few other details we learn from combining the four Gospel accounts of JBPst.

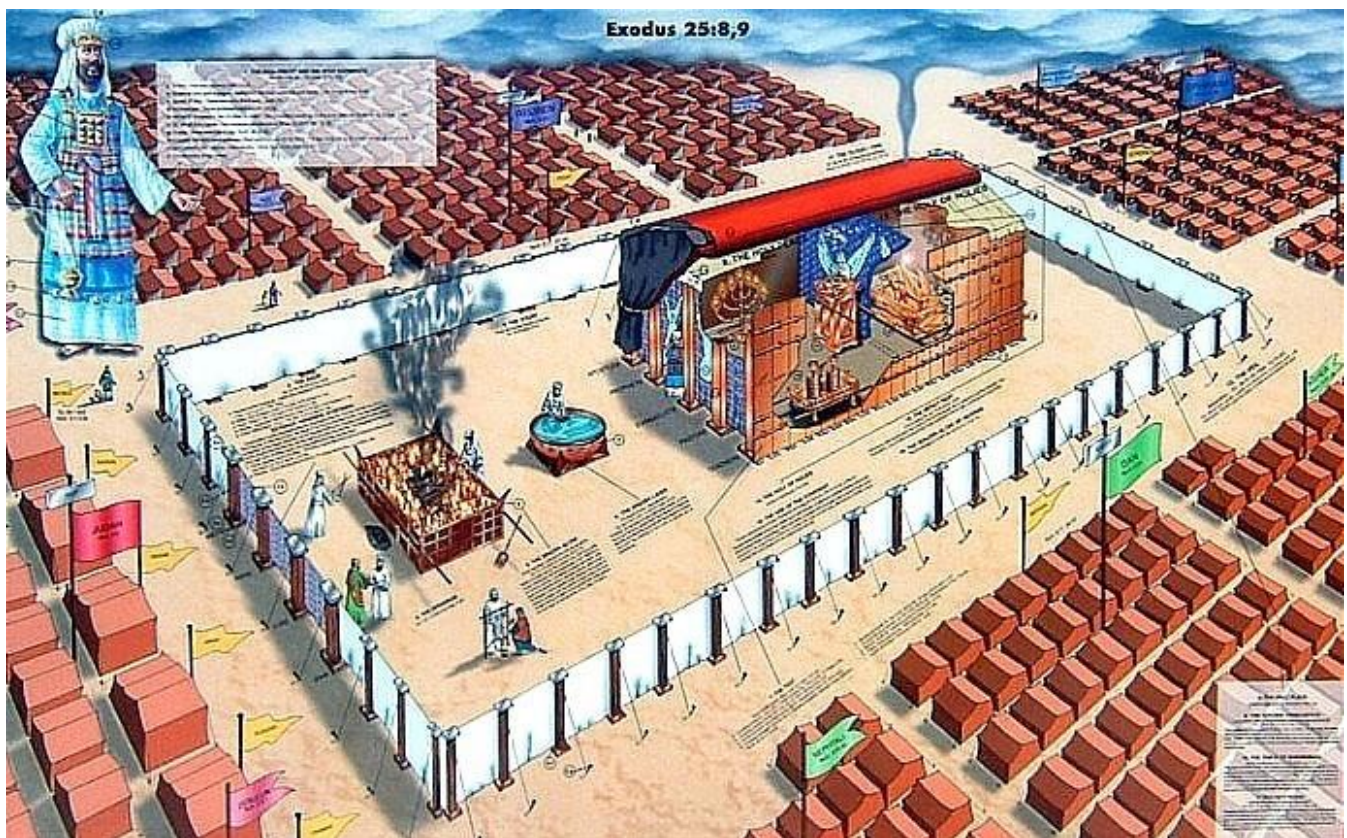
1. **DATE**—Thanks again to Luke, we can date JBPst’s preaching: “in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar” (Luke 3:1). This is the only exact date we have in the New Testament (as I mentioned earlier, many biblical scholars calculate this as a sabbatical year).³
2. **POLITICAL LEADERS**—Leaders of the time are included by our historian and scholarly author, Luke. He also ties JBPst back to his father, to connect the birth narrative by repeating Zacharias’ name here (Luke 3:2).⁴
3. **DRESS and DIET**—Matt 3:4 and Mark 1:6 tell of wearing the thick, coarse (if woven), camel’s hair with a leather sash. Also like the Bedouins, he ate locust and wild honey (probably date honey). The dress sounds similar to the prophet Elijah 2 Kings 1:8, and they shared a spartan wilderness diet for a time.



4. LOCATION—Everyone mentions that JBPst was near the Jordan river, but John includes the southern place where the children of Israel crossed the Jordan to return to their promised land near Bethabara (John 1:28).

JBPst’s preaching and baptizing Jesus is the first event (and one of only six) that all four Gospels share.⁵ As a priest, JBPst would have been eligible to begin his service at age 30 (the age associated with authority in Judaism, Numbers 4:1, 35, 39). Each Gospel introduces Jesus as the fulfilment of an Isaian prophecy: A messenger to prepare the way of the Lord (Isa 40:3; and some of Malachi 3:1). JBPst taught that “the way” to prepare was to repent.

The Way



Mt 3:3 Mk 1:3; Lk 3:4; Jn 1:23. Isaiah’s prophesy has multiple times of fulfillments. “Prepare ye the way of the Lord,” is heavily used in modern revelation too—totaling 16 references! It was also a Puritan theme in early America. Jesus also used part of it in one of His “I AM” statements: “I am the way” (John 14:6). “The way” became the first name for believers in Christ following His death (Acts 9:2). When Jesus identified himself as “The Way,” it took on exceptional meaning. A symbolic interpretation refers to *the way* back to the presence of God, the way back to the Garden of Eden. It is the way back to the tree of life where one can partake of the fruit *without one’s sins*. God revealed this path back to God’s presence, or The Way, in the Mosaic Tabernacle and Temple rituals. Aaron and future priests, outlined the path by washing for a physical and spiritual cleanse in the brass laver or “molten sea.” They

dressed in holy garments of white linen, received an anointing to be set apart as servants of the Anointed One, or Messiah (Exodus 30:30; Lev 16:32). They sacrificed on the altar, sprinkled blood on the horns seven times (Lev 16:18–19), walked through the Holy Place with the incense, table of bread and wine, and then, once a year, on the Day of Atonement / *Yom Kippur*, the one and only high priest sanctified himself to walk past the menorah (representing the tree of life), sprinkled sacrificial blood on the veil seven times (Lev 4:6; 16:14), and then entered into the Holy of Holies, to the presence of God, symbolically sitting on the Mercy Seat (Leviticus 16). These steps are each symbolic of how we apply our Savior’s atoning sacrifice in our lives to be cleansed through Him. As a direct descendant of Aaron on both his father’s and mother’s lineages, JBPst prepared “the way” for The Redeemer, by teaching that it was through repentance that we can be receive a remission of our sins and be bought back to enter God’s presence.

JBpst Preaching Repentance and Forgiveness

Mt 3:2; Mk 1:4; Lk 3:3. We find the word “repent” repeated frequently in the Bible. This also adds to JBpst looking like an OT prophet. Yet it becomes a stronger theme in other scriptures.

- OT = 39 times. (As the OT is over four times larger than the NT, “repent” is actually far less frequent per word.)
- NT = 36 times.
- BoM = 220 times. (The Book of Mormon references also expand the definition that encourages change to [re]turn.)
- D&C = 82 times. (The Doctrine and Covenants’ frequent usage is more visible when word count is included.)
- PGP = 20 times. (Pearl of Great Price)

TEXTUAL HARMONY

As we look at all four Gospel accounts of JBpst’s preaching in harmony, we learn what each author emphasized, how the authors wrote, what their shared sources were, and why they emphasized certain things. For example, while the three “Synoptic” Gospels teach that JBpst preached repentance (Matt 3:2; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3), John does not—nor does he use the word anywhere in his Gospel. In keeping with JBpst’s prophetic role as a restorationist, Mark and Luke both add that JBpst taught forgiveness, or remission of sins, in addition to repentance. *Remission* refers to “casting away,” which was the understanding of baptism since Adam (Moses 6:53).⁶

MARK 1:4

John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins

LUKE 3:3

... he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins

In addition to the numbers above counting “repent,” modern scripture adds to our understanding of the term “repentance” with an extra 275 verses.⁷ Additionally, the JST adds significant changes to these verses on JBpst’s preaching that clarify the doctrine of repentance and forgiveness (see below Matt 3:7–12).

Lk 3:5. The JST nearly doubles the total size of Luke’s writings on JBpst (which also happens in Matthew starting in 3:8). The JST additions to this verse are unique in the Gospels and emphasize Christ’s salvation to the gentiles, his resurrection, and ascension “to dwell on the right hand of the Father,” acting as judge in the day of power. Another large section is added in the JST to Luke 3:13. These extra verses bolster Luke’s theme of the universality of Jesus’ message (see JST Appendix 3:4–11).

Lk 3:6. Each Gospel cites Isaiah 40:3–4, but Luke alone continues in Isaiah and adds the fifth verse: “all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” This specifically highlights Luke’s theology that Jesus came for *all*.

Mt 3:8–10; Lk 3:7–10. Luke includes a second call to repent, this time paralleling Matthew almost word for word (probably because they shared the same source material, unknown to us, but referred to as Q).⁸ JBpst’s condemnation evokes symbols from the Garden of Eden: viper, snake, trees, good fruit, wrath, spirit, etc. Again this exemplifies how he bridges the Old and New covenants as a restorer. The JST adds valuable additions. What are the doctrinal differences? Take a look:

JST MATT 3:7–11A

O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? **8** *Why is it that ye receive not the preaching of him whom God hath sent? If ye receive not this in your hearts, ye receive not me; and if ye receive not me, ye receive not him of whom I am sent to bear record; and for your sins ye have no cloak. Repent, therefore, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance; and think not to say within yourselves, We are the children of Abraham, and we only have power to bring seed unto our father Abraham; for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children into Abraham . . . I indeed baptize you with water, upon your repentance;*

MATT 3:7–11A

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?
8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance; **9** And think not to say within yourselves,
We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham... **11** I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance

LUKE 3:7–10

Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?
8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves,
We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. . . 10And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?

At this time, many Jews felt that being a descendant of Abraham would automatically save them from eternal torture (Luke 16:24).⁹ JBpst (and later Jesus) made a radical change by denouncing this false tradition. One’s genealogy does not make you the seed of Abraham in the sense of being saved (see John 8:53; Gal 3:29). To be part of the house of Israel (through birth or adoption) one must bring forth good fruits—worthy “*upon your repentance*” (JST Matt 3:11).

Mt 3:11; Mk 1:7; Lk 3:16. I love this imagery of the Jewish customary relationship between a disciple and his teacher or servant and master that JBpst alludes to here (which I also mentioned in John 1:27). The Roman Empire maintained a clear social stratum. It carried over to Jerusalem where one half the population was slaves or servants. One of their jobs was to wash people's feet. Walking on dusty roads left one's feet so dirty that the cultural decorum required one's feet to be cleaned when entering a house. Washing callused, filthy, and often sore feet was such a demeaning job that it was left to society's lower classes: women, children, servants, and slaves. Interestingly, in a tutorial setting, students or disciples of a master teacher often chose to do everything they could for their teacher



Saint John the Baptist by Leonardo da Vinci. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

in order to spend more time together (like feed and dress him). Everything, that is, except foot care. The rabbis specifically forbid disciples to wash their master teacher's feet because it was too demeaning.¹⁰ With that as background, note the wording in Mark 1:7 and Luke 3:16. By JBpst explaining that he is not worthy to carry the Messiah's shoes (Matt 3:11), or even stoop down to untie the latchet of His sandal (Mark 1:7), we find a powerful message of humility—and this coming from the man whom Jesus described as the greatest “born of women” (Matt 11:11). JBpst used a powerful image for his followers to understand his nothingness in comparison to Jesus.

Mt 3:11b; Mk 1:8; Lk 1:16b. If you were to introduce Jesus' mission in life, what would you say? I find it fascinating that of all the things Jesus did during his mortal ministry, JBpst chose to emphasize that the Promised Messiah would bring the baptism by fire, or the gift of the Spirit. This spiritual baptism

included a refining and judgment (Matt 3:12). The Spirit became so important in Christianity that some denominations refer to the time after Jesus' resurrection as the “Dispensation of the Spirit.”

In our dispensation of the fullness of times, one of the first things the Lord taught the young prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery was how to recognize and receive guidance from the Spirit (D&C 6:14–23; 8:1–3; 9:7–9; etc.). The Spirit became one of Joseph's favorite topics. On November 29, 1829, when he met with President Martin Van Buren in the White House, the President asked him what is the difference between his church and others. Joseph answered, “our mode of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost.”¹¹ President Nelson also emphasized “One of the things the Spirit has repeatedly impressed upon my mind since my new calling as President of the Church is . . .

[our need to] stretch beyond your current spiritual ability to receive personal revelation.”¹² Jesus’ redemption allows the Spirit to act in our lives. It is the agent that communicates the atonement.

Mt 3:12. JST changes add a double emphasis that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Ghost and add that He has the power, or priesthood to do so. It also adds *when* the purging and judgment will come.

BAPTISM OF JESUS

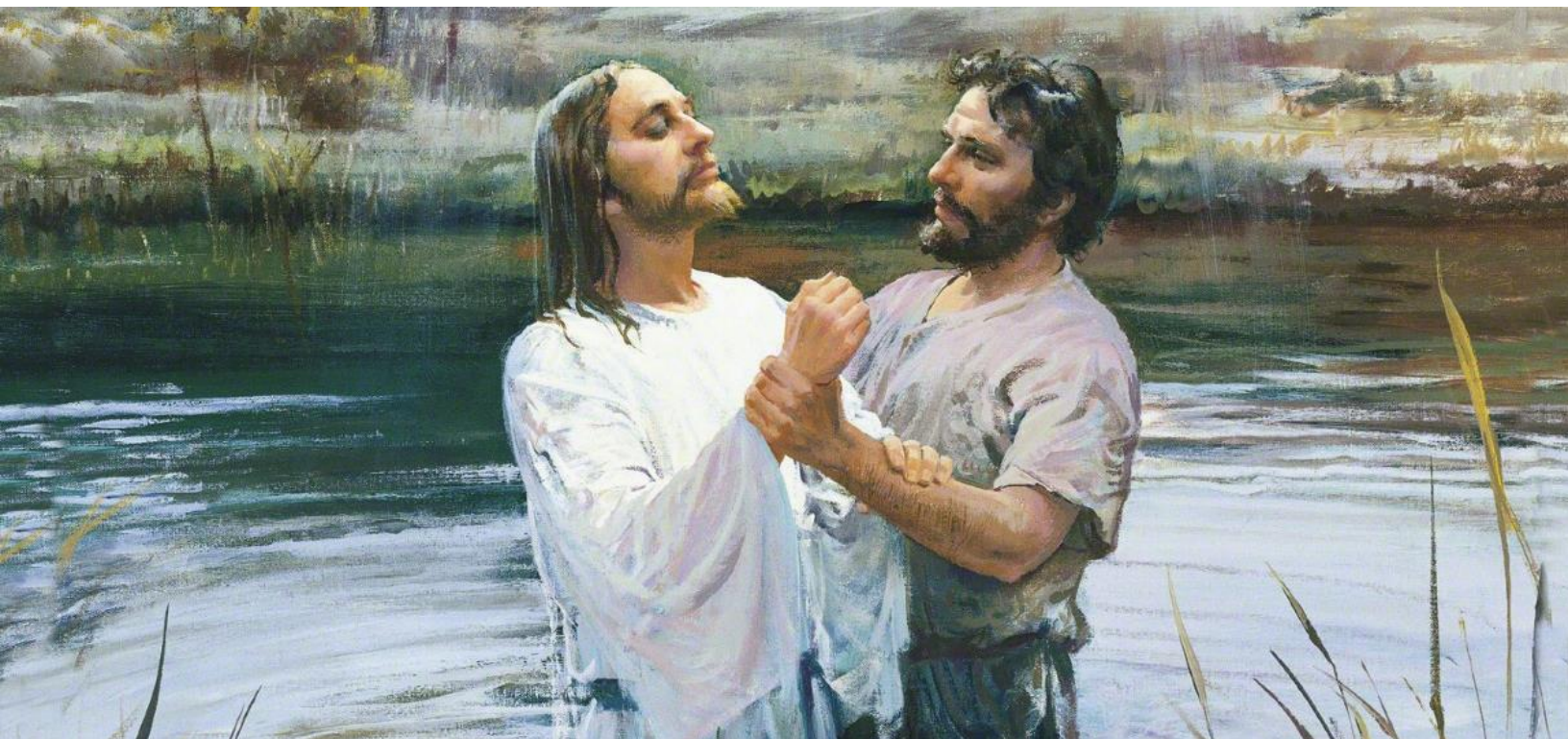


Figure 1 John the Baptist Baptizing Jesus by Harry Anderson. Image via LDS Media Library.

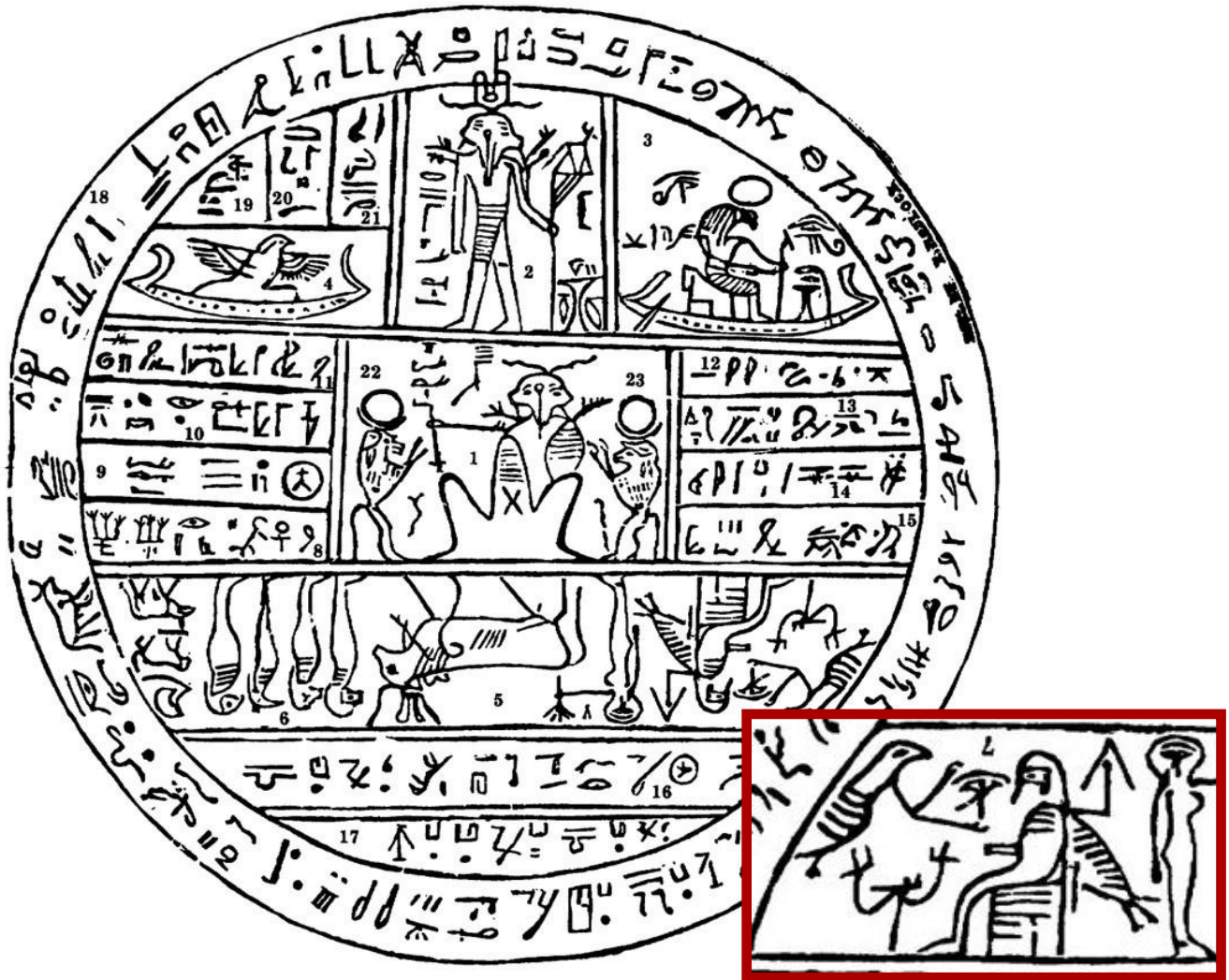
Mt 3:13–14; Mk 1:9; Lk 3:21. The Synoptic Gospels only mention the Jordan river, while John specifies Bethabara (John 1:28; also 1 Nephi 10:9). It is near Jericho and is the lowest land of the planet—which adds to the symbolism of baptism as a burial of the old man or woman (Romans 6:4; 2 Cor. 5:17). The river was also parted there centuries earlier by Joshua 3:8, 15–16, Elijah (2 Kings 2:8), and Elisha (2 Kings 2:14)

JBpst’s baptism for the remission of sins is different than the Jewish cleansing “mikveh” baths. In the notes from John 1, we talked about the different Greek words as found in the ancient cookbook: 1) *bapto*, meaning to “dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge,” and 2) *baptize*, meaning to transform or make a change, like a cucumber becoming a pickle.¹³ JBpst’s call for baptism required a change into something new in our heart, mind and life. Throughout the NT, *baptize* refers to our union with the Savior (i.e. Mark 16:16). The Greek words communicate

that intellectual agreement is not enough. We need to form a union with Jesus that has the power to change our nature, to “become new creatures” (Mosiah 27:26).

Mt 3:15; Mk 1:10; Lk 3:22. Why do you think Jesus had to be our exemplar in baptism? I know the pat answers: to humble himself before God, to be obedient to ordinances (2 Nephi 31:5–7); to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; to gain an inheritance in the celestial kingdom—can you think of more?

Sign of the Dove



Mt 3:16; Mk 1:10; Lk 3:22. Jesus’ baptism includes heavenly witnesses and divine manifestations. The final member of the Godhead is now heard (by JBPst at least). The introduction is tender, “You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” When ordinances are performed in the restored church of Jesus Christ, we also have many witnesses that heavenly beings often visit. Restored truths have also added new revelation to augment our understanding of the significance of the Holy Spirit as the “Sign of the Dove” in five ways:

1. We have other scriptures that also reference the dove (D&C 93:15; Gen 8:10–12; Lev 15:14; Hos 7:11; 11:11; etc. It is the same word used for pigeons in the Hebrew OT and the Greek NT.)
2. It is helpful to remember from D&C 130:22 that the Holy Ghost is a personage of Spirit.
3. In D&C 93:15; 1 Nephi 11:27; 2 Nephi 31:8, the wording from the baptism story is slightly different: “in the form of a dove.”
4. Joseph Smith taught at a Sunday meeting on January 29, 1843:

[John the Baptist] led the Son of God into the waters of baptism, and had the privilege of beholding the Holy Ghost descend in the form of a dove, or rather in the *sign of the dove*, in witness of that administration. The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world, a witness for the Holy Ghost, and the devil cannot come in the *sign of a dove*. The Holy Ghost is a personage, and is in the form of a personage. It does not confine itself to the form of the dove, but in sign of the dove. The Holy Ghost cannot be transformed into a dove; but the sign of a dove was given to John to signify the truth of the deed, as the dove is an emblem or *token* of truth and innocence.¹⁴

The Book of Abraham includes the “sign of the dove” in Facsimile No. 2 (Kolob) in Figure 7 and the Temple. God is sitting upon his throne, revealing Key word of the Priesthood to Abraham and one of them relates one figure to this sign. It appears that the Spirit descended in bodily form and used a sign to identify himself.

Header Image: Image via LDS Media Library

ENDNOTES

¹ QS 9:1. Also see Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: Luke vol 29*, 1311.

² Mark’s Gospel is historically attributed to John Mark, nephew of Barnabas (Col 4:10), companion to Paul (Acts 12:25), son of the wealthy property owner and Jerusalem disciple Mary (Acts 12:12), and close family friend of Peter (1 Peter 5:13). The early Christian Church claimed John Mark was the scribe who recorded Peter’s teachings in his gospel—including Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, and Tertullian, the Muratorian Fragment, and the Anti-Marcionite Prologues. His gospel is the shortest, focusing on the reality of Jesus’ human emotions (e.g. compare Gethsemane scenes), the fastest moving, and was almost entirely used by Matthew and Luke, in their longer Gospels.

³ Tiberius reigned from August 19, AD 14, to March AD 37. John was age 30—and Jesus six months younger, when JBpst began His ministry (King David was also 30 when he began his reign). J. Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 259280; or H. W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*. Some suggest A.D. 27/28 as the Sabbatical year in Palestine, although this is complicated by which calendar system are you are using—Julian, Jewish, Syrain-Macedonian, and Egyptian. I like the discussion in E. Martin, *The birth of Christ recalculated*, 2nd ed. 1980.

⁴ Lynne Wilson, “Confusing Zacharias,” *Religious Educator* 14, no. 2 (2013), 107–123.

⁵ (1) Baptism, (2) Cleansing of the temple, (3) Healing royal official's son; (4) Feeding 5,000; (5) Triumphal entry; (6) Passion, death, and resurrection.

⁶ Kent Brown, *BYU NT Commentary: Luke* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 180–181.

⁷ The simple answer that repentance means the four R's (recognize, remorse, reconcile, renounce) is not enough. In addition to change, modern scripture teaches that repentance is also the condition of trying with all our heart, might, mind, and strength to live as Jesus would have us. When we are repentant, we feel and recognize the Spirit in our lives. Repentance, as taught in modern revelation, is actually the condition of our heart that earnestly tries to do only those things that will please our Savior and His Father.

⁸ German biblical scholars reported in 1900 that Matthew and Luke share much information unique to the two of them, but they often edit it in their own way (even placing the information at different historical times and places). The scholars deduced that Matthew and Luke shared a common source material, and called it after the German word “source / *quell*,” or more commonly known as “Q.”

⁹ Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: Luke*, 468, “Rabbinical literature later played on Israel's physical descent from Abraham as protection against God's wrath.”

¹⁰ Judith R. Baskin and Kenneth Seeskin, *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 313.

¹¹ Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:42.

¹² Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for our Lives,” *General Conference* (April 2018).

¹³ James Montgomery Boice, *Bible Study Magazine*, May 1989.

¹⁴ *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 275-276. For original spelling see, Andrew Ehat and Lyndon Cook, eds. *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990).



MATTHEW 4; LUKE 4–5

COME FOLLOW ME COMMENTARY

LYNNE WILSON

JESUS TEMPTED OF THE DEVIL

Satan's temptations were possibly the third most grievous experience Jesus endured (behind Gethsemane and the cross). The Hebrew and Greek meaning of "tempt" is to try, test, or prove. In King Benjamin describes the Savior: "he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue" (Mosiah 3:7).

Gospels in Harmony

Mark 1:12–13, is the fastest moving and shortest Gospel. He only makes a two-sentence reference to Jesus' temptations. JST adds that it came *after* being in the wilderness for 40 days. Then Mark 1:13, ends with "and was with wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him." The wild beasts quoting Job 5:22–23, "... and need not fear the wild animals. For you will have a covenant with the stones of the field, and the wild animals will be at peace

with you”). If the Spirit led the Lord to be alone, what do you think Jesus had to go into the wilderness? I assume, like many other prophets in the wilderness (Enoch, Moses, Nephi, the brother of Jared, Paul, Joseph Smith), Jesus was taught through visions and grew from grace to grace (Luke 2). I presume His Father prepared Jesus spiritually for his mission (“I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me” John 8:28).

Matthew and Luke fill their account of Jesus’ temptations with more details (probably from a shared source, “Q”). As you find differences in the Gospels, ask “Why did the author include or change this information?” “What does a different order of events do for the author’s message?” “Who is copying who?” “Can I feel what the author was trying to teach?” The KJV of Mt and Lk’s accounts are very similar and have only four significant differences:

1. The order of the second and third temptation is reversed.
2. Mt 4:4 includes a longer OT citation

MATT 4:4

It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

LUKE 4:4

It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

3+4. Slight word changes in both Greek and English in Mt 4:6–7 compared to Luke 4:10–12, as well as:

MATT 4:8–10

8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; 9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written . . .

LUKE 4:5–8

5 And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6 And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. 7 If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written

JST Changes

Major changes of these biblical texts come in the Joseph Smith Translation or JST (see LDS Bible Appendix). In particular, the prophet Joseph wanted to make sure three doctrinal changes were clear—

1. Jesus went into the wilderness to commune “with God,” *not the devil* (JST Mt 4:1–2). Jesus didn’t go looking for him (and neither should we!).
2. After the 40 days of instruction and fasting, Jesus “was left to be tempted of the devil” (Mt 4:2; Mk 1:13; Lk 4:2). Satan sought Jesus at his weak point. Temptations or Satan’s presence came after Spiritual experiences, not during.
3. The Spirit (*not the devil*) can take your spirit to see other places (Mt 4:5,6,8; Lk 4:5, 6, 9). We see this in other scriptures too (i.e. as in 1 Nephi 11:1, 19–21; Hel 10:16–17; Acts 8: 39–40).

Text of JST Matthew and Luke’s section on Jesus’ Temptations

Mt 3:1; Lk 4:1—After Jesus’ baptism, He was, “full of the Spirit,” which led him to commune with God in the wilderness / *erēmon* (elsewhere translated as solitary, secluded, or desert place).

Where has the Spirit led you?

Lk 4:2 JST adds “after 40 days the devil came ...” and Mt 4:2 includes 40 days and nights, as well the JST changes “left to be tempted” after He “communed with God.” The number 40 saturates the Bible as a *purification period*

1. Purification period of a woman after childbirth of a son (7 days + 33 days = 40; Lev 12:1–4)
2. Noah’s 40 days of rain, 40 days of flood, 40 days to open the window (Gen 7:4, 12, 17; 8:6)
3. Isaac’s age when he married Rebekah, Esau age when married Judith and Bashemath.
4. Jacob / Israel 40 days after death for embalming and Egyptian purification (Gen 50:3)
5. Moses on Sinai also fasted from bread and water for forty days and nights (Deut 9:9)
6. Moses’ spies searched out the land of Israel 40 days (Num 13:25)
7. Children of Israel in wilderness 40 years eating manna, without their clothes wearing out or feet swelling (Ex 16:35; Duet 8:4)
8. Goliath taunted Saul’s army 40 days before David arrived (1 Sam 17:16)
9. Elijah fasted 40 days when he went to Mt. Sinai (Horeb) through the wilderness (1 Kgs 19:8)
10. Jonah prophesied that Nineveh would be destroyed in 40 days if they did not repent (Jonah 3:4)
11. Jesus’ post resurrection ministry lasted 40 days (Acts 1:3)
12. Jesus fasted 40 days (Matt 4:2; Luke 4:2)

THREE TEMPTATIONS



Temptation of Christ. 12th century mosaic in basilica di San Marco. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

The temptations given to Jesus are also prototypes for all temptations of man. The underlying question with temptations is one of who to worship. Temptation is to detour one from following God's will by following Satan's will. Each of the issues underlying Jesus' temptations will be fulfilled as part of Jesus' mission. This suggests that Satan knew Jesus would fulfill each—but Satan wanted to have Jesus carry them out on his timing to thwart the Father's plan.

Temptation to the Senses

Mt 4:3-4; Lk 4:3-4

- Satan often appeals to our appetites. The natural man needs are already in place. What is wrong with eating? Well the use of all our appetites needs to follow God's directions. Our bodies must follow advice from our creator. The food is not necessarily the problem, it's taking it from the wrong hand. Obeying Satan is wrong.
- BYU Pres. Jeff Holland, explained in 1982, that Jesus' temptation included getting his bread the easy way.¹
- Soon Jesus will feed 5,000+, turn water into wine, but Elder McConkie says this would "Prostitute his powers," because it is self-serving, and obeying Satan's suggestions.²

- The question is not about *when* one can eat bread, but rather, is Jesus going to submit to Satan or His appetites, rather than submit His will to God? As disciples, who partake of “*the Bread*” weekly, we covenant to obey the Lord and submit our will to His. Sometimes Satan, as the great counterfeit, tries to alter God’s timing to invalidate God’s blessings (i.e. sex after not before marriage). Just like in the Garden of Eden, where Satan tried to usurp God’s timing and role by intervening to get Adam and Eve to eat from his hand, on his time table, his way. Fortunately, the “second Adam” did not fall for it (1 Corinthians 15:47).
- Following God includes accepting His time schedule for our appetites.
- Jesus answer’s Satan by quoting scripture (Deut. 8:3; see also D&C 98:11), a good pattern for all who confront temptations.



Temptation of Christ by Philips Augustijn Immenraet (1663). Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Temptation of Pride

Mt 4:5-7; Lk 4:9-12

- The JST clarifies that *the Spirit* took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and then Satan tempted Him there (Mt 4:5; Lk 4:9). This change suggests that Satan did not have power to move Jesus.
- Satan pesters Jesus with doubts, “IF thou be the Son of God...” to raise insecurity. Insecurity can lead to either self-doubt or pride as a means of defending one’s feeling of self-worth.

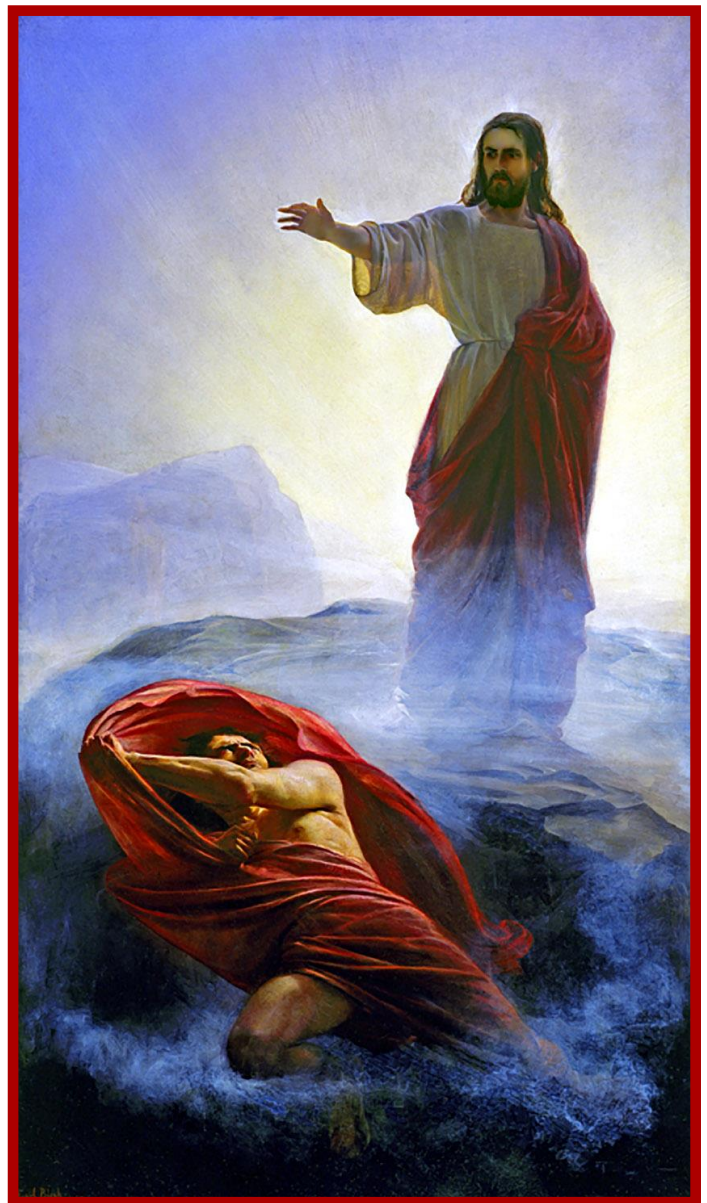
Has insecurity every caused you to become prideful?

- The drive to feel noticed, more important, and indestructible, is Satan’s temptation. Instead, God wants us to feel His love by serving Him and others. Jesus will teach that we become greater by serving others and when we humble ourselves can become exalted (Matt 23:11–12).
- Satan quotes scripture mixed with his philosophy, and asks Jesus to prove his divinity with a sign.
- Satan’s tries to logically argue that by Jesus jumping into the crowded temple courtyard, He could gain a huge following, start his mission off with a bang. It would also prove to Jesus, that God would indeed protect Him as promised.
- Jesus again answers the tempter by quoting scripture (Deut 6:13 and 16), *and so can we!*

Temptation for Power

Mt 4:8-11; Lk 4:5-8

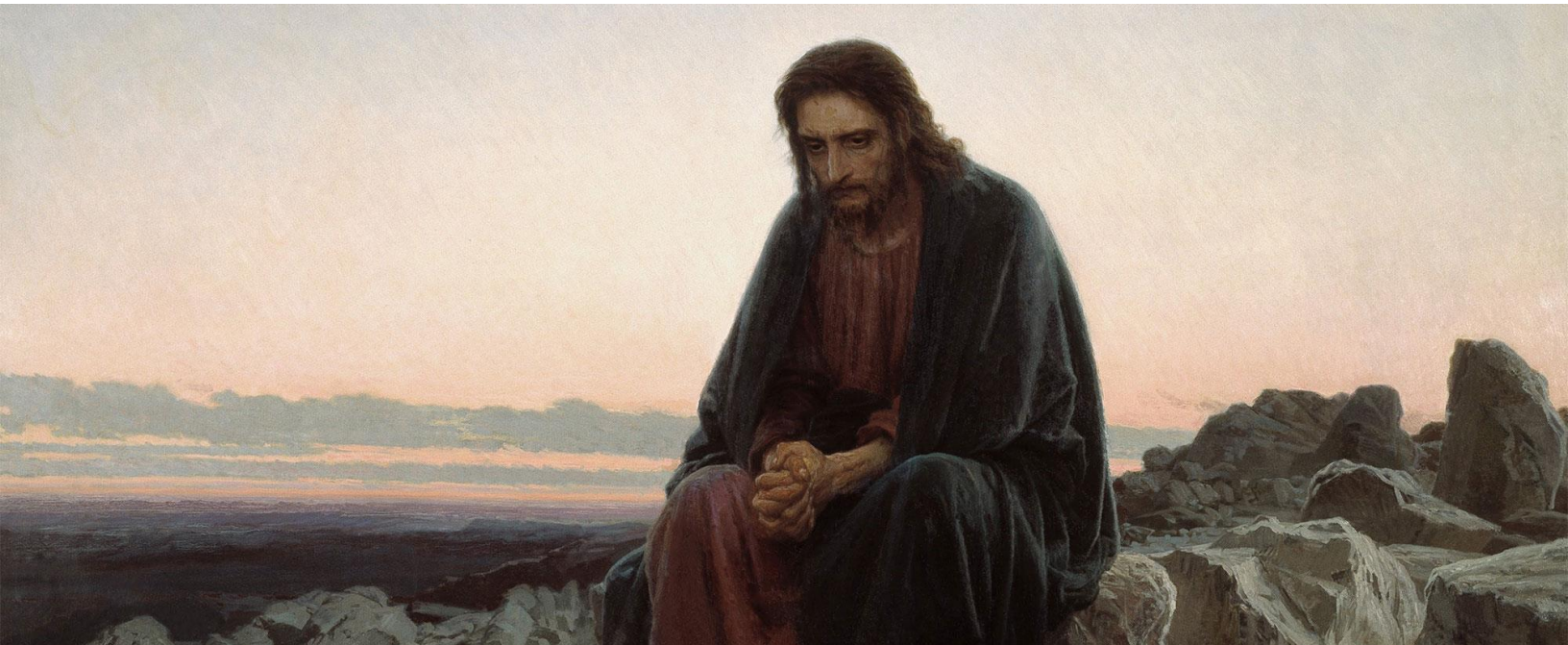
- The JST consistently corrects the text to communicate that Satan does not possess Jesus, but that the Spirit led Jesus to a high mountain. When the Spirit leaves, *then* Satan comes to tempt Him.
- Luke adds that Satan promises “power” and “glory” (Lk 4:6)—*which are not Satan’s to give!* The Prophet Joseph Smith restored that Satan only has power when we yield it to him.³
- Ironically, Jesus is The Creator of the heavens and earth. These are not Satan’s to give. He is the one who will rule and reign—never Satan. From the beginning of the earth, the devil is always trying to usurp God’s role and power.
- This temptation festers at the question, “Will you ever really reign, Jesus?” The answer is Yes, but not Satan’s way, nor on Satan’s time. The easy way out is not our goal, but rather our goal is to follow God’s plan. We fought for it before, and we continue to fight in mortality. Our generation often seeks the fastest way to earn a buck (or a million of them). But those who follow Jesus, do not selfishly desire riches and power by following Satan’s easy route. The Lord



Jesus Tempted by Carl Bloch. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

taught Joseph that by “long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned” we will learn from our experiences (D&C 121:41; 122:7).

- Satan basically asks Jesus, “What is your price?”⁴ This is a common temptation. “Satan’s first article of faith,” according to Hugh Nibley is: “You can buy anything in this world for money.”⁵ Jesus again answers by quoting scripture (Exodus 34:14).
- Satan’s time schedule only *appears* easy. With an eternal perspective, Gods plan—which requires growth, obedience, and patience—is the best route. God’s always has a plan and backup plan that works. This was part of the problem in Eden. Satan lied to our first parents by pretending there was no other way. God’s plan provides “another way” (the 116 lost pages and the small plates for one), rooted in the atonement of Christ.
- Later in Luke 4:32, 36, Jesus’ power heals and exorcises devils in a synagogue and home.
- Jesus will have to wait until the Millennium to fully fulfill the call for him to reign upon the earth.



Christ in the Wilderness by Ivan Kramskoi (1872). Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Why did Jesus have to go through this?

We learn in scripture that Jesus also learned line up on line and progressed. He needed to experience earth-life in order to gain compassion and empathy. To be our judge and advocate he needed experience (i.e. Hebrews 2:10, 18; 4:15; 5:8)

Why three temptations? Perhaps they apply to all temptations. Interestingly, Jesus gave Satan three witnesses. Also, the three temptations apply to Jesus' three periods of his mission as our Savior: 1) During His First Coming, he provided bread physically and spiritually left us with bread as a symbol to convent with Him; 2) At His Second Coming, He will come down from Heaven to Temple; and 3) During the Millennium he will reign over all the earth as King.

What can you learn from your temptations?

THE BEGINNING OF JESUS' PUBLIC MINISTRY

Jesus moves to Galilee

Mt 4:12 Matthew and Mark move Jesus to Galilee with the news that John is in prison. This is not the same timing across all accounts. John's gospel has 4 or 5 months before JBPst is imprisoned (I presume that is more accurate). Nevertheless, all four Gospels moves Jesus to Galilee sometime after His baptism.

MATT 4:12

Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee

MARK 1:14

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,

LUKE 4:14

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about.

JOHN 4:1-3

When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,) He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee.

Mt 4:12 JST adds: "Jesus *knew* that John was cast into prison, *and he sent angels, and, behold, they came and ministered unto him.*" It sounds like Jesus sent the angels to JBPst. When JBPst bestowed the Aaronic Priesthood to Joseph Smith, he specifically mentioned the role of *ministering angels* as part of the Aaronic Priesthood (D&C 13:1 and D&C 107:20).

Ministering angels are a blessing to all ages and genders as a confirmation of truth (D&C 20:10; Omni 1:25; 3 Nephi 19:15; Moroni 7:25; 10:14). Furthermore, the “Parchment of John [the Beloved]” reveals that “he has undertaken a greater work; therefore I [God] will make him as flaming fire and a ministering angel; he shall minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation who dwell on the earth” (D&C 7:6). You can find nine more verses in the D&C that teach about ministering angels including their roles in other kingdoms (i.e. D&C 13:1; 20:6,10, 35; 43:25; 67:13; 76:88; 84:26; 107: 20; 130:5–6; 132:16–17).

Mt 4:13–17 In Matthew’s style, he includes the OT geographical markers listing by old tribal lands, followed by one of Isaiah’s prophecy that was fulfilled. Half of Matthews citations are from Isaiah. (I think Matthew liked Isaiah as much as Nephi did!) This is the seventh of Matthew’s “14 Prophetic Fulfillment” verses, where he repeats: “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken . . .” showing that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies for their promised Messiah.⁶ The message of going from darkness to light is one of repentance and forgiveness. There are 574 scriptural verses that address repent or repentance. It is especially important in the restoration scriptures



Jesus Unrolls the Book in the Synagogue by James Tissot.

Jesus Preaches in Nazareth

Luke 4:16–30

Lk 4:16 Luke alone includes the stories from Nazareth “where he had been brought up” (i.e. starting with Mary and Joseph leaving Nazareth for the Roman enrollment and Jesus’ birth, and here the story of Jesus’ rejection there thirty years later). Luke claims that his stories came from eye witnesses, and so we assume that Mary or others shared this sad event with Luke. Archeologists estimate the ancient population of Nazareth between 300–1,000 people (most speculating on the smaller size because of the location on a rocky hillside that made it difficult to sustain life through farming).

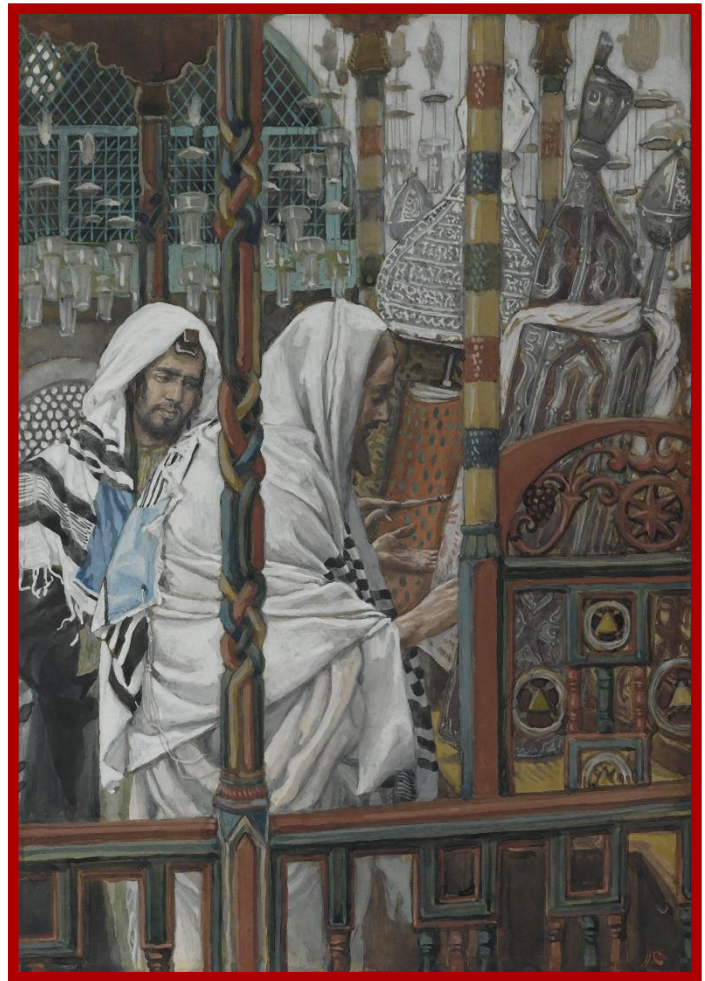
At the time of the Gospels, the late Second Temple Period, Jews met each Sabbath (from Friday at sunset to Saturday sunset) to worship in synagogues or house churches (depending on the size and wealth of the Jewish community).⁷ Women and children were allowed to attend if they were silent and sat in a separate section.⁸ The

synagogue ceremony included reading a section from the Torah (first five books of Moses), and if they had the means to own other scrolls, they also read from one of the Prophets (i.e., Isaiah, Jonah, etc.). The service began with singing Psalms, recitations, and then a Jewish man in the congregation stood to read the assigned Scripture passage of the day from the scroll, and then sat down to discuss it. They sat to signify the higher place of God's word over man's interpretation.⁹ The service usually closed with a blessing.

Lk 4:17–19 The small town of Nazareth seems eager to hear from their hometown, now “rabbi / teacher” who gained a reputation as a miracle worker over the time he has been gone. He is either reading the assigned passage of the day from Isaiah 61:1–2, or he chose. It was one of the passages known to speak of the Promised Messiah.¹⁰ The phrase, “he hath anointed me,” uses the word for *messiah*. Reading the scripture describes beautiful details of the Messiah's mission. No one in the OT ever healed the blind, it was a sign of the Messiah as mentioned here.

What can we learn from His Preaching in Nazareth?

Lk 4:20–22 The small-town congregation gave him full attention as their eyes “fastened on him” (Lk 4:20). His short and clear declaration, “This day is this scripture fulfilled,” was highly offensive. They had a hard time accepting His declaration as they knew Him from childhood and were still living with his younger siblings (who also did not believe we are told in John's Gospel).



Jesus Teaches in the Synagogue by James Tissot

Lk 4:23–27 In their disbelief, His neighbors ask for a miracle like he has performed anywhere as a sign for them. In response, He reminds them of the OT stories where Israelites' lacked faith, and gentiles exhibited greater faith from Sidon and Syria. This message was also clear, and equally as offensive. They felt it disrespectful too.

Lk 4:28–30 In their rage, they attempt to stone Jesus as a false prophet.¹¹ Stoning was prescribed for many sins including, Sabbath breaking, idolatry, a false prophet, and blasphemy (Leviticus 24:11–16). Instead, they receive a miracle that they do not recognize, Jesus remained unharmed. They did not have power over his life.

Call of First Disciples

Mt 4:18–22; Mk 1:16–20; Luke 5:1–11



The Calling of Saint John and Saint Andrew by James Tissot.

Mt 4:18–22 Even though the details and timing are different in each Gospel (John in Judea, synoptics in Galilee), two of the first few disciples to follow Jesus in all four Gospels, include Andrew and his brother Simon Peter (Mark 1:16). Many assume that John the Beloved is the other disciple of JBpst who first asks Jesus, “Mater, where dwellest thou?” and is told, “Come and see” (John 1:38–39).

Mt 4:19, JST, Jesus identifies himself as the fulfillment of the prophets’ messages. Matthew records that he is also mending his nets in Galilee when called by Jesus to follow Him.

What “nets” in our lives do we need to stop mending to more fully follow Jesus?

It requires great faith to leave “all” and follow then and now. I presume it was hardest on their families. How did their families react? (We know of Peter’s wife and mother in law, Papa Zebedee and his wife, and undoubtedly each of the twelve was connected someone—see Mark 1:20.) Following the Lord required a complete change of life and heart. Luke fills in with a few more details.

Lk 5:1 In the morning, a crowd followed Jesus to a beach near Capernaum which was a prosperous city at the north of the Sea of Galilee (also known in the NT as Lake of Gennesaret).

Lk 5:2 The two boats belonged to Peter and his partners, James and John the sons of Zebedee and Salome. Their “fishing nets” were very heavy casting nets. The unsuccessful fishermen must have been exhausted and discouraged as they go through the laborious work of cleaning and folding their linen threaded nets.

Lk 5:3 Jesus would have sat in the back of the boat while Peter walked beside the front pushing it out into the shallow waters. I presume Peter and his partners listened to Jesus teach the crowd. Jesus had already visited Peter and healed his family (4:38), so asking him to use his boat seems reasonable. Peter must have grown his faith and meekly received advise on fishing from a builder.

Lk 5:4–6 Jesus now offers a miracle with broader power over creation. Luke selects miracles that grow in their scope and power (fulfilling Jesus’ mission as announced at the Nazareth synagogue from Isaiah 61:1). Luke starts with protection through invisibility; 4:33–35 casting out devil; 4:38–39 healing Peter’s mother-in-law’s fever, power over the deep, healing permanent conditions of leprosy and paralysis, and forgiving sins).

Deep—echoing creation (Gen 1:2); the path for the ransomed (Isa 51:10); the depths of the earth hold the dead who need redemption (Ezekiel 26:19–20; Romans 10:7), depths pose danger (Psalms 69:2; Amos 9:3).

Nets—The linen threads that are woven into 25’ circular casting nets, snap and pop under the fishes’ weight. The image of a breaking net alludes to snapping off each thread of the Devil’s net that bound us as we come unto Christ.

Lk 5:7 This catch of a lifetime could provide income to sustain the families of the newly called apostles. Just 4.5 miles south is the town of Magdala / Taricheae where they dried or smoked fish. We assume the families took the catch of fish there to sell. Peter’s partners probably included his brother Andrew as well as James and John. Their working together foreshadows the unified team of Apostles as well. The boats in that area were 4 ½ ft deep, and still sinking with the load of fish.

Lk 5:8 Both names for Peter are used only here in Luke. Luke highlights Peter who falls at Jesus’ feet as the first called apostle. Imagine the chaos of tugging the nets into the boat with all the wriggling fish. The miracle is in the timing! I love seeing Peter’s humility as He worships Jesus. This vs also speaks of the need for disciples to be cleansed and live worthy lives to follow the Lord. Yet the Lord calls sinners.

Lk 5:9–10 Astonishment or “Fear seized him” as this miracle is tailor made for Peter! Luke points specifically to the three chief apostles as eye witness’. Jesus observes their fear and commands, “fear not” (one of the most repeated commandments throughout Luke). The Lord gives them a grand catch before calling them to grander things.

Lk 5:11 Immediately they respond to the Lord's call to serve, and left their catch with others. The Lord asks us to forsake our sins to follow and serve Him as well. As a side note, the Lord has provided for the apostle's families by first healing Grandma (Lk 4:39; Peter's mother-in-law), and now fish provided income for the next three years (D&C 118:3; 49:21)

Preaches and Heals in Galilee

Matt 4:23–25, Mark 1:35–39, Luke 4:42–44



Christ Healing the Mother of Simon Peter's Wife by John Bridges (1839). Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Mt 4:23, JST, adds the significant requirement of faith in the Lord's Name to be healed.

Mt 23–25 From the outset of Jesus' ministry, Matthew includes an international crowd following Jesus with his missionary focus. Throughout his Gospel, he uses "book ends" five times to divide his record into sections. Verses 23–25 are the end of the first section (ending with the exact same verse in 9:35). The whole section between the two book-ends is one unit where Jesus teaches (ch 5–7), heals (ch 8–9). Sometimes the KJV translators use different words even though words like "every" and "all manner" are both the same Greek, *pas*.

4:23 ¶ And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing *all* manner of sickness and ...

9:35 ¶ And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing *every* sickness and ...

Mk 1:35 includes that Jesus chose to be alone in the wilderness to prayer in order to prepare. He left to the hillside to be alone and pray at nearly 4:00 in the morning! Mark's Gospel highlights the miraculous nature of the Lord's ministry, while the other Gospels include that Jesus had more to do than perform miracles in Capernaum, he was there to preach the Good News / *gospel*.

Capernaum Synagogue and Healing Peter's Mother in Law

Lk 4:38–40 After the Lord teaches in the Capernaum synagogue and casts out a devil there, he is requested to heal Peter's mother in law. In addition to Luke including more information on women, he is more aware of family life as well. It is also interesting in Luke's account that Simon / Peter has heard the Lord preach (possibly twice) and has the Lord in his home to heal his mother in law, before his call to leave his profession behind and become a fisher of men.

Luke 5:12-16 Jesus Cleanses a Leper

also Mt 8:2-4; Mk 1:40-45

Lk 5:12 "One of the cities," suggests that the unclean man had come into an area where he shouldn't. Especially in the advanced stage of "full of leprosy." (As a physician, I presume Luke knew much of leprosy.) He falls at Jesus' feet with great faith, as did Peter (5:8). Old Testament Mosaic Law stresses "Clean and Unclean" in Leviticus 13:45 (1-46); 14:2-3; Number 5:2; etc. Rabbi's put bans on Lepers as the most unclean (next to the dead). They could not go into a walled city. If they were on a road they must stay at least 6 feet away from others and call out "unclean" loudly. Leprosy was known as "living death" (read Talmage p. 199 description). It was believed incurable once seated in the blood, and this man had the worst form of it ("full of leprosy"). Rabbi's required Lepers to dress as mourners with a black cloak completely covering all their body, most of their face, with "disheveled hair." Rabbi's taught that 11 specific sins brought about Leprosy.

Lk 5:13 Jesus violates the letter of the Law by touching the unclean, while keeping the spirit of the Law by healing him. Jesus send him to a priest to be pronounced clean by under the Law of Moses.

Lk 5:14 Jesus honors the Law by complying with the details of a priest pronouncing the cleansing pure (Lev 14:2-3). We saw this earlier in Luke's nativity where he included the earliest members of the Christian tradition as

respecters of the Law of Moses (Luke 1-2: Zacharias at the temple, Elizabeth at the circumcision, Mary forty-day purification at the temple, young Jesus attending Passover at the temple, etc.).

Lk 5:16 If Jesus needed spiritual rejuvenation, SO DO WE! Find your “wilderness” or place to pray.

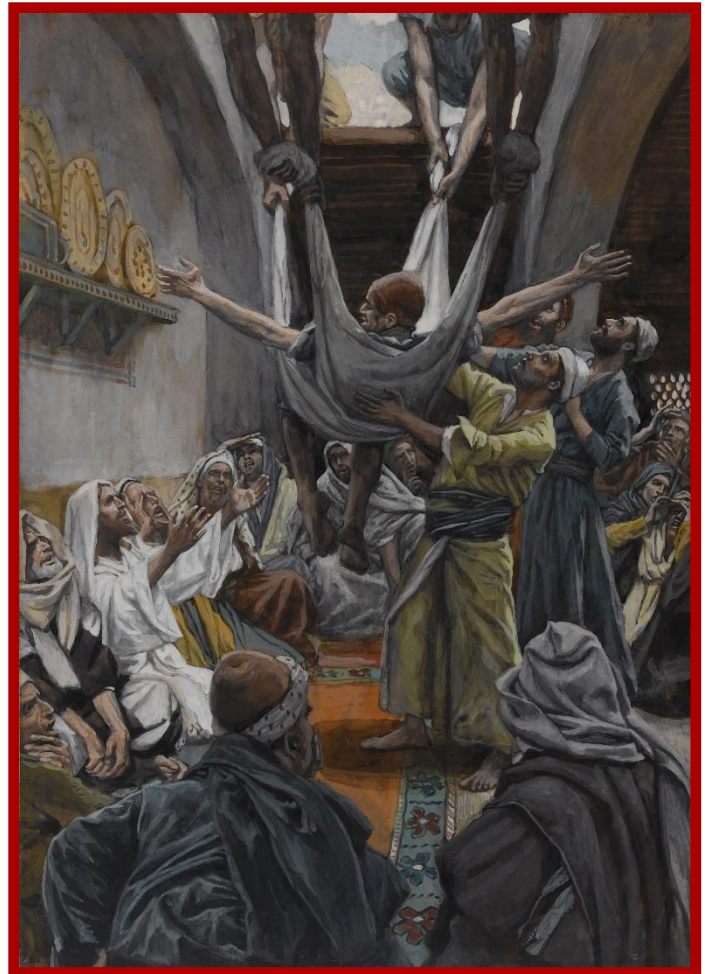
Lk 3:6. Each Gospel cites Isaiah 40:3-4, but Luke alone continues in Isaiah and adds the fifth verse: “all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” This specifically highlights Luke’s theology that Jesus came for *all*.

Luke 5:17-26 Jesus heals Paralysis

also Mt 9:2-8; Mk 2:1-12

Lk 5:17 Pharisees (Josephus identifies a group of 6,000, who emphasized the 10,000 oral laws, especially Sabbath observance and dietary laws), and teachers start attacking Jesus. At the time, small houses were 9' X 12,' medium were 12' X 15', and larger homes had rooms surrounding a courtyard. Often an outside stairwell led to the flat roof where you could work or sleep in warm weather.

Roof: There were outside and inside stairs that lead up to the roof, as well as “the road of the roofs” passing from roof to roof if the house adjoined others in the same street. Many Galilean roofs were hard beaten earth with rubble underneath it, with paved brick, stone, or any other hard substance and surrounded by a balustrade which was at least 3' high. The roof over the courtyard would have been covered with a lighter frame work which supported the tiles. Roman tiled homes have also been unearthed in Palestine.



Paralyzed Man Let Down by James Tissot.

Lk 5:18 The friends of the paralyzed man had great faith and determination! A great example in doing all we can to reach God.

Lk 5:19 The Greek word for “before the Lord” is used “almost as a technical term in temple worship” and when Moses stood before the Lord (p.290). The speaks of a sacred setting. I wonder how disruptive the scene must have been?

Lk 5:20 Faith propels this miracle. Jesus heals in the “psychological order;” inward thoughts first before outward (remember some Jews thought ever illness came from a sin). The healings spoke of His Divine Personality.

Lk 5:21–22 Reading other’s thoughts is another miracle and sign that Jesus is God. The word for “power” is also authority. *Note again the similarities with the Devil’s temptation, now from the questioning leaders “if...if...if thou be...”

Lk 5:23–24 The JST helps, “Does it require more power to forgive sins than to make the sick rise . . .” which immediately happens proving Jesus has power over both. His healing is even shown to provide strength to carry his stretcher!

Levi/Matthew's call

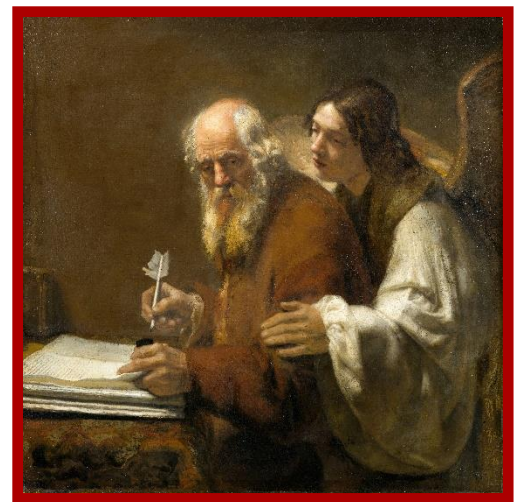
Mt 9:9–13; Mark 2:13–17; Luke 5:27–32

Lk 5:27 The Lord “observed” Levi/Matthew possibly at the custom’s post on the main road just east of Capernaum, on the boarder of Herod Antipas and Philip’s territories (2 miles west of where the Jordan River meets the Sea of Galilee). Luke calls him Levi, but Matthew (“gift of God”), calls him, “Matthew the Publican.”

Tax Collector: Usually, publicans were despised and listed with harlots and sinners (Mt 18:17). Because some were dishonest, none were allowed to be witnesses or judge. Their positions were leased from the government, and lived on the excess that they collected.

Roman Taxes: There were three different taxes each with their own tax collectors: 1) Ground tax: 1/10% of your ground production (ie. grain, wine) paid either in kind or \$; 2) Income-tax amounted to 1%; 3) Poll-tax or head-money was levied on all men over 14–65, and girls 12–65.

Taxes were paid on all imports and exports, all that was bought and sold, toll roads, bridge money, town dues, admission to markets, harbor dues, and ship toll. Taxes ranged from 2 ½–12 ½ % . The price was nothing compared to the hassle of constantly being stopped, unloading your pack animals, every bale and package opened, contents counted, private letters opened, etc. There was plenty of room for favors (Edersheim, 514?)



St. Matthew and the Angel by Karel van der Pluym (ca. 1655). Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Lk 5:28 Luke describes Levi, just as P, J and J, “forsaking all.” Disciples must be willing to leave all to follow Christ (and still must listen and obey His Spirit and servants). Levi as a publican would have had to brake his contract

Lk 5:29–30 Jesus is the guest of honor and “reclines” to eat at the feast Levi /Matthew provides. (Later Pharisaic Jewish laws forbad eating with publicans, p. 296). After the meal, the self-righteous confront Jesus’ disciples about eating with unclean publicans. Eating with “clean” people (male guests ate with men only) was especially important--because eating with someone was the same as if you were covenanting with them or at least shared values with them as you dipped together in the same dish (sharing germs)

Lk 5:31–32 These two statements are cited in the synoptic gospels. We also find them in reverse order as statements from Jesus quoted in Mormon 8:8. None of us are “whole” without the Lord’s atonement making up the difference.

Jesus’ Early Teachings

Luke 5:33–39

Lk 5:33 The audience appears to still be the publicans and scribes, but in the Gospel of Matthew it is JBst’s disciples. Yet Jesus also speaks so that his new disciples will understand that he is not intending to reform the old Law, but calls for a completely new or fresh restoration. The call for fasting would return after Jesus’ death. (Don’t get hung up on order of stories as each Gospel. It’s like a patchwork squares to create a different overall design.

Lk 5:34–35 Jesus uses the “bridegroom / bride” for imagery for God and Zion as we find in the OT too. The analogy is built on throughout the NT in parables and sermons (including the Book of Revelation).

Lk 5:36 A new patch was “un-shrunk” and would pull away as it shrinks and tear or stretch at the seams. Matthew uses the word, “*pleroun* / to fulfill” speaking of the fulfillment of the Law of Moses in Christ.

Lk 5:37 New or “fresh grape juice” was kept in animal skins, so they were only flexible enough for fermentation when new. Christ is symbolically the new wine and must be received with a flexible, soft, heart. Old bottles would not have the supple nature to expand with fermentation. Most wine was diluted significantly with water (10 parts water for the poor, 3 parts water for Passover). ❖

ENDNOTES

¹ Jeffery R. Holland, *BYU Speeches: The Inconvenient Messiah* (Provo, UT: 1982), from his Feb. 27, 1982, devotional. Also see https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/jeffrey-r-and-patricia-t-holland_inconvenient-messiah/ or <https://www.lds.org/liahona/1989/03/the-inconvenient-messiah?lang-eng>

² Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1979), 1:412.

³ na, *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (SLC, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of LDS, 2007), 213. “Satan cannot seduce us by his enticements unless we in our hearts consent and yield. . . . We can resist the devil; if we were not organized so, we would not be free agents.”

⁴ Holland, *The Inconvenient Messiah*.

⁵ Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1989), 255.

⁶ Matthew’s 14 fulfillment prophecies include: Mt 1:22; 2:5, 15, 17, 23; 3:3; 4:14, 8:17; 12:17; 13:14, 35; 21:4; 26:56; 27:9. This use of fourteen points to his Davidic roots as discussed in the handout of Matt 1.

⁷ Howard Clark Kee and Lynn H. Cohick, *Evolution of the Synagogue* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1999), 91. “The basic meaning of the Greek *synagogue* is ‘a gathering, a collection,’ and can be used either of people or of things . . . Jews in antiquity coined the word *proseuche* to designate a place (usually a building) of prayer.” See also 12, 14, 17, 20. Scripture scrolls were found in the synagogue in Masada. First century Jews referred to places of worship as *synagogue* and *proseuche* (Josephus, *Against Apion*, 14.216; 16.164; *Vit.* 277ff; 290; 295; *BJ* 2.289-92; Matthew 9:35; Mark 13:9; Luke 4:16-30; Acts 9:20; 13:15; 18:4, 17).

⁸ Michael Avi-Yonah, “Synagogue Historical Roots,” Skolnik, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 19. 364-366. Later a separate entrance for women and children and lattice screens were set up to keep the women and children unseen and unheard. Archeologists found a lattice separation for gender in a Mesopotamian synagogue from AD 245. Between the third and seventh century, galleries were built to keep the women on separate floors from the men in addition to their separate entrance.

⁹ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 56.

¹⁰ Mark Harding, *Early Christian Life and Thought in Social Context* (NYC: T&T Clark International, 2003), 323. The Messianic hope of the time was outlined by the *Psalms of Solomon* (69-40 BC) and focused on a conquering Messiah: “He will have Gentile peoples serving him under his yoke, and he will glorify the Lord publicly in the whole world. He will pronounce Jerusalem clean . . . He will have nations come from the ends of the earth to see his glory . . . He will be a righteous king over them, taught by God, there will be no unrighteousness among them during his reign, because everyone will be holy, and their king will be the Lord Messiah . . . And he himself will be free from sin, in order to rule such a great people. He will expose officials and drive out sinners by the strength of his word.”

¹¹ Stoning was carried out by pushing the offender of the law off a cliff, if that did not kill him or her, one person was chosen to throw a large rock on the wounded one. If that did not kill him or her, everyone else picked up stones and throw them to attempt to end life.



JOHN 2–3

JESUS' 1ST MIRACLE AND 1ST DISCOURSE ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN

Book of Mormon Additions

In the Book of Mormon, we find common doctrines and principles that are taught in John 2 and 3. For example, the discussion on being born again in John 3:3–5, is found in an expanded view in Mosiah 27:25; Alma 5:49, and Alma 7:14. As you compare these verses on being “born again,” side by side, you can see the extra depth and insight found in the Book of Mormon passages. The same is true on similar themes such as purify, cleanse, and baptize.

Overview

John’s Gospel includes seven miracles and seven discourses. The first miracle is found in chapter 2, the wedding at Cana. And the first discourse is found in chapter 3, with Nicodemus in Jerusalem.¹

Repeatedly in John’s Gospel, the miracles and sermons are used to show how Jesus replaced a Jewish custom with a higher law. We see that in the first miracle at a wedding in Cana. He uses the miracle to demonstrate the fulfillment of the mosaic purification with Jesus’ atoning sacrifice (John 2:11; 4:46). He teaches the difference between the lower law and higher law in His conversation with Nicodemus on being born from on high. He denounces the corrupted use of the temple by cleansing it.

Repeatedly, John’s Gospel attacks false traditions in favor of *restoring* a holier way

I.

MIRACLE OF WATER CHANGED TO WINE AT THE WEDDING IN CANA

John 2:1–12



The Marriage Feast at Cana by Juan de Flandes. Image via Metropolitan Museum of Art

John carefully highlights Jesus’ first “miracle” (KJV) or “sign” (most modern translations) to symbolically teach a higher meaning of purification, and foreshadow the cleansing power of His blood. The first miracle also parallels the first miracle performed by Moses at Pharaoh’s court—turning the water to blood (Exodus 4:9; 7:17–21).

Cana

Cana of Galilee is connected to three points in the New Testament, the first two of the seven miracles mentioned in John’s Gospel—the wedding at Cana and the healing of a royal official’s son (John 2:1; 4:46)—and the hometown of Nathanael (John 21:2). The most likely location is the rocky ruins of *Khirbet Qana*, nestled in the middle of Galilee, about ten miles north of Nazareth.

Text

John 2:1 “third day”: John emphasizes *days* throughout His Gospel. If all the “*days*” are added up from chapter one, this is the seventh day—again harkening to the creation theme. But these numbers are probably used for symbolism rather than for literal calendaring—they are not 24-hour days for sure (i.e. travel time for about 60–100 miles to Galilee appears to be given only one day 1:43). The “third day” may refer to the third highlighted day (1: John the Baptist baptizing Jesus, 2: Jesus calling apostles, and now 3: he first miracle, see John 1:29; 35; 43), or two days after the call of Philip in Galilee (John 1:43). Figuratively, the “third day” brings to mind the promise of the *resurrection* after Jesus’ body lay three days in the tomb (also Jonah’s third day in the whale, Matt 12:39; 16:4). John emphasizes numbers symbolically across all his writings.² This is important because the miracle of the red wine symbolizes Jesus’ atoning blood.

John 2:2 “invited to the marriage”: Jesus’ family, as well as His newly called disciples, appear to be actively involved in the wedding celebration. Jews at the time of the New Testament honored marriage as a religious duty to fulfill God’s commandment given in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:20, 24). Marriages were arranged by the father or guardian when their children were young. Ideally, a Jewish man married between 15 and 20 years old and a Jewish girl married between the ages of twelve and fifteen. Their marriage ceremony took place in two stages—betrothal and wedding—usually a year apart.³ Typically, both ceremonies were performed with witnesses, under a wedding tent or “canopy /*chuppah*,” at the groom’s parent’s home.⁴ If the families had the means, a weeklong feast followed the final ceremony. Family and friends gathered for a reunion and feasting.⁵

John 2:3 “they have no wine”: In the ancient world, extending proper hospitality to guests was a serious obligation. Running short of wine could even end in a lawsuit.⁶ A wise hostess held back food and drink for later. As Mary was worried about the wine, she was probably a close relative or friend of someone in the wedding party. Mary’s comment, “they have no wine” was used by John, as a leading tone, to symbolically highlight the bareness of Judaism.



The Virgin in Prayer by Giovanni Battista Salvi da Sassoferrato. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

John 2:4 “woman”: Throughout his Gospel, John never uses his own name, nor the name of Jesus’ mother, Mary. He also lives in a culture where they do not mention the name of God. John refers to Mary twice as the “mother of Jesus” (2:1–2; on the cross 19:25–26). Both times he addressed her by the title, “woman.” The JST foot note shows love and respect. In Greek it is a polite way of addressing a woman or wife—but strange for a son. Have you noticed all the creation themes in John’s early Gospel? Perhaps using “woman” harkens to the creation of Eve from Genesis 2:22–23. Look at a summary of John’s ties to the creation:⁷

1. Prologue begins, “in the beginning.”
2. Light and darkness creation themes are introduced.
3. The Spirit descends and remains on Jesus just as the Spirit of God moved upon the waters and breathed life into man.
4. The seventh day is important as the day that “woman” was created (Gen 2:24). God tells her in Eden that her seed will crush the serpent (Gen 3:20). Mary is the woman of Eve’s promise (the name Eve is *life* in Hebrew). By calling Mary “woman,” John may be recalling the promise in Gen 3:15; or a second Eve.⁸
5. From day one of Christ’s ministry (his baptism) until the seventh day when he performs His first miracle in Cana, we see the emergence of a new or second Adam (Paul refers to this in 1 Corinthians 15:45).

“My hour” When Mary asks for help, she thinks it is for the wedding. But Jesus’ response shows that He is on a higher plane; He says, “my hour is not yet come.” Is Jesus not ready to start His mission with a public miracle? (Priests could start functioning in their calling at 30, which also was the Jewish age of “arriving.”) OR did Jesus refer to the time when He will reveal the symbol of His wine—the offering of His blood? Combining Jesus’ words with what happens—He provides wine from purification pots—it appears that He refers to a new wine, even His blood, as a miraculous sign of His future purification and glory.

John 2:5 “Do whatever he tells you.”: In reply to Mary’s innocent and faith-filled request, Jesus provided a miracle that is actually a *sign* of His mission. Mary’s reply, showed her faith—her directions become the model for all disciples: do everything He asks. She also shows her preeminent position at the wedding by directing the servants. (In Greek the word *servant* and *slave* are the same. One-third of the Roman Empire was made up by servants/slaves.⁹)

John 2:6 “six water pots of stone...[for] purifying”: John brings our attention to the fact that the stone pots were specifically used in Jewish purification for ceremonial washings. (Leviticus 11:29–38, explains that purification required *stone* pots, rather than clay pots which were unclean.) John emphasized the number six, too. In contrast to seven, John uses six to represent incomplete or not perfect (i.e. Rev 13:18). The symbolism points to the Mosaic ritual cleaning as incomplete, or not whole/perfect. Later Jesus taught that lasting purification comes through His blood, which He connects symbolically with wine at the Last Supper (John 6:54; Matt 26:27–28).

“Two or three firkins apiece”: A firkin holds 10.8 gallons of water, so each pot held 22 to 33 gallons. All six pots could hold 132–198 gallons of water—enough for the wedding, plus a year’s supply gift for the couple!



Image of ancient ceramic amphorae. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

John 2:7 “to the brim”: This foreshadows Jesus’ blood which is completely available to all. I love the image of filling our vessels, or lives, *completely* with the Lord’s directions, and likewise, His atonement. To make His future blood/wine to purify all, His atoning sacrifice also required taking Him to the brim of His Divine capacity (Luke 22:42).

John 2:8–10 “the good wine until now”: Prophets foretold of an abundance of wine in Messianic days (Amos 9:13–15; Genesis 27:27–28, 49:10–11; Proverbs 9:4–5). When Jesus miraculously made wine, John connected it to Messianic prophecies. The six, incomplete, Jewish purification pots, were not enough for complete cleansing. Jesus’ miracle demonstrated a missing ingredient needed for purification:

His atoning sacrifice or blood. His higher law of purifying through His sacrifice, will soon replace the Mosaic lower law of purification through washings. Jesus used wine as the symbol of His blood for His at-one-ment in John 6:56. Also, just before Jesus’ last Passover, the other Gospels introduce the sacrament to use wine in remembrance of Jesus’ blood. Interestingly, this miracle is just before Passover as well (perhaps this is why John 2:13 mentions it). Irenaeus (ca. AD 120–200) referred to a tradition that when the Messiah comes, He will heal the earth of the curse and it will yield ten-thousand-fold.¹⁰ John saw this miracle as fulfilling a *sign* of Jesus’ Messiahship.

John 2:11 He “manifested forth his glory”: Jesus proclaimed His mission and His disciples believed. This first miracle represents the futility of *self*-purification. We need the Savior’s atoning blood—which was shed in Gethsemane and on the cross. On a different level, when Jesus enters our lives, we are changed and purified into something better.

John 2:12 “his brethren, and his disciples”: Jesus and His family and disciples leave Cana and traveled about 20 to 30 miles to the north coast of the sea of Galilee. This verse mentions Jesus’ half-brothers. Mark 6:3 and Matt 13:55, list Jesus’ siblings: James, Joses, Juda, Simon and sisters. Sadly, John 7:5, tells us that Jesus’ brothers did not initially believe in Him. (This may explain why Jesus asked John the Apostle to take care of Jesus’ mother rather than one of her other four sons.) Though, we know that Jesus’ half-brother, James the evangelist, later gained a witness of Jesus’ divinity, as he wrote the Epistle of James.



II.

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

John 2:13–22

The author, John, moves the scene from Cana to Jerusalem where Jesus continues teaching higher meanings of purification. He attacks those using the temple for profit as He purifies it for holier uses.

Timing

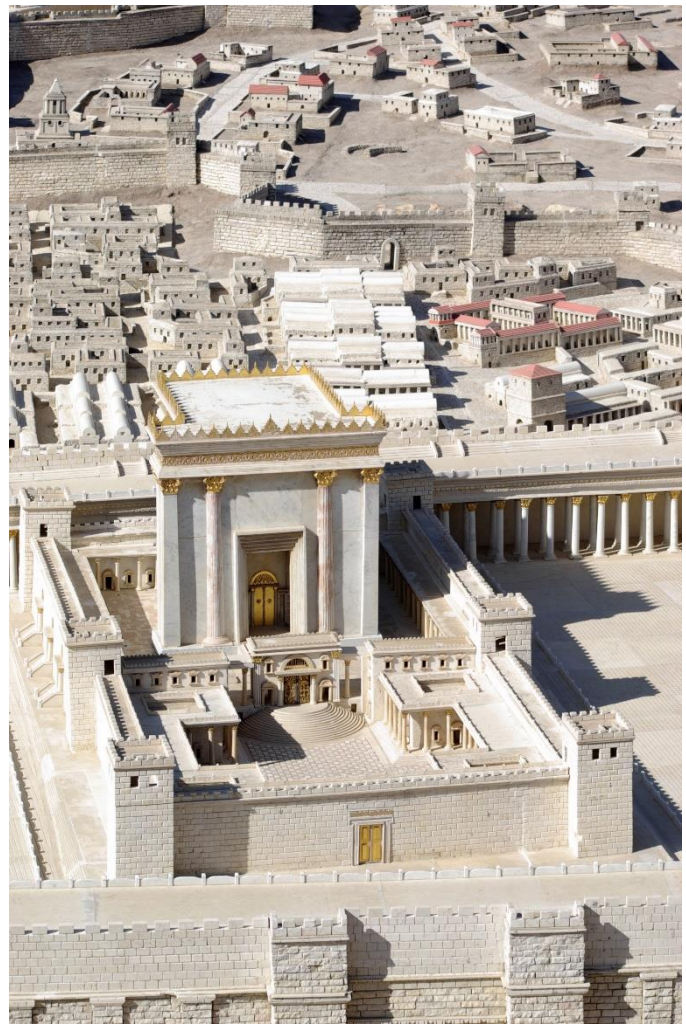
John's Gospel mentions three Passovers during Jesus' adult ministry—thus providing evidence for a three-year mortal ministry. On the other hand, the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) are organized geographically rather than chronologically. After Jesus' baptism, the setting moves to Galilee and everything happening in Galilee is placed together. At the end of Jesus' life, the setting moves to Jerusalem and telescopes everything together into Jesus' last week. This is helpful as we look at Jesus cleansing the temple. No Gospel mentions it happened twice. It only happened once, and John's timing is probably more accurate.

By highlighting the baptism in close proximity to the cleansing of the temple, John's Gospel echoes the prophecy found in Malachi 3:1

I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

Jewish Pilgrimages to Jerusalem

The Law of Moses called for three annual feasts where Israelites came to the temple or tabernacle to worship. By the time of the New Testament 1,400 years later, the pilgrimages still brought Israelites across the Roman world to Jerusalem to celebrate the three feasts at their temple. The most important of the three feasts was, Passover in the spring. It was followed Pentecost, fifty days later, and the Feast of the Tabernacles of Booths in the autumn.



Model of Jerusalem, Herod's Temple. Photograph by Berthold Werner via Wikimedia Commons.

Passover Traditions at the Time of Christ:

1. One month before Passover, preparations began with bridge and road repairs, painting sepulchers white (Matt. 23:27), the testing draught to women suspected of adultery, burning of the red heifer, boring slave's ears. Two weeks before flocks were tithed and the Temple treasury opened. One day before, homemakers cleaned out all "leaven" from their homes (1 Corinthians 5:7).
2. Every male Israelite physically able to walk up Mount Moriah, and who lived within 15 miles, was required come to the temple for the Passover. Those living farther away, needed to come at least once a year.
3. Thousands of pilgrims came for the feast week (including all 24 courses of priests). Estimating the numbers is tricky. The city of Jerusalem soared from an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 to a hundred times that size. Josephus' numbers sound exaggerated by claiming 2-3 million came to the feast. He calculated 256,500 kidneys (one from each sacrificed lamb), for ten people per/lamb. Sacrifices took place on the temple mount. Herod doubled the size to 35 acres, and made it the most magnificent temple complex in the Greco-

Roman world. Grand as it was, the fiery Spirit did not reside there and the Holy of Holies no longer housed the ark and the covenant.

4. Israelites appeared before the Lord in His Temple with three offerings: a non-consecrated animal, one for joy, and one for peace.

Text

John 2:13 “up”: Note that you always go “up” to Jerusalem no matter where you are, because it is a *holy place*. The *Mishnah* outlined “ten degrees of holiness” building up to their most sacred space, the temple.¹¹

The land of Israel is holier than all other lands...

The cities that are surrounded with walls are holier than it...

Within the wall of Jerusalem is holier than they ...The Temple Mount is holier than it...

The rampart is holier than it...

The Court of the Women is holier than it...

The Court of Israel is holier than it...

The Court of the Priests is holier than it...

[The space] between the porch and the altar is holier than it...

The sanctuary [or Holy Place] is holier than it...

The Holy of Holies is holier than them all.

John 2:14 “changers of money”: The “court of the gentiles” made up the majority of the 35 acres of the Temple mount. Israelites as well as Gentiles were allowed to visit (similar to Salt Lake City’s Temple Square). The celebrants could purchase the animals necessary for their Pascal lamb and change their money for the temple coin. The temple currency was a Tyrian half-shekel. All financial transactions in the temple had to be in the “Tyrian” currency. The money-changers were allowed a substantial discount. The Tyrian was also used to pay the annual temple tax, sin offerings, vows, purification, etc. The money-changers positioned themselves outside in the court of the gentiles.

John 2:15–16 “a scourge”: is a whip made out of cords. Jesus’ purging the temple was a sign of the Messianic purification (later His body/temple is also scourged). Isaiah 56:7 prophesied that the temple would be cleaned at the Lord’s coming. Jeremiah 7:11–14 told the Israelites that impurity would destroy the value of their temple. Malachi 3:1, Zechariah 14:20–21, and Daniel 8:14 all point to this too. The crowd’s submission witnessed their guilt.

John 2:17 “thy house”: The disciples remember Psalm 69:10. The Jews held the temple at the very center of their worship, but they missed its message, which was to prepare them as a school master to recognize Jesus as their

Messiah. At the time of Moses and Solomon, the glorious fiery pillar over the tabernacle/temple represented the presence of God, but now they overlooked their Creator and Redeemer who dwelt among them.

John 2:18 “*sign*”: Interestingly, the Jewish pilgrims did not condemn what Jesus had done, they only questioned if this was the *sign* of the Messiah. Even the apocryphal book of Tobit prophesies of the future cleansing.¹²



The Cleansing of the Temple by Giuseppe Passeri. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

John 2:19 “*three days*”: Jesus consistently answers questions in a way to make His audience stretch. He tries to teach them, to help them grow, and to raise them to a higher plane. The Greek word for “temple” denotes less of the sanctuary (just the Holy Place and Holy of Holies) and more of His body. This is Jesus’ first public mention of His death and resurrection in John. “It was at this moment in this place, to these people that he revealed His calling and early mission and foretold the events that would culminate in the freedom of all mankind from death and sin. The most momentous message in all time, and it fell on deaf ears.”¹³ Nevertheless, they remember His words.

John 2:19 “*raise it up*”: The temple authorities should have understood His words, “if you destroy...” John illustrates “the temple” as Jesus who will be “raised up.” This had enough of an impact that at His death, they remembered it and asked for a guard to watch the tomb. Herod began expanding Mount Moriah and rebuilding the second temple in 20 BC. It was under construction the entire time of Jesus’ life, and finished in AD 64 (only to be destroyed between AD 68 and 70). If it were 46 years in the making it would be approximately AD 26 at this time. False witnesses at the death trial of Jesus misrepresent Him as having said, “I can destroy the Temple” (Mark 14:58).

John 2:20–21 “*this temple*”: John emphasizes another meaning: the temple is the body of Jesus. He is the connection between heaven and earth, He is the manifestation of the sacrificial lamb (1 Cor 5:7), the holy altar, the cleansing of the brazen sea, the sanctifying blood, the way to the tree of life (represented by the menorah in the Holy Place), and the veil. His throne rests on the mercy seat atop the covenant, as the giver and fulfiller of the Law. After the resurrection, 500+ disciples see His resurrected glorified body as if they walked into the Holy of Holies.

John 2:23 “*many miracles*”: John speaks of the first Passover filled with many miracles, but no specific examples.

John 2:24–25 “*He knew*”: The “sign” of cleansing the temple is marveled at, but not understood yet. John describes Jesus in control as the omniscient creator (JST: “He knew all *things*”), even if His people do not recognize Him.



Christ and Nicodemus by Henry Ossawa Tanner. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

III.

JESUS' FIRST DISCOURSE: NICODEMUS— BORN AGAIN

John 3

Text

John 3:1 “*Nicodemus*” means, “one who will prevail over the people.” John mentions him here and again in at Jesus’ burial (19:39). Nicodemus is a Pharisee, one of the three main divisions or sects of Judaism at the time include:

1. **Essene:** most strict; apocalyptic focus; 150 BC–AD 70; ritual purity, some practiced celibacy; maintained ritual purity; one group near the Dead Sea in Qumran was known for transcribing sacred texts.
2. **Pharisee** or “separate ones,” were the next most strict; supported all 10,000 “*oral laws*” as equal to the 613 written laws in the Torah; they were the most powerful group in Palestine from 200 BC-100AD; numbered around 6,000 men.
3. **Sadducees** or “righteous ones,” focused on the temple. The only scripture they believed was the Torah, and interpreted it literally—rejecting the resurrection and oral laws. They may come from Zadok [Saduc], David’s High Priest.

When John includes, “a ruler of the Jews,” he means that Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling body. The Sanhedrin leaders consisted of Aaronic priests, Jewish scribes, and the elders. However, King Herod (ca. 73–1 BC) decimated the Sanhedrin to nothing more than a shadowy existence of its earlier fame. The Jews built it back up again, but it functioned only as Rome dictated. Jesus attacked the lack of spiritual discernment within the Jewish leadership—just as he attacked the purification laws and use of the Temple.

John 3:2 “*night*”: John emphasizes the nighttime to evoke images of darkness vs. light (repeated in the prologue), reflecting Nicodemus’s state of spiritual darkness. Nicodemus possibly came at night to protect his leadership responsibilities in the Sanhedrin and reputation. I admire him for wanting to meet face to face, to learn if Jesus were a prophet. The problem became not the protecting cloak of darkness, but his spiritual darkness. Nicodemus addressed Jesus as “Rabbi,” master or teacher, just as Andrew and John did in 1:38., but Nicodemus is not a committed follower yet. In ancient Jewish thought, if a certain Rabbi worked miracles, then it was evidence that God approved his teachings. It appears that Nicodemus acknowledged this. Note too that Nicodemus used “we” as if a plural number were involved in the questioning and he may have represented them (i.e. Joseph of Arimathea).

John 3:3 “*kingdom*”: Jesus answers Nicodemus’s question on a different level than he expected. He came to the Lord with a simple question about Jesus’ divine nature. Jesus answered him with a discourse on how to enter the kingdom. “Knowing the King is the only door to the Kingdom . . . no one can see the kingdoms without first seeing the King and after seeing the King one must acknowledge him, one must commit to serve the King.”¹⁴ Jesus’ answer challenged Nicodemus to receive his own divine witness that Jesus represents God.

“*Born again*”: The phrase, “born again” has a double meaning in Greek: “anew” as well as, “down from above,” or “from the top.” The KJV translators missed the original Greek meaning by following the later the Latin translation by Jerome, giving the reader the understanding from Nicodemus’s flippant answer rather than what Jesus refuted. To say “a man must be born from on high” or from heaven is the higher law in comparison to the lower Law. The symbolism of a rebirth is clear and powerful.

John 3:4 “womb”: Nicodemus only saw the natural impossibility of returning to the womb. He remained tied to the physical level without trying to grasp the higher meaning. Yet Jewish interpretation often required symbolism to comprehend.

John 3:5 “Verily”: is also translated, “truly, thus it is” or “may it be fulfilled, amen.” This begins the first of Jesus’ seven discourses in John’s Gospel. Jesus teaches Nicodemus of the need for a spiritual rebirth. Nicodemus needed Moses 6:59–60, to help:

That by reason of transgression cometh the fall, which fall bringeth death, and inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul, even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory; For by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified.

John 3:6–7 “flesh”: Jesus did not bypass Nicodemus’s confusion, but directly addressed it. Nicodemus missed the point so Jesus tried again to teach him. Jesus knocked down another pillar of Judaism: being a chosen race. By emphasizing rebirth, the importance of a Jew’s natural birth as the chosen people loses significance. To a Jew, being a descendant of Abraham automatically saved them from eternal torture (Luke 16:24). But Jesus corrects this falsehood by teaching that our natural birth is not enough to enter the Kingdom of God. The same idea was taught to another branch of ancient Israelites in Mosiah 27:25; Alma 5:49 and 7:14. John’s account states that one must be born again, but notice how the D&C goes further to explain the role of the Spirit in the process of rebirth:

JOHN 3:5–8

Except a man be **born of water and of the Spirit**, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God...Ye must be born again...so is everyone that is **born of the Spirit**.

D&C 5:16

Behold, whosoever *believeth on my words, them will I visit with the manifestation of my **Spirit***, and they shall be **born of me, even of water and of the Spirit** (emphasis added).

Even though both books focus on the promise of the Spirit and call attention to baptism, only D&C 5:16 explains that *belief* fosters the Spirit. The elusiveness in KJV leaves Nicodemus confused, while restored scripture connects applied faith in the words of God with the result of the manifestation of the Spirit.

John 3:8 “wind”: Nicodemus did not understand, so Jesus gave him an example from nature—which again has a double meaning in Greek. *Wind/pneuma* also means “spirit” (both God’s Spirit and the spirit of man). The KJV

translates *pneuma* 111 times as “spirit,” 89 times as “Holy Ghost,” and 26 times as “Spirit of” God. Every other time the word *wind* is used in the KJV Gospels, it is the word *anemos*, or physical tempest. Here the KJV chose the double meaning of *spirit/wind* because Jesus used the double image for the Spirit—something felt and only indirectly seen. Interestingly, the Hebrew word *ruach*, also shares the same multiple meanings, “breath, wind, spirit.” Ezekiel 36:25-26 taught that in Messianic times God would cleanse His people and give them a new spirit.

John 3:9–12 “How”: Nicodemus responded without understanding Jesus’ witness. Nicodemus (and we) need higher or heavenly thinking. “God, not man, determines the spiritual condition of each individual and must ratify any ordinance.”¹⁵

John 3:13 “came down”: From now on, Nicodemus wasn’t involved in Jesus’ monologue. Jesus also revealed the nature of the Father by introducing himself as “Son of Man.” The Father is “Man of Holiness,” the supreme exalted Man (Moses 6:57)



Christ on the Cross by Carl Heinrich Bloch. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

John 3:14–15 “lifted up”: Jesus again used a double meaning. “Lifted up” refers to on the cross and into heaven (He uses “Son of Man being lifted up” three times). Jesus alluded to the familiar story when the children of Israel looked at the brazen serpent on the staff to be saved from the poisonous serpents. The stories from the Exodus cycle and Moses’ prophetic life foreshadow Christ’s mission. Paul uses the same themes in 1 Corinthians 10:1–6 and Hebrews 8:14–15).

John 3:16–17 “for God so loved the world”: This is the heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Incorporating this message makes mortality meaningful. This is the plan of salvation. God is a God of love. The Greek word “condemnation” is the same word for “judgment, separate, etc.” Jesus will judge and will separate, but that is not *why* he came; His mission is to save.

John 3:18 “Believe”: The JST adds power to the perspective that the mission of Christ was taught from the beginning.

John 3:19–20 “Light and darkness”: also represents good and evil, ignorance and intelligence. Jesus returns to the creation imagery to understand life. The darkness ignores the light (see symbolism in D&C 88:49).

John 3:21 “*truth*”: JST changes “doeth truth” to “loveth truth.” The JST further explains how we “love” truth: “he who obeyeth the truth, the works which he doeth they are of God.”

IV.

JOHN THE BAPTIST’S (JBPST) LAST WITNESS

John 3:22–36



Saint John the Baptist in the Wilderness by Jose Leonardo. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

John 3:22–24 “*baptizing*”: Only the Gospel of John says that Jesus and disciples baptized in southern Israel simultaneous to John the Baptist’s mission (which disagrees with the Luke 3:19–20 timing of John the Baptist’s imprisonment after Jesus’ baptism).

John 3:25–27 “*bear me witness*”: In response to John the Baptist’s followers’ complaints, he offers one last witness (vs. 28–29) of Jesus as the Messiah. As possibly a previous disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:37), John the Beloved alone includes this. John 4:2 states that Jesus’ disciples baptized others, not the Lord, but the JST corrects this to include Jesus.

John 3:28–30 “*the friend*”: John the Baptist bore testimony in humility and self-abasement. He explained himself by using the Old Testament bridal imagery where God’s people become His bride (Hosea 2:19). “In Jewish weddings, the bridegroom came with his friends to the bride’s house to take her to his home. His best friend had been standing guard at the bride’s house to make sure that no one entered before he came. As the friend, the Baptist [heard] the bridegroom coming to claim Israel his bride, and

rejoiced that he [could] withdraw into the background.”¹⁶ A Judean custom referred to the wedding’s master of ceremonies as the “friend of the bridegroom.”

John 3:31 “above all”: These ending verses sound as if John the Baptist were directly speaking—but, in reality, they are echoes from Jesus’ discourse.

John 3:32 “receive”: The JST changes “no man” receiveth His testimony to “few men” receive His testimony.

John 3:34 “dwell”: Believers can receive a portion of the Spirit, but the JST adds that “the fulness” of the Spirit dwelt within Jesus during His mortal mission.

John 3:35–36 “All things”: are given into Jesus’ hands from His Father as a sign of love. The JST and D&C, expand this to touch on different degrees of glory in the resurrection. The fullness of the Father is given to those who receive their exaltation in the Celestial Kingdom. The glory or presence of the Son is given to those in the Terrestrial Kingdom, and the glory or presence of the Spirit to those in the Telestial Kingdom (D&C 76:50–81). ❖

Header Image: *Interview between Jesus and Nicodemus* by James Tissot.

ENDNOTES

¹ The seven miracles mentioned in John are: 2:1 Wedding at Cana; 4:46 Official’s son; 5:1 Healing paralytic; 6:1 Multiplying loaves; 6:19 Walking on water; 9:1 Healing blind man; 11:1 Raising Lazarus. The seven discourses during His public ministry (i.e. before His last supper) are: 3:3–21 Nicodemus; 4:10–26 Samaritan Woman at the Well; 5:19–47 Jesus’ work is the Father’s work; 6:26–58 Bread of Life; 7:16–29 Know the Doctrine; 8:12–59 Light of the World; 10:1–18 Good Shepherd

² In addition to John uses 7 miracles and 7 discourses, we find seven used to represent complete, wholeness or perfection throughout the book of Revelation, and six in this miracle and combined as 666 as the devil’s number in Rev 13:8.

³ *Mishnah, Ketuboth*, 5:2 “a virgin is granted twelve months wherein to provide for herself.” Also, Campbell, *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, 186. W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible Series-Matthew* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 7; “the penalty for fornication with one person while betrothed to another was death for both guilty parties.”

⁴ Skolnik, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 13.568–570. One symbol of the wedding tent was a type of tabernacle where the couple came before God to make their covenants.

⁵ Michael L. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 178; “There are many stories about rabbis who make feasts for their sons (but almost never for their daughters), often at the home of other rabbis.” For

more details on Jewish weddings at the time see chapter four in Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: GP, 2015).

⁶ Kent Jackson, and Robert Millet, eds., *Studies in Scriptures vol. 5: The Gospels* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1986), 113.

⁷ Raymond Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: The Order of St. Benedict, 1988), 28–29.

⁸ Genesis 3:15 “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head.” Paul refers to Jesus as the “second man / *adam*” (1 Corinthians 15:47).

⁹ Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Bartchy, “Servant” 4.420. Tim G. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins, 2003), 183. Junius P. Rodriguez, *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABD–CLI, 1997), 7.548.

¹⁰ Raymond Brown, *Anchor Bible: John* (New Haven, CT: Yale), 105, quoting: Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* V. 33:3–4; PG 7:1213–14; “the earth shall yield its fruit ten thousand-fold; each vine shall have 1000 branches; each branch 1000 clusters; each cluster 1000 grapes, and each grape about 120 gallons of wine.

¹¹ *Mishnah, Kelim*, 1:6–9; Parry translation. Although the Jewish Mishnah was compiled by rabbis after the destruction of the Temple (AD 68-70), it records what was said and done at the time of the second temple which overlapped with the NT.

¹² Tobit is an apocryphal book written centuries before Jesus. Tobit 14:5 reads: “But God will again have mercy on them, and God will bring them back into the land of Israel; and they will rebuild the temple of God, but not like the first one until the period when the times of fulfillment shall come. After this they all will return from their exile and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendor; and in it the temple of God will be rebuilt, just as the prophets of Israel have said concerning it.”

¹³ Jackson, and Millet, eds., *Studies in Scriptures*, 5.191.

¹⁴ Dean Garrett, ed., *New Testament and the Latter-day Saints* (Orem, UT: Randall Book, 1987) 110.

¹⁵ C. Wilfred Griggs, ed., *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies, 1986), 215–40.

¹⁶ Brown, *John: Concise*, 35.



MATTHEW 5; LUKE 6

SERMON ON THE MOUNT AND PLAIN

Jesus Teaches the Higher Law

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is arguably the most influential sermon to "the history and character of Christianity."¹ Evidence that this message was very important to Jesus is found as we find portions of Matthew's account scattered across the Gospels of Mark and Luke, in the Sermon on the Plain, and at the Nephite Temple.² The repetition of the message, and the care in recording it, is one of the ways we know how important the message was to Jesus. The texts often overlap, yet they are still individualized for each audience and setting. Each difference will be pointed out as we go through Matthew's account verse by verse.

Matthew's Gospel draws regular parallels from the OT. One of those emphasized in Matthew 5–7 is the fact that Jesus gives this sermon on a mountain. Moses received God's Law on a mountain, but his people refused it, and received the Mosaic Law instead. Jesus was the premortal Jehovah, the Law Giver. Now He is back on a mountain in a sacred setting and gathers His most trusted disciples to teach the higher law again. The Sermon was given as

spiritual training for disciples, and this time, they received it. The audience in Matthew and 3 Nephi are those who have chosen to follow Jesus—covenant makers, if you will.

Book of Mormon Parallels with the Sermon on the Mount

It should not surprise us that Jesus chose to teach His higher law to other prepared Children of Israel. Those gathered at their temple in Bountiful—nearly a *year after* the great destruction affiliated with Jesus’ death (compare 3 Nephi 8:5 with 10:18–19)—were saved because they were repentant and “more righteous,” or in other words, prepared to learn the higher law (3 Nephi 9:13). The Nephite record offers higher Christology by augmenting the messages of Jesus’ divinity. We find these NT parallels outlined by John W. Welch focusing on “the Sermon at the Temple” as a sacred and covenant temple text: “I invite readers to ponder the prospects of the exceptional view of the Sermon that the Book of Mormon presents to us, for that view has far-reaching implications.”³

THE BEATITUDES

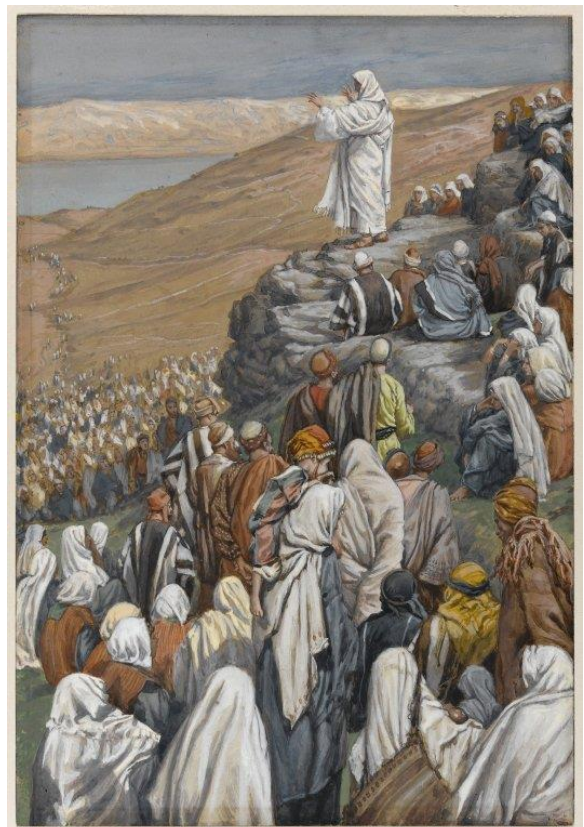
Matthew 5:1–12; Luke 6:17–23

Second only to the Torah, Jews of the late second temple period (the time of the New Testament), knew their Psalms. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and Plain echo the Psalms by beginning with, “blessed.”⁴

Setting

Matthew 5:1 “*mountain*”: Before the sermon begins in Matthew, Jesus escapes from the crowd by climbing up or “into” a mountain, followed by His closest disciples. (Matthew uses “disciples” for the twelve apostles). Contrast this private setting of believers to the shorter Sermon on the Plain.

Luke 6:17–20 “*plain*”: Luke places the “Sermon on the Plain” after an enormous crowd has gathered from great distances to seek Jesus’ healing. However, when the teaching begins, Luke 6:20 says, “Looking up at His disciples, Jesus said . . .”



The Sermon of the Beatitudes by James Tissot. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

(Berean Study Bible or BSB). Perhaps He addressed only believers who were *ready* for the higher law in both settings.

Beatitudes

Matthew 5:2 “he opened His mouth”: The JST of this verse includes a 75-word addition, which follows 3 Nephi 12:2, *almost* verbatim. It begins with the familiar phrase, “blessed are they,” and then refers to those who have: (1) faith in the Lord and His messengers, (2) been baptized, (3) received the promised fire and the Holy Ghost for a remission of their sins, and (4) remained humble.

Mt 5:3-11 “*blessed*”: in English Bibles, “blessed” can come from two different biblical words:



Sermon on the Mount by Henrik Olrik.

1. **Adjective:** “*makarios* / blessed,” usually translated as “fortunate, well, happy or blessed.” However, by studying the 50 uses in the NT, across 11 books, including Matthew 5 and Luke 6, the word “*makarios* / blessed” takes on additional meaning. Often the authors of the NT and early Christian disciples used the word to refer to a *future* state of divine blessedness, a future heavenly state (i.e. the pure in heart will see God). This is the way it is in the Beatitudes. The word is “exalted and exalting.”⁵
2. **Verb,** “*eulogeo* / blessed” as in “thank, praise, or to invoke a blessing.” This is addressed to God requesting blessings upon us; “he blessed, and brake, and gave . . .” (Matthew 14:19). Luke used, “*eulogeo* / blessed” twice, once from angel Gabriel and once from Elizabeth, both referring to Mary as one who has received special *blessings* from God, “. . . blessed art thou among women. . .” (Luke 1:28, 42)

The Sermon on the Mount lists eight beatitudes (or future promised blessings), while the Sermon at the Temple includes thirteen (3 Nephi 12:1–11), and the Sermon on the Plain only has four (Luke 6:20–22). Looking at different biblical translation options help to understand the original meaning of this new law of the Gospel.

MATTHEW 5:3–12

3. Blessed *are* the poor in Spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 4 Blessed *are* they that **mourn**: for they shall be comforted.
- 5 Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
- 6 Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.
- 7 Blessed *are* the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
- 8 Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God.
- 9 Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
- 10 Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my name.
- 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

LUKE 6:20–23

20. Blessed *be ye* poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.
- 21 Blessed *are ye* that hunger now: for ye shall be filled.
Blessed *are ye* that **weep** now: for ye shall laugh.
- 22 Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you *from their company*, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.
- 23 Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.

3 NEPHI 12:3–12

- 3 Yea, blessed are the poor in spirit **who come unto me**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 4 And again, blessed are all they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.
- 5 And blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
- 6 And blessed are all they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, **for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost**.
- 7 And blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
- 8 And blessed are all the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
- 9 And blessed are all the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.
- 10 And blessed are all they who are persecuted for **my name's** sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 11 And blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake;
- 12 For ye shall have great joy and be exceedingly glad, for great shall be your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets who were before you

Love God + Love Neighbors: God’s Spirit Fills us to Bless Humanity

Similar to Moses’ Ten Commandments, where the first four commandments deal with our relationship with God and the last six with our relationship to our fellow humans, so too are the Beatitudes. The first four beatitudes focus on our need for God’s help and relationship to Him. We need God when we are poor in spirit, mourning, and meek. Then when we hunger after Him, we receive the strength to be merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, and to endure persecution.

TEN COMMANDMENTS (EXODUS 20:3–17)

1. No other gods
2. No graven images
3. Do not take the Lord’s name in vain
4. Keep the sabbath day holy
5. Honor your father and mother
6. Do not kill
7. Do not commit sexual sin
8. Do not steal
9. Do not bear false witness
10. Do not Covet

Love God

Love Others

BEATITUDES (JST)

1. Poor in spirit who come unto me
2. Mourn = Comforted
3. Meek = inherit
4. Hunger for Righteousness = filled with Spirit
5. Merciful
6. Pure in heart
7. Peacemakers
8. Persecuted for God

BEATITUDES WITH OLD TESTAMENT PARALLELS

Matthew 5:4 = Isaiah 61:2

Matthew 5:5 = Psalm 37:1

Matthew 5:6 = Psalm 107:4–7

Matthew 5:7 = 2 Samuel 22:26

Matthew 5:8 = Psalm 24:3–4

Matthew 5:9 = Genesis 13:8

Matthew 5:10–11 = 2 Chronicles 36:16

Matthew 5:6 The transition verse between spiritually needy and a restoration of spiritual strength comes as we hunger and thirst after God. The Book of Mormon adds a key addition at this transition. God strengthens us by filling us “with the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 12:6). Seeking and receiving the Holy Spirit evokes the gift and change.

Matthew 5:7–11 The last four beatitudes allow us to serve others. Positioning “persecution” as the last state of blessedness enhances it. It “provides the greatest opportunity to triumph over hate and fear and to love one’s enemies . . . the last point the Lord made before the injunction to be perfect.”⁶

Sermon on the Plain: “Woe”

Luke 6:23-26 “Woe”: Jesus’ Sermon on the Plain detours from the Sermon on the Mount by aligning its four beatitudes with four “woes.” Rewards and judgment will both come in heaven, where opposition will still apply.

BLESSED (LUKE 6:20–22)

Poor

Weep

Hunger

Hated

WOE (LUKE 6:24–26)

Rich

Full

Laugh

Socially accepted

Luke’s record of Jesus’ Sermon is like a “Reader’s Digest” version, and no longer runs alongside, until it returns to discuss the need to love your enemies. Yet, many missing sections are found in Jesus’ teachings tucked elsewhere in Luke’s Gospel. This realistically portrays Jesus’ returning to important, well thought-out messages when speaking to a new audience.

TEACHINGS FOR A HIGHER ORDER

Covenant Making

Matthew 5:13–16

Matthew 5:13 “Salt” was very precious in the ancient world.⁷ Temple sacrifices were salted as a sign or symbol of the covenant (Leviticus 2:13; Numbers 18:19; D&C 101:39). Also salt, like fire, was a purifier. Salt crystals can lose their flavor and preservative capabilities in moisture. Jesus builds on this image to invite His disciples to make covenants. He asks them to bless and preserve the earth. If they do not, they will be as useless salt. (*We find a similar discussion between Jesus and His disciples in another setting: Mark 9:49–50 and Luke 14:34–35.*)

Matthew 5:14–16 “light”: In the ancient world, light came from the sun, moon, stars, fire, or God (Exodus 13:21). Fire was used in sacrifices as the purifier, which is also the Spirit’s role in our lives, it acts “as a fire is burning.”

Jesus’ combining of the topics of salt and light together points to “the theme of men making themselves sacrifices to God.”⁸ Sacrifice and sanctification come from the same roots. In Latin, sacrifice meant to make sacred. Jesus introduces the new change from offering a blood sacrifice, to a sacrifice of one’s heart.

Salt, light, and earth also evoke the theme of creation. John W. Welch sees this as part of the new higher law for covenant disciples to make:

Instead of the old imperative, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3), Jesus now issues the new injunction, "Let your light so shine before this people, that they may see your good works" (3 Nephi 12:16). Just as the Creator looked at the creation and pronounced his works to be good, Jesus now invites each disciple to become a creator of "good works," that when they are seen, men may glorify God. With this, Jesus is forming a new heaven and new earth, a new creative act and new creation.⁹

Jesus calls His disciples to radiate His light to the world, on a candlestick. Jesus is the light of the world, and Christians can reflect or hold up His light. In addition to not hiding one's light, this also communicates to get more of His Light, or strengthen one's testimony, to offer a witness that will shine so brightly that it cannot be hidden.



The Sermon on the Mount by Jan Brueghel the Elder, 1598. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Lower and Higher Law Explained

Matthew 5:17-19

Matthew 5:17 “fulfilled”: The word “*pleroo/fulfil*” in Greek meant: 1) to fill up, 2) to render full, i.e. to complete; 2a) to fill to the top: so that nothing shall be wanting to full measure, fill to the brim; 2b) make complete in every particular, to render perfect; to carry through to the end, to accomplish, carry out.¹⁰ Many ancient Jews viewed the Laws of Moses (written and oral) as the source of salvation. Jesus attacked that falsehood by teaching that He was the source of Salvation. Later He taught the Nephites, “I am the Law” (3 Nephi 15:9). The old Law of Moses was fulfilled in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.

The new law and covenant were a restoration of the higher law (D&C 84:23-27). The Christ’s restored attention on the inward state of one’s heart. The medium for this change is the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is essential to being

born again. With the higher or Melchizedek priesthood available again, so was the gift of the Holy Ghost. Jesus compares the old and new laws from verses 21–48.

Matthew 5:18 “until”: The text does not explain when the law is going to be fulfilled. Only in 3 Nephi’s parallel account do we find a helpful explanation saying that it was Jesus’ mortal life, atonement, death, and resurrection that fulfilled the Law of Moses. Unlike the earlier sermon in Galilee, by the time Jesus came to the Americas, Jesus rightly emphasizes fulfillment and the need to keep Jesus’ commandments..

MATTHEW 5:18–20

For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

3 NEPHI 12:18–20

For verily I say unto you, one jot nor one tittle hath not passed away from the law, but in me it hath all been fulfilled. 19 And behold, I have given you the law and the commandments of my Father, that ye shall believe in me, and that ye shall repent of your sins, and come unto me with a broken heart and a **contrite spirit**. Behold, ye have the commandments before you, and the law is fulfilled.

20 Therefore come unto me and be ye saved; for verily I say unto you, that except ye shall keep my commandments, which I have commanded you at this time, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

John 2:24–25 “He knew”: The “sign” of cleansing the temple is marveled at, but not understood yet. John describes Jesus in control as the omniscient creator (JST: “He knew all *things*”), even if His people do not recognize Him.

3 Nephi 12:19–20 “**contrite**” is not used in the NT (but four times in the OT). It meant “to grind down to powder.” A contrite heart should be broken and ground down to dust to be a new disciple. Our will must be broken to receive the will of the Father in our hearts. If we live the first three beatitudes and are poor in spirit, mournful, and meek we will develop a contrite spirit. Here the Sermon at the Temple emphasizes the *law of obedience and sacrifice* more than the Sermon on the Mount.

Prohibition Against Anger

Matthew 5:21–22

Matthew 5:21–22 “but I say unto you ...” Jesus quotes the most heinous sin of the Decalogue, Ex 20:13, and then adds its higher law. The outward deed of intentional killing is now the inner feeling of anger. Matt 5:22 is altered

by the JST to match 3 Nephi 12:22, by taking out “without a cause.” Disciples must sacrifice their anger and contempt to come to the Lord’s altar. Under Moses’ Law, the penalty was physical death; now it is spiritual death. Jesus refers to the “counsel,” which was the Sanhedrin or Jewish leadership body (70 male leaders plus the high priest). It is also good to recall Jesus’ reminder of the reality that there is a “hell/*gehenna*.”

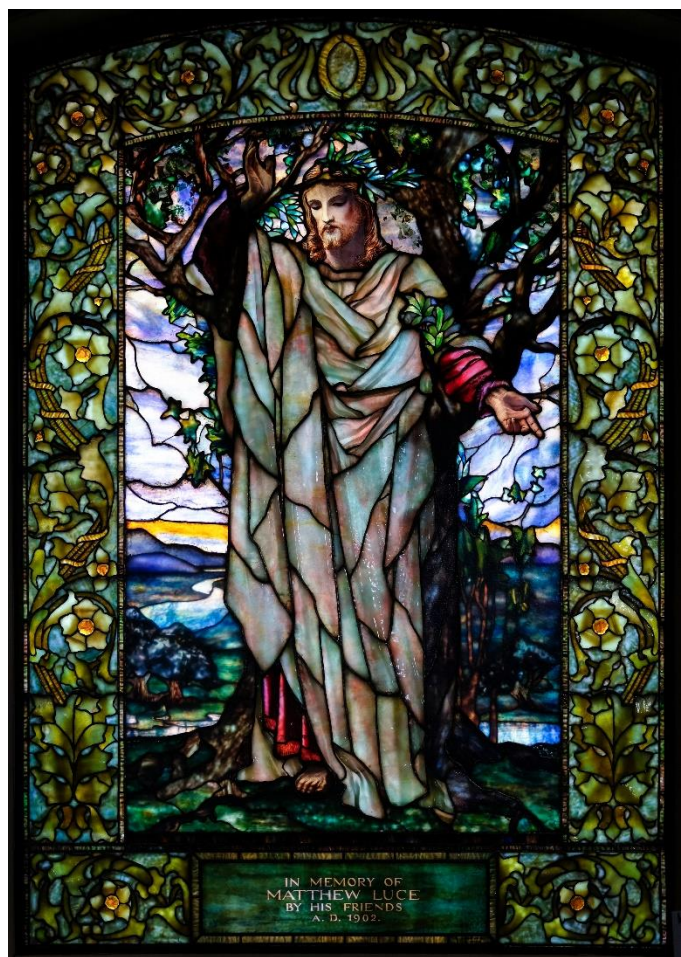
Reconciliation Needed Before Proceeding

Matthew 5:23–24

Matthew 5:23–24 “*leave thy gift ...*”: Before we cry to the Lord, He asks us to reconcile our differences with our fellow humans. Healing is needed for both parties. Reconciliation also requires a sacrifice of our pride. This may explain why sometimes we don’t receive answers from God. Jesus’ counsel also applies to our sacrament participation.

Higher Law of Chastity

Matthew 5:27–28



The Sermon on the Mount. Stained glass window, 1902 Arlington Street Church, Boston. Photograph by Sharon Mollerus.

Matthew 5:27–28 “*lust*”: The second most damning commandment from the Decalogue is adultery. Jesus’ new higher law again asks us to control the condition of our hearts. Joseph Smith probably had no idea how Satan would sexually tempt in the 21st century, but the principle offered in the JST covers everything. (The JST addition at the end of 28 is not footnoted because it is found in 3 Nephi 12:29–30.) “Behold, I give unto you a commandment, that ye suffer none of these things to enter into your heart, for it is better that ye should deny yourselves of these things, wherein ye will take up your cross, than that ye should be cast into hell.” (The Lord repeated this again in D&C 63:16)

Matthew 5:29–30 “*pluck it out*”: Mutilating the body was extremely offensive to the Jewish culture. Jesus probably shocked them into realizing the vileness of the sin. The JST adds an additional verse of explanation, “And now this I speak, a parable concerning your sins; wherefore, cast them from you,

that ye may not be hewn down and cast into the fire.” Interestingly, 3 Nephi 12:30 has none of these last verses as the shock treatment wasn’t needed.

Marriage Covenants Not Dissolved Except for Fornication

Matthew 5:31–33

Matthew 5:31 “*divorcement*” Deuteronomy 24:1 states the Mosaic Law of divorce. But by the time of Jesus, it had been contorted to destroy the marital relationship. At the time men alone initiated divorce, for either a “*Religious duty*” or a “*just cause*” (all of the causes were heavily debated by the rabbis). In either case, it left the woman in dire straits.

MAN’S RELIGIOUS DUTY

(the man didn’t have to return the bride price)

IF

For The wife committed adultery

Fed her husband untithed food

Had marital relations while “ritually unclean”

Failed to fulfill a vow

Her voice is heard from outside or by a neighbor

Shoes lie under the bed

HANBAND’S JUST CAUSE

Lived ten years of childlessness

Wife burning her husband’s toast or dinner

Speaking in public, or nursing a child or spinning
(which included standing in her front doorway)

If he found another fairer than she

A change of feeling

Matthew 5:32 “*porneia/fornication*”: means *all* sexual sins. In the Greco-Roman world at the time, divorce among the wealthy was rampant.¹¹ The rate was lower for Jews, but rabbinic law did not allow a divorced wife to return to the marriage. The sanctity of marriage is God’s priority—yet many generations have lost God’s perspective. This is another example of Jesus’ tearing down the false traditions that permeated His culture to restore the original, Edenic law.

In the current restored church, we are not living Jesus’ preeminent law either. We do not live in an Edenic perfect world, and believe that God honors all members of the church who live their covenants with full fellowship, whether divorced or not. This includes making the highest temple vows.

Oaths Sworn by Saying Yes or No

Matthew 5:33–37

Matthew 5:33–36 “*swear not at all*”: It appears that Jesus references Numbers 30:2, which teaches to fulfill all your oaths. The OT taught not to swear by God (Exodus 20:16; Leviticus 19:12). Jesus asks us to speak only truths. Notice that when Jesus wanted to teach something, He quoted the scriptures. The same is true when angels come—

they often quote scripture. Perhaps when we look for answers to our prayers, we should first look in the scriptures. Here Jesus cites Isaiah 66:1; Deut. 23:22, 35; and Psalm 48:2. Everything created by God should be hallowed and treated with respect. Even verbal abuse of God’s creations is inappropriate. Many, if not all, “swear-words” fall into this category. Outside of “taboo” words, even phrases like “for heaven’s sake!” or “oh my word!” are inappropriate biblical references. Purity includes sanctifying all things that God has created.

Matthew 5:37 “*logos/communication*” as used in John 1:1, for the “word,” can also mean: “discourse, decree, reason, divine plan, council, etc.” Jesus is trying to develop a holy people. To join Him in His work, we must watch what we say every hour of every day.

Love even Enemies

Matthew 5:38–46; Luke 6:27–36

Matthew 5:38–39 “*turn to him the other*”: In the old law, an “eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Exodus 21:24), the Israelites learned an elementary form of God’s plan. These laws help keep order. But Christ’s higher law leads to a Zion society where we learn to love everyone. The hardest people to love are those who abuse and spitefully use us. Jesus showed us how to do that as Isaiah 66:1 prophesied. Jesus endured “the smiters,” and gave His “cheeks to them that plucked off the hair” without retribution—He asks us to do likewise.

Matthew 5:40; Luke 6:29–31 “*let him have . . .*”: Jesus references Exodus 20:26, “If thou at all take thy neighbour’s raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down.” This practice must have developed into law suits. We too live in a society plagued with lawsuits. Jesus asks us to forgive, avoid contention, and be generous with all. Generosity is essential in the Lord’s Law (even to robbers, the poor, and solicitors). A cloak or the outer garment is the most valuable piece of clothing. These acts of mercy speak of charity as Paul taught in 1 Cor 13. The verb used is a “lifelong pattern.”¹²

Matthew 5:41–42 “*compel*”: In a culture where social hierarchy reigned, and 1/3 of the populations were servants or slaves, lower-class people were forced to do work for others regularly. Jesus rises above the social order to ask disciples to live a form of love that even extends to serve those who compel us. The JST change reads: “whosoever shall compel thee to go with him twain, thou shalt go with him twain,” not the extra mile.

Matthew 5:43–44; Luke 6:27–28, “*love*”: Jesus’ higher law takes loving your neighbor to a new level. The word choice is the most noble use of love, *agapao*, often translated as “charity” in the KJV. Christian disciples are not only good to their friends and neighbors, but also pray for their enemies who “spitefully use you” (JST). Jesus is citing OT scriptures like Numbers 10:35, and Deuteronomy 30:7 (but there are other OT scriptures that emphasize loving your enemies too: Leviticus 19:18; Exodus 23:4; Proverbs 25:21; Deuteronomy 14:1). Jesus is also preparing them for the “new” commandment to love as Christ loves (John 21:34).

Matthew 5:45–46 “*children of your Father*”: To be included among God’s children, we must love our enemies. The JST chastises those who love “*only*” their friends. Jesus wants us to love those who do not reciprocate.

Matthew 5:46–47 “*publicans*”: Appropriately, these two verses on loving publicans are not in 3 Nephi 12, as publicans only relate to the Jewish world. Instead, 3 Nephi explains fulfilling (rendering complete, to accomplish) the law.

MATTHEW 5:46–47

For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? 47And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more *than others*? do not even the publicans so?

3 NEPHI 12:46–47

Therefore, those things which were of old time, which were under the law, in me are all fulfilled. 47 Old things are done away, and all things have become new.

Transition to a Higher Order

Matthew 5:48 “*teleios/perfect*” means “complete, finished, consummate human integrity and virtue, adult, etc.” The injunction, “be ye therefore perfect,” did not mean be 100%. The ancients did not even have that number. Perfect meant towards an end. Something was perfect when it was finished. Or it was perfect if were *good enough* for its purposes. With this commandment Jesus had several things in mind. It involves the idea of becoming like God. As Joseph Smith taught, we are “instructed more perfectly,” or more like God in temples.¹³

The “second” Gospel of Mark, or “secret” Gospel of Mark, was prepared “for the use of those who were being perfected.” The copy was read “only to those who are being initiated into the great mysteries”¹⁴ The scriptures mentioned many people who had perfect attributes in the scriptures: Seth, Adam (D&C 107:43).

In 3 Nephi 12:48, we see the post-resurrected Jesus adding, “I would that ye should be perfect even as I” alongside “or your Father.” The Lord does not add His name in Matthew, even though He was a perfect man. Not until His mission is finished did He include: “even as I.” He invites us to strive for becoming complete or whole, finished in this covenant making setting. Some see Jesus’ commanding us to be perfect in the intent of our hearts. Through Christ’s grace and Spirit, we have power over our intentions. In 1831 the Lord observed, “ye are not able to abide the presence of God now, neither the ministering of angels; wherefore, continue in patience until ye are perfected” (D&C 67:13). I see this as completing our mortal missions. It is only then, that we can live with God.

And with that, Matthew 6 ends, and the Sermon on the Mount continues next week. ❖

Header Image: *The Sermon on the Mount* by Carl Bloch.

ENDNOTES

¹ John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Provo, UT: Foundation of Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999), 3. “It would be hard to overstate the value of the Sermon on the Mount in shaping Christian ethics and in conveying to the world the teachings of Jesus and of early Christianity. It is known as the Great Sermon, . . . an “unparalleled address,” and thousands of books and articles have analyzed it extensively and minutely. It stands unsurpassed as the sermon of the Master par excellence.”

² Just looking at the NT, we find repeated messages from the Sermon on the Mount. For example, in addition to Matthew 5, we find: “the salt of the earth” in: Mark 9:49–50 and Luke 14:34–35; the “light of the world” in Mark 4:21 and Luke 8:16. The repetition shows their importance and gives perspective to finding similar passages in 3 Nephi 12:17–18 and 12:21–22. To further your own study of these parallel passages, use a synopsis or harmony of the Gospels. My favorites are: Kurt Aland, ed., *Synopsis of the Four Gospels: Greek-English Edition* (Stuttgart, Germany: German Bible Society, 1984); and Steven and Julie Hite, *The New Testament with Joseph Smith Translation* (Orem, UT: Veritas Group, 1994).

³ Welch, *The Sermon*, 5. Welch offers “a Latter-day Saint interpretation of the Sermon that sees it in the context of a sacred temple experience, for that is the setting of Jesus’ Sermon at the Temple. Seeing the teachings, instructions, doctrines, and commandments of the Sermon on the Mount in this way—in connection with the ceremonial stages and ordinances of covenant making—opens new insights into a unified meaning and comprehensive significance of the otherwise segmented Sermon on the Mount.”

⁴ “Blessed” begins Psalm 1:1; 28:6; 31:21; 32:1–2; 33:12; 40:4; 41:1, 13; 65:4; 68:19; 72:18–19; 89:15; etc.

Other messages included in the Beatitudes are found in: Isaiah 61:1–2; Psalms 107:4–7, 9; 24:3–6; Leviticus 2:13; Numbers 18:19, etc.

⁵ From the New Testament Commentary Conference, January 26, 2019. John W. Welch’s presentation on “Blessed.” The talk will be available on line at: <http://www.byunewtestamentcommentary.com/conferences/26-january-2019-in-the-beginning-were-the-words/>.

⁶ Kent Jackson, and Robert Millet, eds., *Studies in Scriptures vol. 5: The Gospels* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1986), 239

⁷ In the Roman world, salt was an expensive form of trade and currency. Making it was legally restricted which raised its value. The Roman military were paid partially in salt. Our English word soldier and salary stem from this tradition.

⁸ Jackson and Millet. *Gospels*, 5.241.

⁹ Welch, *Sermon at the Temple*, 47.

¹⁰ The definition of “fulfill / *pleroo*” in Greek continues: 2c) to carry into effect, bring to realization, realize; of matters of duty: to perform, execute; of sayings, promises, prophecies, to bring to pass, ratify, accomplish; to fulfil, i.e. to cause God’s will (as made known in the law) to be obeyed as it should be, and God’s promises (given through the prophets) to receive fulfillment.

¹¹ David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 73–74.

¹² Kent Brown, *New Testament Commentary: Luke* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies Press, 2017), 339.

¹³ Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:312

¹⁴ From Clément’s writings around 200 AD.



MATTHEW 6–7

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Book of Mormon Perspective

By comparing and contrasting the similar passages of the Sermons on the Mount and the Plain with the Sermon on the Temple in 3 Nephi, you can find great insight into their different times, audiences, needs, and even levels of understanding. I find the nuanced additions of the Book of Mormon meaningful.

Overview

Matthew 5 focuses on the Mosaic “Law,” while Matthew 6–7 distills the “Prophets.” Jesus teaches his higher law to emphasize inner purity along with outer obedience. He calls on disciples to control their appetites, needs of the flesh, and worldly wants. Stylistically, there is such a sharp contrast between these two chapters that biblical commentators suspect Matthew 6:1–18 was introduced later. That is not the way John W. Welch sees it, however. As the text moves to a higher order and presents a second set of requirements for total dedication to God, Welch sees this as transition in a temple text taking the disciples to a higher order, as outlined below.¹

MATTHEW 6

Matthew 6:1–4 *Giving to the Poor* (also 3 Nephi 13:1–4): Jesus encouraged giving to the needy *anonymously*. He promised that if one gives sincerely and secretly, Heavenly Father will reward the giver openly. This became important in the restoration as well when the Prophet Joseph Smith received the law of consecration and understood our need to sacrifice our all to God generously (D&C 42). Joseph Smith’s *Lectures on Faith* instruct: “A religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation.”² No gift is accepted on the Lord’s altar unless it is motivated by love (also Matthew 6:18, 22–24).

Matthew 6:2a Note the footnote for hypocrisy, it shows a hypocrite as an actor who plays different characters behind a mask. Jesus denounces such pretending by teaching that God knows our hearts.



The Lord's Prayer by James Tissot

Matthew 6: 5–13 *The Order of Prayer* (also 3 Nephi 13:5–6): Jesus begins His instruction on *private* prayer, note the singular, “when *thou* prayest, enter into *thy* closet” (6:6). Verse 9 turns to group prayer (see below). One third of the Lord’s prayer includes praises to God: Hallowed His Name, His Kingdom will come in Power and Glory (Matthew 6:9, 10, 13).

Matthew 6:8 This verse does not mean that even though God knows our needs, we shouldn’t sincerely ask. Instead, Christ asked us to use prayer to *seek the Father’s will* and draw closer to Him. Asking acknowledges that we know our Heavenly Father is the power supporting all that is good, or the giver of our gifts.

Matthew 6:9 here Jesus changed to the plural referring to *public* prayer, “after this manner pray ye.” From the earliest Christian times, the Lord’s Prayer was “basically a prayer used by a group.” Jesus “may have taught something like the Lord’s

Prayer in Matthew several times,” as other prayer outlines in different situations have minor changes. Both Jewish rabbis and early Christians had “strong prohibitions against reciting a fixed prayer.”³ In early Christian documents, Hugh Nibley found sacred group prayers, where those praying stood in a circle around the Lord.⁴ The Lord’s prayer in Matthew 6:9–13, can be seen as an *outline* for group prayers rather than a set recited text.

Matthew 6:11 translates literally, “Give us this day bread ‘sufficient for our needs’ (*epiousion*).” Welch sees this foreshadowing the sacrament or eucharist.⁵

Matthew 6:13 The JST changes the doctrine to clarify that God does not tempt us. Instead, His gift of agency allows *choice and an opposition*. Jesus encouraged disciples to pray for help and avoid temptation. Later this is listed as a great gift of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:10). “Amen” means: verily, surely, truly, of a truth, so it is, so be it, may it be fulfilled.

Matthew 6:14–15 Forgiveness (also 3 Nephi 13:11, 14–15): Jesus’ law of forgiveness is repeated twice in the higher law for emphasis (Mt 6:12, 14–15). The double reference underscores that no one with hard feelings or an unforgiving attitude toward others can expect God’s forgiveness.

Matthew 6:16–18 Fasting, Washing, and Anointing (3 Nephi 13:17): Jesus asks His disciples to focus their fast on communing with and serving God. Isaiah 58:5–7 reiterates the law of the fast in a similar way:

Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? . . . Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

Jesus’ new order of fasting is accompanied with anointing the head and washing the face. In the past, Levitical and Aaronic temple workers washed their faces, hands, head, and feet, symbolic of becoming spiritually cleansed (Exodus 30:18–19; 40:30). God also commanded Aaron to anoint ancient temple workers (Exodus 29:7; 30:30).



The Anointing of Solomon by Cornelius de Vos. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Jesus' higher law invites all disciples to be like the priests and come before the Lord as they fast and are washed and anointed, without any need of worldly acknowledgement. This sacred and private worship will be rewarded by Heavenly Father. Jesus returned to further develop the washing at the Last Supper by introducing an apostolic ordinance (John 13:9–10).

Matthew 6:18 repeats that God will “see” and “reward” your secret needs for the third time (Matthew 6:4, 6, 18). The pattern of repeating things three times is characteristic of the Sermon on the Mount—and even more in the Sermon at the Temple, including before the sermon, when the voice of the resurrected Lord was heard by the crowd three times before it was understood (3 Nephi 11:5).

Matthew 6:19–24 *A Requirement of Consecration* (3 Nephi 13:18–22, 24): Jesus requires a singleness of heart (or wholehearted dedication). When disciples put aside their own will and riches to serve God, they in turn give generously of their time and talents to God's work. Disciples must commit their lives if needed. When complete sacrifices are offered on God's altars with love, He accepts them.

Matthew 6:21 Jesus asked for a pure heart for the third time in the Sermon (Matthew 5:8, 28). Only through Him can we be purified. He gave his Spirit as the cleansing agent to accomplish that atoning gift for us.

Matthew 6:22 Jesus promises more light, “thy whole body shall be full of light.” The footnotes explain that a singled eye means it is sincere. This is consistent with the JST of 6:22, which adds, “be single to the glory of God.” This is how our bodies can be full of light, or as Jesus later taught, “I am the light” (John 8:12).

Matthew 6:24 “Two masters” is a phrase from ancient slave laws. Mammon is a Semitic word used for riches. In Jesus' law, we should not serve money by seeking worldliness. Instead, Jesus' disciples realize that everything we have is God's. If we want to follow Him, we must align our heart with His will and serve Him as our master. A true disciple asks God every morning, “How can I serve You today?”

Matthew 6:25 *Care Promised for the Disciples* (3 Nephi 13:25): The JST adds wise counsel for disciples who are called to preach as missionaries: “Go ye into the world, and care not for the world, for the world will hate you, and will persecute you, and will turn you out . . . Nevertheless, ye shall go forth from house to house teaching the people; and I will go before you.” Jesus promised to take special care of the physical needs of His special disciples, so they may focus on their service to build God's kingdom. (In 3 Nephi this promise is for the ordained Apostles.) For the rest, we must go back to the instructions given in Eden, to labor for food while calling upon God for help (Moses 5:1). Yet, God never wants us to lose an eternal perspective, “Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” God promises to provide for the eternal needs for all who endure to the end, “[even] will I give eternal life” (3 Nephi 15:9).

Matthew 6:26–28 *Sacrifice Fears:* In Jesus’ higher law of faith and trust, he asked disciples to sacrifice fears and anxieties intertwined with the many elements of life. Disciples sacrifice fear by giving up anger, vengeance, pride and self-seeking worldliness. If our aim is single to doing God’s will, we can serve Him without fear or anxiety. (Yet, there are mental illnesses or times when anxiety can play a debilitating role. These are separate matters.)

Matthew 6:26 After Jesus referred to God feeding the birds, the JST adds, “Wherefore, take no thought for these things, but keep my commandments wherewith I have commanded you.” As Jesus continued, He asked disciples not to fret or worry about things one cannot control, but rather trust him.

Matthew 6:28 The example of the lilies refers to a broad classification. The Bible dictionary explains: “the term lily here is general, not referring to any particular species, but to a large class of flowers growing in Palestine,



Image of poppies in field via Pixabay

and resembling the lily, as the tulip, iris, gladiolus, etc.” In Israel, flowers grow in various colors. It is interesting to note, the “*lilium chalconicum*,” or scarlet martagon, looks like a red poppy and grows profusely among the wild grasses of Galilee. Jesus’ returning apparel will also be red (Isaiah 63:2).

Matthew 6:29–32 *Clothing Endowing the Disciples:* Building on the reference, “what ye shall put on / *endysēsthe*,” in Matthew 6:25 (and Luke 24:49), Jesus continued on in this section of clothing His ordained disciples. I will cite a Greek scholar’s explanation behind the words found in Matthew and Jesus’ Sermon:

[God will] newly clothe them in glorious clothing. As the lilies of the field, so the chosen disciples will be clothed by God, even more gloriously than Solomon himself, whose temple was the most splendid of all (see 3 Nephi 13:25, 29–31). The Greek word for being clothed is *enduo* (*endumatos*, ‘raiment,’ in Matthew 6:25, 28; *endusesthe*, ‘put on,’ in Matthew 6:25). Jesus uses this word in Luke 24:49, shortly after his resurrection, when he tells his apostles, to remain in the city “until ye be endued with power from on high.” It means “to endow.” The Greek word *enduo* has two meanings, and both are pertinent to the endowment. First is “to dress, to clothe someone,” or ‘to clothe oneself in, put on.’ The second is, figuratively, to take on “characteristics, virtues, intentions.” The meaning of the English word *endue* (or *indue* from the Latin) likewise ‘coincides nearly in signification with endow, that is, to put on, to furnish. . . . To put on something; to invest; to clothe,’ and Joseph Smith’s diary uses these spellings interchangeably, as for example when Joseph prayed that all the elders might ‘receive an endument in thy house.’ Thus, in this section of the Sermon at the Temple, Jesus can be understood as promising more than garments that offer physical protection for the body (although garments do this, too); he speaks of garments that ‘endow’ the disciples with powers and virtues more glorious than Solomon’s. More is involved here than the promise of material well-being: “Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” (3 Nephi 13:25).⁶

Matthew 6:32 The JST addition includes: “Why is it that ye murmur among yourselves, saying, We cannot obey thy word because ye have not all these things . . .” Jesus asked disciples to not seek for worldliness or compete with gentiles. The world receives their glory in monetary adornments, while disciples are covenant people. Disciples still have an obligation to make the best of themselves, as do those not serving the Lord fulltime. We always work for God. Money is only a means to the end. The end is in the next verse.

Matthew 6:33 *Build the Kingdom of God on Earth:* When disciples do their part through obedience and hard work, the Lord promised He will provide for their needs (and sometimes wants). When pure motives combine with earnest seeking of God’s will, His promises of celestial exaltation will be honored.



Louis XVI, King of France and Navarre, endowed with his grand royal vestments, signifying his power. Painting by Antoine-François Callet. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Matthew 6:34 This is the fifth and sixth time the idea of “take . . . no thought / *merimnao*” is mentioned (Matthew 6:25, 27, 28, 31). It means, “to be anxious; to be troubled with cares, to care for, look out for (a thing); to seek to promote one’s interests.” The Lord wants us to apply faith to overcome fears. If we are doing everything the Lord asks of us, we should not worry about the rest. Remember the children of Israel received their daily ration of manna, one day at a time (Exodus 16:4). The last phrase of verse 34 uses the word “evil / *kakia*” which also has the broader meaning in Greek of our problems or troubles of the day.

CHAPTER 7

Matthew 7:1–5 *Preparing for the Judgment* (Luke 6:37–38): The command to not judge is augmented in the JST to Judge righteously *with the Spirit* (also Moroni 7:16; “the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge”).

Matthew 7:1–2 Consistent with the audience change in 3 Nephi, the JST adds: “*Jesus taught his disciples that they should say unto the people. Judge not unrighteously . . . but judge righteously.*” The Spirit teaches us to make wise choices and judge between truth and err. Jesus warned that we will be judged as we judge others. Elsewhere God encourages us to pray for the gift of discernment (D&C 46:8, 23, etc.), while He alone, is the judge who knows each heart and circumstance. Righteous judgment is filled with love, and should be more “reflective than projective.”⁷ The key to not being judgmental is to seek the gift of charity.

At this point in Luke’s Sermon on the Plain, there is a turning point, with a parable, “can the blind lead the blind?” (Luke 6:39).

Matthew 7:3–5 The mote/beam is a speck of straw, saw dust, or stone compared to the main “I” beam in a home. Jesus taught purity and service with the analogy of saw dust and beams. To cast out our “beams” or weaknesses, we must repent and introspectively seek more purity. Then we can serve, without hypocrisy, to help others cast out their “beam.” This way we respect and empathize with others as we hope God does for us. Our primary job is to develop our own character (The JST adds extra ideas on the unrighteous Pharisees’ hypocrisy found in the LDS Bible appendix).

Matthew 7:6 *Secrecy Required:* The JST clarifies that this has to do with the “mysteries” or the most sacred teachings of Jesus. “*Go ye into the world, saying unto all, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come nigh unto you. And the mysteries of the kingdom ye shall keep within yourselves; for it is not meet to give that which is holy unto the dogs . . .*” (more in the Bible JST appendix.) Dogs were an unclean animal to Jews (Deuteronomy 14:3–20). The emphasis is on withholding certain things that are “holy” and protecting them as sacred. The obligation

of secrecy includes harsh penalties. Being “trodden under foot” was an old Semitic phrase found often from 700–600 BC in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and six times in the Book of Mormon and in the book of Hebrews (also see Psalm 50:5, 22). This may also be a warning to apostates and heretics.



Sermon on the Mountain by Károly Ferenczy. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Matthew 7:7–8 A Threefold Petition: The disciples are preparing to approach Heavenly Father. Jesus instructed them to *ask, seek, and knock* (in other words, a threefold petition is made), before “it shall be opened unto you.” Everyone who asks doesn’t get an answer immediately, but only as we continue to seek and listen and submit our will to God. In this *ceremonial context* of Jesus’ sermon, all of his special disciples who *now* seek and ask, at this point, it will be opened—after repenting, believing and accepting the requirements Jesus has just given. An early Christian document records Jesus saying, “Let him who seeks not cease seeking until he finds, and when he finds, he will be astounded, and having been astounded, he will reign, and having reigned, he will rest.”⁸

The most important things we need to seek are not physical, but our eternal and spiritual needs—“strength in temptation, forgiveness, love, insight, knowledge of his will, a blessing on another, a change of heart. It is in the asking, seeking, and knocking process that we come to understand intimately the Lord’s accessibility and his

ongoing function as Savior.”⁹ The dialogue teaches us more of our need for a Redeemer, our dependence on the Spirit, and how to turn our will over to God. This allows us to become all we can be, as Elder Maxwell taught; our complete submission to God is really emancipation.

Matthew 7:9–11 *Seeking a Gift from the Father:* In the long JST addition in the Bible appendix, note that Jesus spelled out a misunderstanding of the day, “they will say, we have the law for our salvation, and that is sufficient for us.” But they misunderstood; it is not the law that saves. They need a Redeemer who says, “Come in, my son; for mine is thine, and thine is mine” (Matthew 7:9 JST).

Jesus taught on many levels when encouraging disciples to ask for “bread.” In John 6:35, 48, it was symbolic of asking for the “Bread of Life.” Fish also shared dual meanings as it became a symbol in early Christianity (by the time the Gospels were written). This adds symbolic depth to the child asking for a “fish” as it points to asking Christ’s at-one-ment, figuratively. The fish was a symbol in many ancient cultures. In early Christianity, the Greek word for “fish / *ichthus*” is an acrostic for **I**esous (Jesus) **C**Hristos (Christ) **T**Heou (God) **U**iou (Son) **S**oter (Savior). This also makes sense when used beside, or in opposition to the serpent.

The serpent can be interpreted as an unclean animal under the Law of Moses’ dietary code. Also, it can be interpreted from the biblical context of the Garden of Eden as Lucifer or temptation. Jesus promised that those who properly ask for God’s Spirit will not receive the devil. When petitioners follow Jesus’ previous directions, they will receive good gifts from the Father (D&C 14:7). As Jesus identified His Father as the only One who is “good,” then God’s good gifts are a portion of His Spirit (or possibly receiving Him by entering into His Presence in this covenant or temple context). We can ask for simple blessings of food, or we can ask for a higher level of spiritual blessings. Catherine Thomas wrote, “We restrain the Lord’s gifts to us until we have identified the things we need most and then ask him for those gifts.”¹⁰ God’s greatest gift is Eternal Life (meaning Exaltation, D&C 14:7).

Matthew 7:12 *Other People:* The golden rule is more than kindness toward other people. This also extends to all children of God on either side of the veil. Jesus asked his disciples not only to do things “to others” but as the JST adds, “for others.” Vicarious Temple work fits into this category (1 Corinthians 15:29). This is the only way one can understand how a just and merciful God can insist on baptism in John 3:5 (and the other ordinances elsewhere), when only a small percentage of humanity has ever had the opportunity for baptism. Jesus admonished us to teach the gospel and perform ordinances for them.

When I am asked how I can believe in the exclusive idea that only a *chosen people* can be saved, I explain that, of all the Judeo-Christian traditions, the Restoration alone opens the door for everyone ever born to receive God’s greatest blessings through vicarious work and eternal progression. We believe God has a completely inclusive view. All may choose to be chosen.

Matthew 7:13–14 *Entering Through a Narrow Opening*: There is only one gate and one *strait* (meaning: narrow, difficult, restricted, channel, very strict, or severe) way that leads to Life with God. This teaching of only “Two Ways” was important in early Christianity. The JST precedes this with, “Repent, therefore, and enter...” The Book of Mormon mentions a similar idea, about 600 years earlier. 2 Nephi 31:17 teaches that the gate is repentance, baptism, remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. We must go through the Lord’s narrow gate as total submission to God’s will.

MATTHEW 7:13

Enter ye in at the **strait gate**: for wide is the **gate**, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in there at: Because **strait is the gate**, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

LUKE 13:24

Strive to **enter** in at the **strait gate**: for many, I say unto you, will seek to **enter** in, and shall not be able.

2 NEPHI 31:17–18, 32:5

The **gate** by which ye should **enter** is repentance and **baptism** by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins **by fire and by the Holy Ghost**. And then are ye in this **strait** and narrow path which leads to **eternal life**; yea, ye have entered in by the **gate**; ye have done according to the commandments of the Father and the Son; and ye have received the **Holy Ghost**, which witnesses of the Father and the Son, unto the fulfilling of the promise which he hath made, that if ye **entered** in by the way ye should receive . . . the **Holy Ghost**, it **will show unto you all things what ye should do**.



Sermon on the Mount by Cosimo Rosselli. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

The three scriptural blocks incorporate similar vocabulary; however, Nephi’s sermon identifies the key position of the Spirit. It is the Spirit that can navigate us through the narrow and difficult opening to enter into God’s presence. The Spirit becomes a personal guide to “show unto you all things what ye should do.” Nephi’s passage highlights another restored insight by associating a remission of sins and the fire of the Holy Ghost. Only then

is one on the “path which leads to eternal life.” Nephi explains the cause-and-effect-relationship between the need for baptism and keeping the commandments in order to receive the Spirit, “which witnesses of the Father and the Son.”

Matthew 7:15–20 *Bearing the Fruit of the Tree of Life* (Luke 6:43–46): Immediately after the imagery of the path “which leadeth unto life,” Jesus described trees and their fruits. These are not ordinary trees. They are symbols of “evil” and “good.” In Greek, the “evil” fruit also means “sick, wicked, worthless, degenerate, malicious,” and the “corrupt” fruit can be read as “decayed, rotten, evil, unwholesome.” While the “good” fruit is “fit, capable, of inner worth, moral, right.”

The good trees that bring forth good fruit symbolize the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:22). After Eve and Adam ate of the Tree of Knowledge, and entered mortality, they began their quest to find and worthily partake of the Tree of Life. After their probation period where they learned of the Savior’s atoning sacrifice and repented, they could live forever without their sins (1 Nephi 8:20).

Jesus also equated individual people with trees. We can plant the seed for the good tree to grow within (Alma 32:41–42). Each good tree of life has a place in God’s paradise, growing up unto eternal life and yielding much fruit (see Psalm 1:1–3). Jesus also spoke of bad fruit or evil trees, like “false prophets” who will come. The Lord assured the disciples that he has given them adequate knowledge to test these “prophets” by their fruits.



Sermon on the Mount by Makarov. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Elsewhere Jesus used allegories to describe God or His prophets as the root of righteous people becoming the branches (John 15:1–5 and Jacob 5). The cross is also referred to as “the tree” (1 Peter 2:24). Ritually, early Christians prayed with their hands raised “stretched out towards the Lord.” The “extension,” they said, “is an upright cross.” Welch explained, “Originally this signified the passion of Christ and was a gesture used in confessing Christ at baptism. It imitated the cross, death, and a mystic unification and life with Christ.”¹¹

Matthew 7:21–24 *Entering into the Presence of the Lord*: The sermon now turns to an encounter with the Lord of Heaven. The JST adds the reminder that this encounter will be at the judgment, “for the day soon cometh, that men shall come before me to judgment, to be judged according to their works.” Some say “Lord, Lord” but they do not “enter the kingdom of heaven.” Only they who “doeth the will of my Father” are allowed to enter. Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, “We need to break free of our old selves—the provincial, constraining, and complaining selves—and become susceptible to the shaping of the Lord. But, the old self goes neither gladly nor quickly. Even so, this subjection to God is really emancipation.”¹²

When we sacrifice and submit to God, when we dissolve our fears to trust God, it then builds our love and confidence that His ways are best. As we work through this process to see through our mortal veil to submit to God’s plan, we can see His Hand sprinkling miracles and tender mercies graciously in our lives.

Many people who have even cast out devils and done wonderful works, will be turned away for the Lord. The JST corrected, “*Ye never knew me.*” We come to know God through studying the scriptures, having His Spirit, keeping our covenants, and following Him. In Hebrew “knew/*yada*” has a broad range of meanings. It can mean “covenantal” as in Amos 3:2. “You only have I known of all the families on the earth.” Only to Israel had God granted the covenant. It suggests that more than “good works” are required. God requires more than doing good, or the equitable principles of life, to enter into His kingdom.

Catherine Thomas summarized the ending of the sermon on the Mount:

The old concept of God as primarily an emergency source evaporates, as does the idea that we might still live our own lives, God helping a little now and then. “I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). Perhaps we think that God speaks in hyperbole—that we cannot take him literally when he invites total dependence. Perhaps we are afraid to interpret him literally because the full truth seems to require so much of us. Or perhaps it seems too wonderful to be true.¹³

Matthew 7:24–27 *The Wise Build on God’s Firm Foundation* (Luke 6:47–49): As a builder himself (translated “carpenter” in KJV, but more likely a stone mason or general builder), Jesus used the image of building a home,

and/or church. The wise are those who “know,” remember, and do His requirements. These will be recognized by the Lord at that day and raised up to see God and to inherit celestial glory (3 Nephi 15:1–8).

Conclusion

Matthew 7:28–29: The author concluded Jesus’ sermon with, “when Jesus ended these sayings.” He went onto repeat this phrase five times (Matthew 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). Between the birth and death of Jesus, the author repeats this saying as a section marker to organize his Gospel into these five sections (possibly like a Christian Pentateuch).¹

Header Image: Sermon on the Mount by Henrik Olrik. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

¹ John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount* (Provo, UT: Foundation of Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999), 62-69. I quote his ideas and words as an the outline as well as the synthesis.

² Sidney Rigdon, *Lectures on Faith* (SLC, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of LDS, reprint from January 1835), 6:7.

³ Welch, *Sermon*, 63.

⁴ Nibley, Hugh “The Early Christian Prayer Circle,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (1978): 41–78.

⁵ Welch, *Sermon*, 68.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 87

⁸ *Ibid.*, 72 quoting the Coptic Gospel according to Thomas.

⁹ Kent Jackson, and Robert Millet, eds., Catherine Thomas, “Sermon on the Mount,” *Studies in Scriptures vol. 5: The Gospels* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1986), 247.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 247

¹¹ Welch, *Sermon*, 76. The symbol is found when the serpent on the rod/tree during Moses’40 years in the wilderness (1 Timothy 2:8).

¹² Neal A. Maxwell, “Willing to Submit,” LDS General Conference April 1985.

¹³ Jackson and Millet, *Gospels*, 248.

¹⁴ The Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi continues with eight more points (just as it began with more points): 1) Lecture on the portion of God’s covenant with Israel yet to be fulfilled; 2) Admonition to ponder; 3) Healing the Sick; 4) The parents and the children; 5) The covenant memorialized and a new name given; 6) Continued worthiness required; 7) Conferring the power to give the Power of the Holy Ghost; 8) From Sermon to ceremony. For more detail see Welch, *Sermon*.



MATTHEW 8–9; MARK 2–5

JESUS TEACHES AND HEALS WITH MIRACLES

Jesus Acts with Authority

The past two weeks we studied how Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (found only in Matthew 5–7) with authority as He presented the higher law to His chosen disciples, Matthew next illustrates how Jesus acted with authority by including eleven miracles in public settings (i.e. Matthew 8:1–9:34). Most of these miracles are found sprinkled throughout the Synoptic Gospels too (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) albeit, not always in the same order. Miracles—in Latin, “an act that causes wonder”—were signs of Jesus’ Divinity.

Setting Connection with the Book of Mormon

The wealthy city of Capernaum on the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee,¹ becomes Jesus’ new home-base or “own city,” following the Nazareth rejection and attempted stoning (Matthew 4:13; 9:1; etc.). Capernaum means, Village of Nahum or Village of Consolation. As ancient Hebrew was written without vowels, the word is similar to “Nahom” where Ishmael, Nephi’s father-in-law, was buried. The first author Nephi tells us that this location name was unique. Nephi’s family usually gave names to the other locations mentioned, but in Nahom—which

also meant place of mourning in Hebrew—Nephi records “the place . . . was called Nahom” (1 Nephi 16:34). It has also been discovered archeologically right where the text describes it. This point offers amazing evidence for an authentic ancient text and translation by the young prophet Joseph.²

Below is the outline of these chapters in the synoptic Gospels.³ Then we will go through each following Matthew’s order.



The Woman with an Issue of Blood by James Tissot

OUTLINE OF SYNOPTIC PARALLELS

	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE
CAPERNAUM			
Jesus heals a leper	Matt 8:1–4	Mark 1:40–45	Luke 5:12–15
Jesus heals centurion's servant	Matt 8: 5–15		Luke 7:1–10
Jesus heals Peter's mother in law	Matt 8:14–15	Mark 1:29–31	Luke 4:38–39
Jesus' evening healing	Matt 8:16–17	Mark 1:32–34	Luke 4:40–41
Foxes have holes	Matt 8:18–22		Luke 9:57–62
SEA OF GALILEE			
Calming the Sea	Matt 8:23–27	Mark 4:35–41	Luke 8:22–25
GERESA-GADARA			
Casting out legion of devils to swine	Matt 8:28–34	Mark 5:1–20	Luke 8:26–39
CAPEXRNAUM			
Paralytic healed	Matt 9:1–8	Mark 2:1–12	Luke 5:17–26
Feast with Matthew-Levi the Publican	Matt 9:9–13	Mark 2:13–17	Luke 5:27–32
GALILEE			
John the Baptist's disciples ask Jesus about fasting	Matt 9:14–17	Mark 2:18–22	Luke 5:33–39
CAPERNAUM			
Jairus' daughter needs healing	Matt 9:18–19	Mark 5:21–24	Luke 8:41–42
Jesus heals woman with issue of blood	Matt 9:20–22	Mark 5:25–34	Luke 8:43–48
Jairus' daughter raised from dead	Matt 9:23–26	Mark 5:35–43	Luke 9:49–56
Jesus healed two blind men	Matt 9:27–31		
Jesus heals demoniac	Matt 9:32–34		Luke 11:14–15
GALILEE			
End of section: Jesus preaches	Matt 9:35–38	Mark 6:6	

CAPERNAUM



Capernaum was a busy commercial center at the crossroads of two important highways, and a seaport (which also means it was a Roman taxing point). With so many Romans and Greeks around, the larger area was referred to as “Galilee of the Gentiles.” Capernaum was one of the most populated and prosperous areas in Galilee. There were enough Jews that lived there to build a large synagogue from black basalt (whose foundation still stands). This is where Jesus gave his wonderful Bread of Life Discourse (John 6:49). Most of Jesus’ recorded miracles were worked in the city of Capernaum. Yet, most did not believe, so later He upbraided the people of the Capernaum for their rejecting his signs and message (Matt 11:23, Luke 10:15).

Jesus Heals a Leper

Matthew 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-15 (note Matthew and Luke adapt Mark’s text)

Matthew recorded Jesus performing 24 miracles; Mark has 21, Luke 23, and John 7. Of all the miracles in the New Testament, 26 are healings. Matthew referred to healings generally in Matthew 4:23, but the healing of the Leper in Matthew 8:2-4 is his Gospel’s first example of a specific healing.

Matthew 8:2; Mark 1:40; Luke 5:12 In the Old Testament, the law of Moses stresses states of “clean and unclean.” Leprosy was defined as an unclean condition. Specific guidelines for treating lepers are mentioned in Leviticus 13:45; 14:2-3; Numbers 5:2; etc. Sometimes the Old Testament defined leprosy as conditions that spread (like mildew) that we no longer define as leprosy. *Mycobacterium leprae* (M. leprae) or Leprosy is also known as Hansen’s disease

Leprosy begins in the skin, peripheral nerves, respiratory tract, eyes, and nasal mucosa. It spreads to decay fingers, limbs, and finally causes death. Luke 5:12 includes that the man was “full of leprosy.” Once it spread from the skin to the bones, it was called, “living death.” As leprosy was highly contagious, and thought to be incurable, lepers were removed from society into secluded areas.

By the time of the New Testament, rabbis claimed that lepers were the most unclean—second only to the dead. Lepers could not go into a walled city. If they walked on a public road, they must stay at least six feet away from others and loudly call, “unclean.”⁴ Lepers dressed as mourners, completely draped in black and kept their hair disheveled. Rabbis also claimed that specific sins brought on the disease.⁵

Luke 5:12 describes the leper prostrating himself before Jesus. Each account includes his faith by saying: “if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean” (Matthew 8:2; Mark 1:40; Luke 5:12). As the man’s faith had already been demonstrated, Jesus immediately agreed, “I will.” As Jesus touched the leper, he violated the letter of the Law, but taught the spirit of the Law by compassionately healing him.

Matthew 8:4; Mark 1:44; Luke 5:14 All three Gospels include that Jesus asked for secrecy. Perhaps Jesus wanted to remain anonymous to have time to finish His teachings, or perhaps he did not want to be bombarded with healings when he needed to preach. Many possibilities can be assumed, but the text is silent.

All three Gospels point out that Jesus complied with the Law of Moses by sending the cleansed man to “a priest” to be pronounced clean (Leviticus 14:2–3). However, He denounces the thousands of extra laws known as the “oral

Below and opposite: Woodcut of Christ healing a leper ca 16th century. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



laws” or “traditions” of the Jews. These interpretations grew up as a fence around the Torah during and after the Babylonian captivity.⁶

Jesus Heals Roman Centurion’s Child/Servant⁷

Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10

Matthew 8:5; Luke 7:2 Capernaum is the town where Peter, Andrew, James, and John were working as fishermen—even though they were from the smaller nearby town Bethsaida (compare John 1:44; 12:21; Matthew 8:14; Luke 5:2-4).

A centurion was a military officer in the Roman Army who commanded 50 to 100 soldiers.⁸ They were usually Gentiles or Samaritans, but in this case, I suspect he was a “God-fearer” (meaning a Jewish convert, who had not been circumcised).⁹ His nationality and loyalties needed explaining and that is why Luke 7:5 included, “he loveth our nation and he hath built us a synagogue.”



Jesus Heals Centurion’s Servant in Capernaum
by William Hole

The centurion was probably a Roman, as Matthew’s account includes the local Jews justifying why Jesus should help him as a friend of the Jews. Matthew included other gentile seekers (i.e. the magi / wise men in Matthew 2:1-12) to demonstrate that Jesus reached out to the gentiles too—as they were part of the Christian church by the time Matthew finalized his Gospel.

Matthew 8:6 Palsy was a paralytic—either malfunction of nerves, or some type of disablement.

Matthew 8:10; Luke 7:9 Faith is more important to Jesus than one’s birthright. Matthew and Luke elaborate on “faith” more than the other two other Gospels.¹⁰ To the Israelites in the NT, the birthright of the chosen people blessed them with eternal bliss. Jesus corrected this misunderstanding and taught that they must develop faith, as this gentile has (Matthew 8:10).

Matthew 8:11 Matthew emphasizes that part of the Messiah/Christ’s gift will be the adoption into Israel by believing gentiles.

Note the JST 8:12 “children of the wicked one shall be cast out.”

Jesus Heals Peter's Mother-in-law

Matthew 8:14-15; Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4:38-39

This is the third of three healings that Matthew includes in a row following the Sermon on the Mount. All three are performed immediately and cross race, gender, and social hierarchy. It appeared that Jesus (and maybe the twelve) stayed at Simon Peter's house (or Peter's in-law's house) for periods of the Galilean ministry.

Matthew pauses in his series of miracles to remind the reader how the healings were fulfilling a Messianic prophecy. Before quoting the OT scripture, Mt repeats (for the eighth time!) that this event happened to fulfill OT prophecies: "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by . . . the prophet" (Matthew 8:16). Similar fulfillment passages are found fourteen times throughout Mt's Gospel.¹¹ Fourteen was significant in Hebrew as the number that represented "David," thus adding another layer of testimony that Jesus was the Messianic promised heir from King David.¹² Each of the fourteen fulfillment passages is followed by a scripture quotation supplying evidence that Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets. This time Mt quotes from one of Isaiah's suffering servant passages.¹³

ISAIAH 53:4

Surely he hath borne our griefs,
and carried our sorrows

MATTHEW 8:17

Himself took our infirmities,
and bare our sicknesses

The Cost of Discipleship

Matthew 8:18-22

Matthew 8:22 Jesus warned the scribe / lawyer who expressed a desire to follow him that discipleship is not easy. His comment, "foxes have holes," explains that Jesus did not even have a regular place to sleep or call home anymore. His work does not provide mortal ease or comfort, but requires prioritizing his work above all other desires or needs.

The sacrifice that working with Jesus requires will be rewarded later. Matthew included a similar statement by Jesus later, and included an eternal promise: "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matthew 19:29).

Matthew 8:21 Let me bury: In the ancient world, burial occurred within a few hours after death (always before 24 hours), so this may be an example of an excuse or indefinite postponement. The example also shows that

discipleship requires the sacrifice of all other things for God's work and will. The following miracle can be seen as part of that cost of discipleship.

Jesus Calms the Tempest

Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25



Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee by Ludolf Bakhuizen. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Mark 4:35-36 Only Mark 4:35 includes that it was night when Jesus fell asleep in the boat and the storm arose. Mark 4:36 refers to “the” ship as if it were a familiar boat which bore Jesus. This is particularly interesting if Christian history is correct in recording that Mark was the scribe for Peter’s Gospel. Peter would have included details about his boat (Luke 5:3 also mentions that Jesus used Peter’s boat).¹⁴ A boat from the time of the New Testament was found in the Sea of Galilee measuring 27’ x 7.5’. It is possible that this was a common size. In early Christianity, the church was often described as a ship. In this light Jesus and His disciples enter the ship as entering the church. Once on board, the disciples’ faith is tried.

Matthew 8:24; Mark 4:37; Luke 8:23 Because of the lake’s geography and location at 700 feet below sea level, fierce storms can blow often across the lake. The Greek word for tempest/*seismos*, suggests seismic or earthquake activity, too—which hints of the Last Days.

Matthew 8:25 Matthew added, “Lord save us!” This brings up multiple levels of meanings about the redemption of discipleship.

Matthew 8:26; Mark 4:39; Luke 8:24 The Creator’s power over nature is seen in the Old Testament through prophets like Moses, Joshua, Elijah, etc. (Exodus 14:21–22; Nehemiah 9:11; Psalms 106:9). Now the Creator Himself, conducted the powers of earth and the elements obeyed. Symbolically, the miracle speaks to all disciples of Jesus. The Creator established order over chaos and rescues His disciples from watery disasters (Genesis 1:2). Now He has a similar role in His disciples’ destiny.

Matthew 8:26; Mark 4:40; Luke 8:25 Jesus questioned the disciples’ lack of faith—they do not understand that he has taken care of everything. The only thing that would make it impossible for him to help them is their unbelief.

Jesus Casts Devils out of a Man and into Swine

Matthew 8:28–34, Mark 5:1–20; Luke 8:26–39

Matthew 8:28; Mark 5:1; Luke 8:26 Gergesenes (small village named by Matthew) or Gadarenes (the larger region referred to in Mark and Luke) are two names used for the same neighboring gentile location near the eastern shore of Galilee.

Matthew 8:29; Mark 5:2–7; Luke 8:27–29 This account fits into the Jewish superstitions that evil spirits dwelt among tombs in desolate places. The evil spirits knew Jesus was “the Son of the most high God,” perhaps because they do not have the veil drawn. We understand that devils and unclean spirits were part of the war in heaven (Moses 4; Abraham 4).

Mark 5:8–9; Luke 8:30 While we expect Jesus to free the man possessed by unclean spirits, we may be surprised to see Jesus’ compassion extended towards the evil spirits. He asked them questions, listened to them, and honored their desires. The unclean spirits identify themselves as “legion” which was the word used at Jesus’ time for 2,000 soldiers.

Matthew 8:30–32; Mark 5:10–13; Luke 8:31–33 When the unclean animals (pigs) were possessed—they went crazy and drowned themselves rather than have unclean spirits inhabiting their bodies. Only Mark’s Gospel includes the number 2,000 swine. Symbolically, the “watery deep” represents of chaos before creation as well as the demons’ final destination. It speaks to Jesus bringing an end to the demonic forces in the world.

Matthew 8:33–34; Mark 5:13–17; Luke 8:34–37 Unlike the Samaritans of Sychar where the whole town believed in Jesus’ divinity (John 4:42), the Gadarenes were afraid of Jesus and asked him to leave (Matthew 9:34).

Luke 8:38–39 adds that the healed man wanted to leave and join Jesus—but instead, Jesus’ calls him to proselyte as a missionary to his own people. By the location and presence of swine, we assume the healed man was not Jewish—so it makes sense that Jesus encouraged him to stay and spread Jesus’ message among his own people rather than in Palestine. By Acts 10:34–35, Christianity would be spreading to the gentiles and this town may have been prepared.

Jesus heals a Paralyzed Man

Matthew 9:2–8; Mark 2:1–12, Luke 5:17–26



Paralyzed Man Let Down by James Tissot

Matthew 9:1; Mark 2:1 The Gospel of Mark gives us the most information about this location. Jesus’ fame as a healer caused crowds to throng Him. But undaunted by the crowd, this believing group determined to bring their paralyzed brother/friend before the Lord. They did this by entering through the roof and lowering their friend down on a cot.

Mark 2:2–4; Luke 5:18–19 Small houses in the area were 9’ X 12’, and medium homes were 12’ X 15’. Larger homes had several rooms surrounding a courtyard. Over a portion of the courtyard, a covering may have been just been with palm branches, sticks, or tiles. But the other portions of the house were covered with sturdy roofs made from a layer of wood, pressed mud, and plaster made from lime and straw. These roofs were replaced every four to eight years. These flat roofs were sturdy enough to use as a work area or sleeping space for the home. In cities, some roofs also acted as a walkway or road on the roof from one building to the next.

There were outside and inside stairs that lead up to the roof, as well as rooftop roads to pass from adjoining buildings. These roof roads were surrounded by three-foot-high balustrades and covered with tiles. Whatever rooftop or trap door they opened, it would have caused quite the commotion in the room below.

Matthew 9:2; Mark 2:5; Luke 5:20 Jesus saw the group's faith and used this opportunity to teach one of the most important aspects of his mission: because of the Messiah's atoning redemption, He has the power to forgive sins (Mosiah 3:11,16).

Matthew 9:4–8; Mark 2:8–12; Luke 5:22–26 Jesus healed in the “psychological order,” inside out, spirit before body. At the time, many Jews believed that sickness and disabilities were a direct result of specific sins.¹⁵ Inward sicknesses because of anxiety, consciousness of guilt, or fear must also be removed for full healing. By starting with the healing of the soul, Jesus was able to testify of his divinity. If the two healings were inverted, there would have been evidence of his power to forgive (Matthew 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24).

Jesus Calls Matthew–Levi

Matthew 9:9; Mark 2:13–14; Luke 5:27–28

Disciples must leave all to follow Christ (and when we have, we still must listen and again leave all when he calls to obey). Publicans were despised Roman tax collectors. In Jewish writings from the time, publicans were always listed with harlots and sinners; they were not allowed to be witnesses or judges. Even Jesus used “publican” to illustrate one despised: “Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and publican” (Matthew 18:17).

The Greek poet, “Theocritus was asked, ‘what are the worst wild animals?’ and he answered, ‘On the mountains, bears and lions; in the city, publicans’ . . . The Jews had a proverb, ‘Take not a wife out of a family where there is a publican, for they are all publicans.’”¹⁶

There were three types of Roman taxes collected at the time—each from a different type of collector:

1. Ground: 1/10% of your ground production (i.e. grain, wine, etc.) which was paid in kind or money.
2. Income-tax amounted to 1% (collected by Gabbai)
3. Poll-tax or head-money which was levied on all men over 14 and girls from 12 to 65. Mokhes collected from 2 ½-12 ½ % as tax or duty on all imports and exports, all that was bought and sold, toll roads, bridge money, town dues, admission to markets, harbor dues, and ship tolls. The price was only part of the hassle, as mokhes could constantly stop one on a journey, and unload every package and count one's contents. This



The Calling of Matthew by William Hole

practiced was known for charging extortionary prices and for receiving bribes.¹⁷ Wealthy Roman tax collectors hired local Jewish workers to do part of their work. This is probably where Matthew-Levi falls as a “custom officer / telōnēs.”

Only in the Gospel of Matthew is the publican called Matthew with means “gift of God”. Mark and Luke call him Levi before conversion and Matthew after conversion. Both names were common in Galilee. Possibly Jesus gave him a new name with his new calling (as He did Simon Peter and other covenant disciples).

Some have questioned if the name Levi was given outside of the tribe of Levi? If no, would this work disqualify him from temple service? Or could Levi have been disabled in some way, making him ineligible to serve in the temple, and thus taken work as a publican? Others question if he collected the temple tax, but I find that not possible as he sat at the customs office in Capernaum, not Jerusalem.

Matthew gives a Dinner Party in Jesus' Honor

Matthew 9:10-17; Mark 2:15-22, Luke 5:29-39

Matthew 9:10-11; Mark 2:15-16; Luke 5:29-30 In first century Galilee you ate with your hands and dipped together in the same dish sharing germs. Eating with “clean” people (Israelite men only) was important because eating with someone, was seen as covenanting with them as you shared food, space, conversation, and values.

Matthew 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32 The oldest and best manuscripts do not include “to repentance” tacked on the end of Matthew 9:13 and Mark 2:17. It appears to be a scribal addition to harmonize with Luke 5:32. Its not being there is a doctrinal change—Christ calls sinners to him not just to repent.

Matthew 9:13 “Go and learn” was another common phrase, but to this crowd, it was a slap in the face.¹⁸ “I will have mercy not sacrifice” is cited from Hosea 6:6 “For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” Righteousness and mercy are compared, the former being declared the greater; and then righteousness is compared with works of kindness.

Matthew 9:15; Mark 2:19; Luke 5:34 The inverse of this verse suggests that fasting brings us closer to God. Jews and Christians both fasted for this reason. Matthew 9:15 JST adds additional commentary on the Pharisee’s baptism being called into question (see appendix).

Matthew 9:16; Mark 2:21; Luke 5:36 “A new patch of cloth” was unwashed and needed thus would shrink and would pull away as it shrinks and tear or stretch at the seams. Matthew used the word, “*pleroun*/to fulfill” speaking of the fulfillment of the Law of Moses in Christ.

Matthew 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37 New wine was kept in animal skins, because the flexible leather would expand for fermentation. Christ's new law, is symbolically the new wine, and must be received with a flexible, soft, heart.

Jairus Asks Jesus to Heal his Daughter

Matthew 9:18-19; Mark 5:22; Luke 8:41

We worship the Lord when we extend faith in His healing power, yet we are asked to do all we can. Think of the desperation Jairus felt at this point as his only child was taking her last breaths. The girl was just twelve years old (Mark 5:42). By 12 ½ she was an adult, paid taxes, and could be married.

Jesus Heals Woman with an Issue of Blood

Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48

All three synoptic Gospels recorded Jesus' remarkable interaction with an unclean woman on a crowded street in Galilee, as a throng of people accompany him from the synagogue to Jairus' home. With faith-filled determination, this woman sought healing from Jesus, even if it meant breaking all the social and religious rules of segregation.

Matthew 9:20; Mark 5:25; Luke 8:43 An issue of blood made this woman ritually unclean (Leviticus 15:19). Additionally, for the last twelve years, all that she touched would be unclean. So, she was undoubtedly ostracized, as literally an "untouchable," for twelve years. According to Jewish oral laws, this meant that she could not go out in public, could not worship in the synagogue, and could not share her husband's bed, and her social position dropped drastically. As a result of this, she was more than likely accused by her neighbors and family of some wickedness that brought on her "uncleanliness." Her husband would have divorced and left her, and she would have been utterly destitute (Mark 5:26). She was determined to find healing from the Lord, even if it meant breaking the oral laws that kept her from reaching out to God. Interestingly, as the "beloved physician," Luke includes a stab at his fellow physicians who take money without providing healing (Luke 8:43; Colossians 4:14; Mark 5:26 also).



Christ Healing a Woman with an Issue of Blood by Paolo Veronese. Image via Flickr.

Matthew 9:21; Mark 5:27–29; Luke 8:44 The desperate woman reaches for the hem or fringe of Jesus’ outer garment. The fringe of blue or tassels (called tzitziyot, in Hebrew), had 613 knots to represent each commandment in the Torah.¹⁹ They were tied to each corner of a Jewish man’s outer cloak as a sign of the covenant (Deuteronomy 22:12; Numbers 15:38; also used in Matthew 23:5).

Matthew 9:22; Mark 5:30; Luke 8:45 The woman demonstrated even more courage in Mark and Luke when Jesus asked, “who touched me?,” Jesus defied the cultural norms that marginalized women. By acknowledging, touching and healing this woman, He set a new standard for their segregation laws and how women should be treated.

Question: What does it mean that Jesus felt the absence of his “virtue /dunamis / strength, inherent power, ability?”

Matthew 9:22; Mark 5:33–34; Luke 8:47–48 The women knew she was healed and came “trembling” and fell down before Jesus. She admitted to touching His tassel (which broke several societal laws), but also boldly testified of the miracle. Jesus did not reproach her for breaching many social customs; instead, He praised her faith,



The Raising of the Daughter of Jairus by Gabriel von Max. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

“Your faith has brought you salvation” (Luke 8:47, ABT). Luke 8:48 includes Jesus’ giving a departing blessing, “Go in peace.” For all unclean modern disciples, there is much that we can do to strengthen our faith to help us become whole—as Christians we are never powerless.

Raising of Jairus’ Daughter

Matthew 9:23–26; Mark 5:35–43; Luke 8:49–56

Mark’s gospel gives us the most details (suggesting that the source—possibly Peter—was an eye witness. Both Mark and Luke inform us that the sick girl dies before Jesus arrives. Peace, or at least an atmosphere of faith and hope, fosters the Spirit of the Lord and manifests God’s power.

Luke 8:42 includes the detail that the girl was Jairus’ only daughter.

Mark 5:38–40; Luke 8:51–54 At the time of death, Jews had a custom of hiring “wailing woman” or professional mourners, and “minstrels” or flute players.²⁰ Mark and Luke mention that Jesus had the howling sight-seers leave the room before His healing.

Jesus Heals two Blind Men

Matthew 9:27–31

Matthew next turned to fulfill another Old Testament prophesy of the Promised Messiah—He alone will heal the blind (Isaiah 35:5–6). Matthew’s record of the healing of two blind men is repeated in Matthew 20:30–34 in a similar setting. The healing of the blind marks the fourth Isaiah prophesy fulfilled in Matthew 8–9.

Jesus Heals a Mute Man

Matthew 9:32–34

The word for “dumb / kophos” is also translated “deaf” at times (Mark 7:37)—so the man may have been both or either. (Also, Zacharias couldn’t speak, but it appears that he was also deaf in Luke 1:20, 62.) Why blame deaf and dumb on a devil? Ancient traditions and theology often blamed illnesses and disabilities on sin or a devil. In this case, it sounds like Jesus cast out a devil—suggesting that the man was not always dumb.

Matthew’s Bookends: Repeat and Summary

Matthew 4:23 and 9:35

Matthew 9:35 repeats nearly verbatim the same summary he mentioned in Matthew 4:23. It summarizes Jesus’ traveling around Galilee while teaching, preaching, and healing. These two verses act as “book ends” to this section on Jesus speaking and acting with authority.

ENDNOTES

¹The Sea of Galilee is actually the Lake of Galilee, and also referred to as the Lake of Gennesaret or Sea of Tiberias in the NT (John 6:1; Luke 5:1; etc.).

²Warren P. Aston, “Newly Found Altars from Nahom,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 2 (2001): 57–61. Also, <https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/who-called-ishmaels-burial-place-nahom>

³Some New Testament Study Bibles have the Gospel texts recorded in a parallel fashion. My favorites is Synoptic Gospel, Hitte is also helpful as it additionally includes most of the Joseph Smith Translation.) Studying them with color coding allows you to spot which sections are shared text, where the changes lie, and what the unique emphasis is from each author

⁴Bible Dictionary, LDS 1979 edition.

⁵James Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 199.

⁶*Mishnah, Avoth*, 1:1. “Make a fence around The Law.” The fence became the “oral laws.” They elaborated on each the 613 laws contained in the Torah, or first five books of Moses. Rabbi’s and Pharisees claimed that Moses additionally thousands of oral laws that were recorded in the late Second Temple period (or time of the New Testament). Rabbis systematized the extra laws to act as a buffer zone around the original commandments. Their hope was to avoid breaking a Law of Moses. For example, the 4th Commandment, to keep the sabbath day holy was enumerated into 39 specific laws (i.e. no cultivating, reaping, carrying your bed, etc.), which then received hundreds more. *Mishnah, Moed: Shabbath*, 7:4; 8:3, 8.5, 10.5, 6; etc. However, Jesus repeatedly condemned them as “tradition of the elders” (Matthew 15:2–6).

⁷This story is an example of many that appear to be shared just by Matthew and Luke. It is assumed there was an earlier source that is now lost, which the two authors shared. It is referred to as “Q” from the German “que” or source.

⁸*Bible Dictionary: centurion* explains that the Roman army was divided into legions. Each legion varied from 3000 to 6000 men. The legions reported to six commanding *tribuni* (or “chief captains” Acts 21:31). Each legion was divided into ten cohorts (or “bands” Acts 10:1). Each cohort was divided into three maniples, which in turn was divided into two centuries, originally with 100 men each. Over time, the centuries varied in size from 50 to 100 soldiers. Each of the sixty centuries in a legion, were under the command of a centurion. The head-quarters of the Roman forces in Judea were at Caesarea. In summary the soldiers were divided as follows: 1 Legion = 10 Cohorts (3000-6000); 1 Cohort = 3 Maniples (300-600) 1 Maniple = 2 Centuries (100-200) 1 Century = (50-100).

⁹Some scholars estimate that adult male circumcision had a 50% fatality rate, thus many male converts did not go through with the surgery, but believed in monotheism. The NT refers to them as “God fearers.”

¹⁰Matthew cites the word “faith” 12 times, as does Luke, Mark 4 times, and John not at all. Matthew also elaborates on the principle and adds more in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:25–34).

¹¹Matthew 1:22; 2:5; 2:15; 2:17–18; 2:23; 3:3; 4:14–16; 8:17; 12:17–21; 13:14–15; 13:35; 21:4–5; 26:56; 27:9–10; 27:35

¹²Fourteen had special significance to the author of Matthew’s Gospel as we read in his genealogy (Matthew 1:17), and in

the fourteen OT citations that include a fulfillment statement. As explained in Matthew 1–2, the number 14 was a way that Hebrews used numbers to emphasize the name David (orthography for D-W-D). See Come Follow Me, Matthew 1: “From the 5th C BCE the accepted gematria of David’s name was 14.”

¹³ There are four “Suffering Servant” passages in Isaiah: 1) 42:1–7; 2) 49:1–6; 3) 50:4–11; 4) 52:13–53:12.

¹⁴ Charles Freeman, *A New History of Early Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ, 2009), 74.

¹⁵ Avraham Steinberg, ed., *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics* (Jerusalem Israel: Feldheim, 2003), 34, “Any illness may result from sin.” Also see 106-107.

¹⁶ Fredric William Farrar, *The Life of Christ* (New York City, NY: Dutton, 1874), 188.

¹⁷ Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 1:515 ff.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 520.

¹⁹ Rabbis counted 613 laws in the first five books of Moses (the Torah or Pentateuch). There are 365 negative commandments, “thou shalt not,” and 248 positive commandments, “thou shalt.” The knots also correspond the sacred name of God which was not spoke, Yahweh.

²⁰ *Mishnah Ketuboth*, 4.4; quoting Rabbi Judah (born AD 135) who codified the *Mishnah*: “Even the poorest funerals called for two flutes and one wailing woman.” An earlier source on mourning also describes: “And Mattathias and his sons tore their garments, and they covered themselves with haircloth, and they lamented greatly . . . And they fasted on that day, and they clothed themselves with haircloth, and they placed ashes on their heads, and they tore their garments” (1 Maccabees 2:14, 3:47). Similar mourning during repentance is found in Jonah 3:6–8; and Matthew 11:21.



MATTHEW 10–12; MARK 2; LUKE 7, 11

TWELVE CALLED, COMMISSIONED, AND TUTORED

We begin this week with Jesus preparing the Twelve for their missions. His commission included teachings, examples of healings, new Sabbath laws, and ends by inviting all disciples who hear and follow him to become his family. Matthew, Mark and Luke share much of the same source material, but present it differently. To save space, I have not written out the scriptural verses, so follow along in conjunction with these notes.

OVERVIEW

	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
Jesus Calls of the Twelve	Matt 10:1–26	Mark 3:13–19; 6:7–11	Luke 9:1–3; 6:12–16	John 1:42
The Value of Life	Matt 10:27–33	Mark 13:9–13	Luke 12:2–9, 11–12; 21:12–19	John 13:16
Conditions of Discipleship	Matt 10:34–42	Mark 8:34–35; 9:41	Luke 12:51–53; 14:25–27	John 13:20
John’s disciples’ Question	Matt 11:2–6		Luke 7:18–23	
Jesus’ Witness of John	Matt 11:7–19		Luke 7:24–35	
Woes to Galilean Cities	Matt 11:20–24		Luke 10:12–15	
Jesus Thanks his Father	Matt 11:25–27		Luke 10:21–22	
Come Unto Me	Matt 11:28–30			
Lord of the Sabbath	Matt 12:1–8	Mark 2:23–28	Luke 6:1–5	
Jesus Heals a Hand	Matt 12:9–24	Mark 3:1–6	Luke 6:6–11	
Jesus Heals at Seaside	Matt 12:15–21	Mark 3:7–12	Luke 6:17–19	
Jesus’ Family Reaction		Mark 3:19–21		
Jesus Heals Blind–Dumb	Matt 12:22–30	Mark 2:22–27	Luke 11:14–15, 17–23	John 7:20
Sin Against the Holy Ghost	Matt 12:21–27	Mark 3:28–30	Luke 10; 6:34–35	
Sign of Jonah	Matt 12:38–42	Mark 8:11–12	Luke 11:16, 29–32	
Return of the Evil Spirit	Matt 12:43–46		Luke 11:24–26	
Jesus’ Spiritual Kindred	Matt 12:46–50	Mark 3:31–35	Luke 8:19–21	

JESUS CALLS THE TWELVE

Matthew 10:1–26; Mark 3:13–19; 6:7–11; Luke 6:12–16; 9:1–4

Apostles vs. Disciples

The Twelve are often called “disciples,” just as Jesus referred to them in the Book of Mormon (3 Nephi 15:11). In Greek, the word “apostle/*apostolos*” means, “one sent, a messenger, ambassador of the Gospel; officially a commissioner of Christ.” We use it differently now than it was used in the New Testament (NT). In the NT, “apostle” and “disciple” are used for many believers, men and women.¹ The NT distinguishes Jesus’ closest disciples, those who received keys and authority as special witnesses, as “the Twelve.”

Matthew 10:1; Mark 6:7; Luke 9:1–2 “power and authority” While Matthew and Mark explain that Jesus conferred “power/*exousia*” on the Twelve, only Luke 9:1 adds the double—power *and authority*, for emphasis and clarity. All righteous disciples may receive God’s power through the gifts and fruits of the Spirit. However, *authority* comes with Priesthood keys.² Jesus organized his quorum of the twelve after the Holy Order of God, which we refer to as the Melechizedek priesthood (D&C 84; 107). The three New Testament lists include the same men, except for Judas the brother of James who appears to overlap with Lebaeus/Thaddaeus.

List of Apostles in the Gospels

MATT 10:2–4

Simon, who is called **Peter**,
and **Andrew** his brother;
James *the son* of Zebedee,
John his brother;

Philip,
Bartholomew;
Thomas,
Matthew the publican;
James *the son* of Alphaeus,
Lebaeus surname Thaddaeus
Simon the Canaanite,
Thomas,
James the *son* of Alphaeus,
Judas Iscariot, betrayed him

MARK 3:13–19

Simon he surnamed **Peter**;
Andrew,
James and
John the sons of Zebedee...
surnamed “The sons of thunder”

Philip,
Bartholomew,
Matthew,
Thomas,
James the *son* of Alphaeus
Simon called Zelotes,
Judas *the brother* of James,
Thaddaeus,
Simon the Canaanite,
Judas Iscariot, betrayed him

LUKE 6:14–16

Simon, whom he also named **Peter**
Andrew his brother,
James and
John,

Philip,
Bartholomew,
Matthew

Judas Iscariot, the traitor

Eleven of these apostles carried on Jesus' work in the Apostolic church. In Acts 1:20–26, God directed the calling of Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot in the quorum.³ The Gospel of Mark gives us the most details on the call of the Apostles (again consistent with the claim that Mark recorded Peter's memoirs). Only Matthew lists their names at the same time they are called as a quorum of the Twelve and sent out.

The Twelve's Commission Includes

Matthew 10:1–10; Mark 6:7–9; Luke 9:1–3

Jesus instructs the Twelve to preach the kingdom of God (Matthew 10:7; Luke 9:2) and heal (Matthew 10:1, 8; Luke 9:2), cast out devils and “all manner of sickness” (Matthew 10:1; Mark 6:7; Luke 9:1). Though the Creator knew the differences between devils and sicknesses, the New Testament authors confused evil spirits for many illnesses, including emotional and mental challenges (i.e. deaf and dumb in Mark 9:25; epileptic in Matthew 17:15; etc.).

Matthew 10:5–10; Mark 6:8–9; Luke 9:3 “lost sheep” Jesus taught the Twelve rules for their missions. He instructed them to preach only to the lost sheep of Israel. Matthew includes a prohibition against gentiles and Samaritans. This seems at odds with the example Jesus set in John's Gospel when teaching the Samaritan woman and her fellow townspeople of Sychar. These Samaritans become, possibly, the first branch of Christianity.⁴

Matthew 10:9; Mark 6:8; Luke 9:3 “Scrip” was a knapsack or satchel. It was not needed because they were not to bring an extra “coat” (meaning something worn next to the skin, a tunic or undergarment), nor two pair of sandals, no money, or even bread/food (Matthew 10:10; Mark 6:9; Luke 9:3).

“Stave / Staff” Matthew and Luke include no need to bring a “stave” or “staff.” They were used either as a walking stick or weapon to protect against robbery. Mark includes a similar list of exclusions, with one exception: “take nothing for their journey *except a staff*” (NAE). Interestingly, the Mishnah (written later than the NT by rabbis), includes a list of things that were left outside of the temple before entering: a staff, sandals, wallet, and dust.⁵ Sacred space and sacred callings both left behind things of the world to focus on things of God.

Matthew 10:10 “laborers” When Jesus send the Twelve out, they are “workmen/*ergates*,” not as dignitaries or religious rulers.

Ministry Rules for Entering a House

Matthew 10:12–13; Mark 6:10; Luke 9:4

Matthew 10:12–13 “peace” Jesus offers advice for the first missionaries. If they are invited into someone's home to preach the word of God, Jesus' tells them to share their “peace” (Matthew 12:13). Peace or *shalom* is also a Hebrew greeting. Yet, here I think Jesus meant more. Peace is also the language and witness of the Spirit (D&C

6:23). Jesus also gave instructions on where to sleep. The practice of lodging within local homes on their journey was a customary practice of the Essenes and others in the ancient world.

Matthew 10:14; Mark 6:8; Luke 9:5 “dust off” The Lord also gave instructions on what to do if (or when) the apostles were rejected. If they shook the dust off their feet, it became a sign or testimony against the town (which we see in action by Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:51). Joseph Smith received a similar commandment as part of the restoration of all things. This is an ordinance against those who refuse to accept the gospel (D&C 60:15–17; 75:20; 84:92; 99:4). Joseph Fielding Smith explained, “The cleansing of their feet, either by washing or wiping off the dust, would be recorded in heaven as a testimony against the wicked. This act, however, was not to be performed in the presence of the offenders, lest thou provoke them, but in secret, and wash thy feet, as a testimony against them in the Day of Judgment.”⁶



Christ with His Disciples by A.N. Miranov. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Matthew 10:15 “judgment” If missionaries are doing God’s work, they do not need to fear rejection, as God will judge their efforts and reward them. Matthew adds that those who reject them will have a harsher judgement than the people of Gomorrah. This message parallels, “where much is given, much is required” (Luke 12:48).

Facing Persecution

Matthew 10:16–25; Luke 10:3

Under the direction of the Good Shepherd, the apostles go out as sheep among wolves. Well intended people may become deceived by Satan and become like wolves attacking God’s message.



Jesus Chooseth His Apostles by William Hole.

Matthew 10:16 When persecution results, Jesus gave more advice: be wise and innocent. The KJV reads: “wise as serpents,” an emblem of cunning. The JST changed it to “be ye therefore wise *servants*, and *as* harmless as doves.” This change encourages servants to be wise by following their master, Jesus.

Matthew 10:17 “Councils” were a tribunal who acted as a judge in each town (they were not allowed to issue a capital sentence, which was saved for the Sanhedrin, with Roman validation).

Matthew 10:17 “Scourging” or “flogging” is called for in the Law of Moses. One may receive 39 (one less than 40—the number for purifying) lashes with a whip of leather, with bones, and rocks at the ends.

Matthew 10:19 “No thought” means not to be, “anxious, or seek to promote one’s interests.” In the face of persecution—saints are not to worry about what to say. However, this does not mean that missionaries and members should not prepare for preaching and teaching opportunities. While we do so, the Lord promises that his Spirit can guide his servants at their times of need (also see Luke 12:11–12).

Matthew 10:20 When the apostles speak as directed by the Spirit, “the Spirit of your Father . . . speaketh in you.” This is also true for other missionaries and servants of the Lord who are guided in their ministry.

Matthew 10:21–23 These tragic disruptions of familial love are prophesied to come at the last days and at times and of ravishing wars—including AD 68–70 at the destruction of Jerusalem.

Matthew 10:26 To help those who will suffer such persecution, Jesus promised that justice would come.

The Value of Life

Matthew 10:27–33; Luke 12:2–9

Matthew 10:27 and Luke 12:2–3 offer a parallel account of Jesus’ encouragement to fearlessly confess him. “Proclaim upon housetops” has new meanings today with satellite dishes and digital clouds.

Matthew 10:28 and Luke 12:4–5 Jesus’ warning has not lost its pertinence over time. He asks us to be more worried about our spiritual condition than our physical condition. Our spiritual safety is at stake when counterfeits and falsehoods filter into our minds and hearts.

Matthew 10:29–31; Luke 12:6–7 Sparrows and hairs were used as examples of things that come and go—almost imperceptibly. Their minor value is used in contrast to the great worth of humanity.

Matthew 10:32–33; Luke 12:8–9 Christ will stand by those at the judgment bar, who stand up for Him day by day. This is terrific comfort for those enduring persecution. At the time the Gospels were written, many, if not most Christians, were persecuted or else they knew others who were suffering for their testimonies.

CONDITIONS OF DISCIPLESHIP

Matthew 10:34–42; Luke 12:51–53

Negative Consequences

In addition to restoring the full plan of happiness, Jesus’ discipleship also brought painful separations. He asked his followers to stand up for their beliefs, even at the cost of their lives. This was what the early Christians faced as the Gospels were being written—life and death decisions and separations from family members were sacrificed for Jesus’ sake. This message had very real personal application for them.

Matthew 10:34, Luke 12:51 The word for “peace” also means 1) “a state of national tranquility; exemption from the rage and havoc of war;” 2) “peace between individuals, i.e. harmony, discord;” 3) “security, safety, prosper-



Saint John the Baptist in Prison Visited by Two Disciples by Giovanni di Paolo. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ity, felicity.” Jesus taught that discipleship can bring *peace of mind and heart* and eternal rest (meaning exaltation). But in this life, discipleship also requires real sacrifice and brings great challenges.

Matthew 10:37; Luke 14:25–26 Jesus asks disciples to let nothing in life, including one’s family, detour us from following Him. Everything life has to offer is not worth what Jesus has to offer.

Matthew 10:38; Luke 14:27 The “cross” is and was the symbol of extreme suffering, crucifixion, or ignominy. We must be willing to die (and live) in the service of God. Elder James E. Talmage wrote, “Figuratively, to take, take up, or bear one’s cross is to endure suffering, affliction, or shame, like a criminal on his way to the place of crucifixion.”⁷ These verses require the reader to ask, “am I willing to pay a similar cost?” As we do not know what our personal sacrifices or costs will be, we must walk humbly before God, submitting our will to His. Obedient disciples seeking the spirit of inspiration are in training to heed God at any cost. The Lord gives most disciples an Abrahamic sacrifice, tailor-made for them, to prove and refine them. God’s requires whole heartedness from disciples, and the consequences of sacrifice are real.

Positive Consequences

Matthew 10:39 JST changes “findeth” to read: “*He who seeketh to save his life . . .*” The meaning is that we give up our personal desires or will to do the Lord’s will.

Matthew 10:40–41 Jesus promised that those who follow the Lord’s servants—apostles, prophets, righteous teachers—will receive the same rewards as those good leaders. (The KJV “righteous man” can be “humans.”) This is an amazing consequence! The workings of the Spirit of God are passed on from one disciple to another.

Matthew 10:42 Those hands who serve and feed little ones are very sacred to God and will be rewarded. Perhaps the “cup of water” in this verse also refers to the as those who share Christ’s living water.

Matthew 11:1 Matthew’s repeated phrase, “when Jesus had made an end…” hints that he will change the subject.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist’ Disciples’ Questions

Matthew 11:2–6; Luke 7:18–35

While John the Baptist was imprisoned in Herod Antipas’ Dead Sea fortress,⁸ his followers were distraught and came to Jesus with questions. Before we study this account—remember what you know about John the Baptist. How did he know Jesus was the Savior? Did he know he was preparing the way for Him? Matthew’s and Luke’s texts can be read as if the questions/answers were for John the Baptist’s disciples’ benefit. As all four Gospels (as well as 1 Nephi 11:27), claim that John the Baptist received a clear witness from God at Jesus’ baptism—I presume the questions are coming from the disciples. It helps to keep this in mind—as Jesus’ praise negates John the Baptist’s faith wavering. Yet we also must ask, “What effects does imprisonment have on humans and their loved ones?”

Matthew 11:1–3; Luke 7:18–19 Perhaps they expect Jesus to miraculously release John the Baptist. But the Lord cannot do that if God sees it best for John the Baptist to become a martyr. We know from Matthew 4:11 JST that Jesus sent angels to John the Baptist. Also note Matthew 11:3 JST addition points to Matthew’s focus of showing Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament (OT) Law and prophecies, “Art thou he *of whom it is written in the prophets* that *he* should come?”

Luke 7:20 “sent” Luke’s wordplay with “one sent/*apostolos/apesteilen*” can refer to Jesus, the apostles, and John the Baptist.

Matthew 11:4–6; Luke 7:21–3 The Lord’s examples include the sign that only the Messiah can perform—healing blind—as a sign of Him. Luke includes Jesus’ double witness of enacting miracles along with his verbal witness. The JST of Matthew 11:6 adds Jesus’ blessing on his cousin, “Blessed is *John and* whosoever shall not be offended in me.”

Jesus' Witness of John the Baptist

Matthew 11:7-19; Luke 7:24-35

Matthew 11:7 “a reed?” This is a statement of irony. Often, in the Gospels, Jesus taught by exaggerating, using irony, and shock-value to maintain the attention of his audience while teaching. When Jesus asked John the Baptist’s disciples what were they going out in the wilderness to find—was it something extraordinary? The use of wind is *NOT* the usual “*pneuma*/wind/spirit,” but is the Greek word “*anemos*/wind,” meaning, “a violent agitation and stream of air, a very strong tempestuous wind.” Could Jesus’ words have meant “were you looking to get shaken up or blown away?” The opposite follows.

Matthew 11:8-9 report Jesus reminding them that they did not go out to find a nicely dressed king. John the Baptist dressed in camel’s hair with a leather sash and ate desert foods like Elijah did (Mark 1:6). They went out find a prophet—a man who was God’s servant and testified of knowing God. Jesus also witnessed that John the Baptist was more than a prophet.

Matthew 11:10 Jesus explained the gap between the forerunner and himself as the Messiah by quoting Malachi 3:1. Malachi 3:1 is quoted in all four—standard works.⁹ Unfortunately, at least at this point, it appears that John the Baptist’s followers did not move toward understanding that Jesus was their Promised Messiah. It’s as if they accepted the burning match, but did not use it to light the candle.



Saint John the Baptist Revealing Christ to the Disciples by Salvator Rosa, 1655. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Matthew 11:11 Jesus offered remarkable praise of John the Baptist. One wonders, was Jesus referring to those living at that time, or for all mortal history?¹⁰ The prophet Joseph Smith defined this statement as John the Baptist having the 1) mission to prepare the way for Jesus, 2) baptized Jesus, and 3) acted as the legal administrator in the affairs of the kingdom by receiving and passing on the priesthood keys.¹¹

The phrase, “*least in the kingdom of heaven*” is used three times in the NT (twice in Matthew and once when Luke shared similar source materials). They do not mean the same thing though. The Greek words behind “least” are different. In Matthew 5:19 “least/*elachistos*” means small in size, or authority, or rank. Here, “least/*micros*,” also refers to age or time. When it is used in the Sermon on the Mount, it does not refer to Jesus, but here in Matthew 11:11, it may.

MATT 5:19

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach [them], the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

MATT 11:11

Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Matthew 11:12–14 “suffereth violence” The Gospel of Luke stops sharing Matthew’s source material just for these four verses, and Matthew’s Gospel alone references the expectation of Elijah from Malachi 4:5. In Matthew 11:12, the word *violence*/*biastes*/*forceful*/*strong*, is only used one other time in Luke 16:16–17, “From the time of the Law all the prophets prophesied . . . until John the Baptist. For that time the Kingdom of heaven is violently attacked and violent men lay hands on it” (Anchor Bible Translation). The JST adds the joyful message that the violence that has attacked God’s kingdom will end: “but the days will come when the violent shall have no power . . . Yea, as many as have prophesied have foretold of these days” (Matthew 11:13, 14, JST Bible Appendix).

Matthew 11:15 “Those who have ears to hear” is repeated eight times in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; 7:16; Luke 8:8; 14:35). Endowed members receive a special blessing to hear the word of God if they live worthy of their temple covenants.

Matthew 11:16–17; Luke 7:29–32 The publicans, lawyers, and Pharisee’s positions were added by Luke. They treated Jesus and John the Baptist like children playing at the market, ignored by the adults. Some see this section as the Lord’s invitation to have John the Baptist’s disciples and Jesus’ other listeners to become fully initiated



Ruins of the ancient Great Synagogue at Capernaum (or Kfar Nahum) on the shore of the Lake of Galilee, Northern Israel. Photograph by Eddie Gerald. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

into higher ordinances. He invited them to the “wedding feast of the Lamb” and “his death” (both places where one hired flute players), but they would not receive his invitation.¹² A complementary additional interpretation comes from Hugh Nibley’s studies on prayer circles:

In Matt. 11:7, Jesus is speaking about John the Baptist’s followers and begins, “concerning John, what went ye out into the wilderness to see?” This is a challenge to the desert sectaries. They were out there, as the Serekh Scroll (VIII, 12ff.) so clearly tells us, to “prepare the way” (see Matt. 11:10). He spoke of John’s great mission as the herald of a dispensation, an “Elias, which was for to come” (Matt. 11:14), and then addresses the initiates: “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (v. 15), describing the present generation as those rejecting John’s message (v. 12)—they would accept neither John nor the Lord (vs. 18–19): they refused to dance to their playing, nor would they mourn with them for the sins of the world (vs. 16–17). The knowledge is properly guarded – “he that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (v. 15), a hint to the initiated that it is meant only for them. In the Acts of John, the Lord says, “Grace is dancing. I would pipe: Dance all of you. I would mourn: mourn all of you!” The connection with Matthew is undeniable, and again the limitation of the real meaning to the inner circle: “He that does not move in the circle knows not what is happening. Amen.” An important clue is the likening to little children in Matt. 11:16.¹³

Matthew 11:18–19; Luke 7:33–35 While John the Baptist is described as an Old Testament (OT) “prophet-look-alike” (as described earlier—he ate ritually clean foods from Leviticus 11:22, “locust,” and wild date honey; and from Luke 1:15, he drank “neither wine nor strong drink”), the Lord on the other hand, is condemned for living a normal Jewish life—eating and drinking as the Law called for. Later, Matthew 14:11 and Mark 6:28 speak of John the Baptist’s beheading as part of King Herod’s birthday celebrations, but Luke avoided it.

GALILEAN MINISTRY CONTINUES

Woes to Galilean Cities

Matthew 11:20-24; Luke 10:12-15

Matthew 11:20; Luke 10:12 “Woe” Jesus calls three towns and cities around the sea of Galilee to repentance. The meaning of repentance is slightly different in different cultures and languages. In Greek it includes: “heartily to amend with abhorrence of one’s past sins.” In Hebrew, “to [re]turn;” in Chinese to “change your heart every day.” The restored scriptures give us the most information and the broadest definitions for repentance. It has always been at the core of coming unto Christ.

- Chorazin was two miles north of Capernaum in a hilly area now totally covered with black basalt.
- Bethsaida was the small fishing village where Peter, Andrew, James, and John were born.
- Capernaum was on the northern crest of the sea, a wealthy city and a major Roman cross-road.
- Tyre and Sidon were strong Phoenician cities on the Mediterranean coast from Joshua’s time.
- Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed for wickedness during Abraham and Lot’s lifetimes.



Ruins of the ancient Great Synagogue at Capernaum (or Kfar Nahum) on the shore of the Lake of Galilee, Northern Israel. Photograph by Eddie Gerald. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Jesus Thanked His Father

Matthew 11:25-27

Matthew 11:25-27; Luke 10:21:24 “Revealed ...to babes” Jesus thanked his Father for keeping precious truths for the innocent. The flow of these passages doesn’t seem to quite fit together in Matthew. Fortunately, there are helpful JST additions: “*There came a voice from heaven, and Jesus answered. . .* And in v. 27 the last phrase is replaced with, “they to whom the Son will reveal himself; they shall see the Father also.” These are powerful doctrinal additions (Luke also has clarifying, but different JST additions).

Come unto Christ

Matthew 11:28-30

Matthew 11:28 “Come unto Christ and find rest to your soul” This outlines Jesus’ call and the purpose of His Church. The “Lord’s rest” is defined in the Book of Mormon as entering into God’s presence—or the sanctification that comes to those worthy to live with Him (Alma 13:12, 16; 29–30; 16:17; 60:13; Moroni 7:3; etc.).



Image by skeeze on Pixabay.

Matthew 11:30 “my yoke” Isn’t it interesting that the Lord used the image of a yoke? Especially, an easy or light yoke. Jesus asks us to put on his yoke to walk beside him, to really conform to his direction. In this analogy, our load is easier because we are walking beside a yoke-fellow who is stronger. God’s commandments are not hard to live—in fact, life is easier when we live as God directs. A yoke is only difficult if we don’t want to go where our yoke-fellow or master is leading us. Carrying the image further, when they work together both grow stronger and both to do meaningful work. A yoke allows the trainer to teach the trainee, alongside, not in front or behind. This allows the trainer and trainee to strengthen their relationship as well as their power. When both yoke-fellows pull the load, a mutuality exists, teamwork, and accomplishment. “Christ’s Gospel is not a ‘do-it-yourself program,’ but rather it is a do-it-with-Christ program.”¹⁴

Lord of the Sabbath

Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5

Matthew 12:1; Luke 6:1-2 “sabbath” As Jesus and his disciples walked through a field, they practiced the Mosaic Law of “gleaning.” This law asked farmers to leave a little food to provide for poor or travelers (Leviticus 23:22). The Pharisees who observed Jesus’ traveling band were upset about the specific day they choose to glean. The word “sabbath” is mentioned 55 times in the NT with Luke using it the most frequently with 17 times. The strict law-enforcing Pharisees were obsessed with their Sabbath *Oral Laws*.

Shortly after 600 BC, when the Jews were taken captive to Babylon, they tried to build a “fence” around their commandments.¹⁵ This was especially detrimental to the fourth of Moses’ 10 Commandments: Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy (Exodus 20:8, BSB). Scribes systematized their definition of “work” into 39 categories (or “forty save one”). In an attempt to build a fence or to protect the Sabbath, they forbade each of these types of work:

(1) sowing, (2) ploughing, (3) reaping, (4) binding sheaves, (5) threshing, (6) winnowing, (7) cleansing crops, (8) grinding, (9) sifting, (10) kneading, (11) baking, (12) shearing wool, (13) washing, (14) beating, (15) dyeing, (16) spinning, (17) weaving, (18) making two loops, (19) weaving two threads, (20) separating two threads, (21) tying [a knot], (22) loosening [a knot], (23) sewing two stitches, (24) tearing in order to sew two stitches, (25) hunting a gazelle, (26) slaughtering or (27) flaying or (28) salting, (29) curing its skin, (30) scraping it or, (31) cutting it up, (32) writing two letters, (33) erasing in order to write two letters, (34) building, (35) pulling down, (36) putting out fire, (37) lighting fire, (38) striking with the hammer, and (39) taking aught from one domain into another.

Closer to the time of the NT, Rabbis elaborated further on these 39 banned labors to include hundreds of micro-manage-style details. For example, the Mishnah records that you could not carry a handful of straw, a dried fig's bulk of foodstuff, a piece of leather, etc. To protect against ploughing or cultivate the dirt, one could not spit in the dirt, only on a rock on the Sabbath.¹⁶

Matthew 12:3–7; Mark 2:23–26; Luke 6:3–4 “read what David did” Jesus answered the Pharisees’ questions by appealing to scriptures—just as he did with Satan’s temptations. He began with a story of King David from 1 Samuel 21:3–6. Luke and Mark end there, but Matthew includes two more scriptural accounts from Numbers 28:9–10 and Hosea 6:6.

Matthew 12:6 “One greater than the temple” Jesus rightly equated himself to the temple, as it was created as a pattern of him. Paul explained that it acted as, “a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (Galatians 3:24). As a few examples, we see the Savior in the washing for cleansing and anointing/*messiah* for sanctification, in the altar as a place of sacrifice, in the unblemished animals as vicarious offerings, in the blood shed to carry sin, in the veil as a meeting place between God and man, and in the mercy seat or seat of at-one-ment. The whole high priest’s experience on the Day of Atonement speaks of the Redeemer, starting with selecting the scapegoat to carry Israel’s sins through the veil onto the ark and the covenant (Leviticus 16). The path to the Holy of Place was “the way” back to the tree of life (menorah) to partake without sins and from there through the veil into the Holy of Holies. Each of these things depicts aspects of Christ’s

Disciples Eat Wheat on the Sabbath by James Tissot.





at-one-ment. He is the great or real high priest who goes through the veil to enter God's presence. Every aspect of the Mosaic temple spoke of our Creator who took on flesh as Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus understated the facts when he said, "in this place is one greater than the temple."

Matthew 2:27 "The sabbath was made for man," only Mark leaves us this gem—made all the brighter with its JST addition: "Wherefore the Sabbath was given unto man for a day of rest; and also that man should glorify God . . ." Jesus reoriented the Jews to honor the Sabbath as a day of worship, rest, healing, and doing good.

Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5 All three synoptic Gospels emphasize Jesus' divinity, "the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." As the Creator of the world He knows what is best for His Creations.

Jesus Healed a Withered Hand on the Sabbath

Matthew 12:9-24; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11

Matthew 12:9; Mark 3:1; Luke 6:6 "right" Jesus entered a synagogue to see a man with a withered hand. Only Luke, the physician, included that it was his *right* hand. A withered right hand is significant as it was to perform all "clean" functions, thus if it were withered, it was "unclean." Furthermore, whatever he touched would be unclean with his good left hand would be unclean. No doubt he would have been ostracized for this.

Luke's Gospel specifically points out in one-third of the 26 healings listed that Jesus performed them on the Sabbath. This was highly offensive to the Pharisees as there were oral laws against healing on the Sabbath, and they held these oral traditions as scripture.

In the oral laws that governed the Sabbath, rabbis outlawed healing as a form of work. If one dislocated a joint or broke a bone on the Sabbath, oral laws forbade you to set the fracture or relocate the joint because once in place, the victim's body would work to heal itself, thus breaking the Sabbath.¹⁷ One could take out a thorn with "a sewing-needle" as long as the needle was not used for sewing.¹⁸ Certain foods, like Greek hyssop, were often used for medicinal purposes, so they made a law to not cook with it on the Sabbath in case it might stimulate the work of healing.¹⁹ Ironically, Rabbi Meir gave permission to use certain cures on the Sabbath: "a nail of one that was crucified" to cure a festering wound, or a locust's egg to cure an ear ache, or a jackal's tooth to cure sleepiness (if the jackal were still alive) and sleeplessness (if the jackal were dead).²⁰

Luke 6:8a "He knew their thoughts" was pointed out by Luke alone. I believe that means Jesus knows ours too.

Matthew 12:11; Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9 "to do good" Luke repeatedly highlighted the Lord's doing good on the Sabbath. I think Jesus deliberately broke the "oral Sabbath laws," as a way to denounce them. Yet it appears that he lived the Mosaic Law completely.

Matthew 3:3; Luke 6:8b-9 "Stand forth" Jesus got everyone's attention by having the disabled man stand in the middle of the synagogue to receive his healing.

Matthew 12:12-14; Mark 3:5-6; Luke 6:10-11 "do well" Jesus' benchmark for appropriate Sabbath activities is if it does good and saves lives. I fear our generation is on the opposite spectrum of the Pharisees of his day. Modern prophets have called us to reexamine our Sabbath observance. We can fine-tune by asking the question, is this a "good, better, or best" thing to do on the Sabbath.²¹



Jesus Healed Multitudes

Matthew 12:15–21; Mark 3:7–12; Luke 6:17–19

Jesus' audience changed to a larger group gathered. Matthew saw this healing as a fulfillment of Isaiah 42:1–3. In similar instances, Jesus healed many in large groups, which are described across the four Gospels. The multitudes included seekers from the Mediterranean, Jerusalem, and Judea. Similar events are recorded by Mark 3:8, at the seaside, and Luke 6:17 in a valley or flat plane.

Jesus Healed a Blind and Dumb Man

Matthew 12:22–30, Mark 3:22–27, Luke 11:14–18, John 7:20

Matthew 12:22; Luke 11:14–15 “one possessed” Social and medical understanding labeled one “possessed with a devil” when they had birth defects or other “abnormal” behavior. The opposite may be truer as those with disabilities often have extra divine blessings.²² We see evidence that the hosts of Satan were clearly working at the time of Jesus, but more likely in the hearts and minds of those who attacked Jesus rather than those with disabilities. The healing of the blind and dumb man was thrown into that category, too (Luke only includes that he was dumb). Blindness was so difficult in the ancient world that blind infants were often killed rather than to try to take care of them. Later in the Jewish world, the cause of blindness was attached to “punishment for specific sins—such as the taking of bribes, feigning blindness, negligence in feeding the poor, improper behavior during cohabitation, and faulty education for one’s son or pupil.”²³

Matthew 12:23 “Son of David” (JST capitalizes Son) An onlooker sees Jesus healing the blind as evidence that he is the *Messiah ben Judah*, or son of David (as prophesied in Isaiah 35:5). One hundred years before Jesus' birth, Jews combed through their scriptures to find all the statements that referred to the coming of their promised Messiah. They compiled them into a document called, “Psalms of Solomon.”

Matthew 12:24–27 Mark 3:22–26; Luke 11:15–18 “Beelzebub” Even though this is a name used for Satan in the NT, it is probably from the god of Ekron, *Baalzebub*, meaning “the lord of flies,” or, “the lord of dung.” Jesus pointed out their faulty logic and tried to teach them with an example of a parable or story of a divided house.

Matthew 12:28–30 Mark 3:27; Luke 11:19–23 “the stronger man” The discussion on the devil’s power provides evidence that Jesus was stronger, and an enemy of wickedness. Even though Satan and his power were, and are, misunderstood in the ancient and modern worlds, we have lots of evidence that Satan reigns over many demons who opposed Jesus in the Bible and modern scripture. The JST of Matthew 12:28 is one of those: “For they also cast out devils by the Spirit of God, for unto them is given power over devils, that they may cast them out.”

Forgiveness for Repentance—Except the Sin against the Holy Ghost

Matthew 12:31–37; Mark 3:28–30; Luke 12:10

Matthew 12:31; Mark 3:28 “sins . . . forgiven” The JST in both Mark and Matthew add important messages on repentance and forgiveness. Mark 3:28 adds: “All sins *which men have committed when they repent*, shall be forgiven them, *for I came to preach repentance unto the sons of men . . . [They] shall be forgiven them that come unto me and do the works which they see me do.*” Likewise, Matthew 12:31 adds that they “shall be forgiven unto men *who receive me and repent.*” Both of these qualifiers teach an important lesson about God’s conditions for forgiveness.

Matthew 12:32–33; Mark 3:29 “blasphemy against the Holy Ghost” is the one unforgiveable sin. This is not as simple as ignoring a prompting. The Lord taught a similar message to our dispensation, “The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, which shall not be forgiven in the world nor out of the world, is in that ye commit murder wherein ye shed innocent blood, and assent unto my death, after ye have received my new and everlasting covenant, saith the Lord God; and he that abideth not this law can in nowise enter into my glory, but shall be damned, saith the Lord” (D&C 132:27; also Jacob 7:19; Alma 39:6). The prophet Joseph Smith elaborated on this, “To commit the unpardonable sin . . . he has got to deny Jesus Christ when the heavens have been opened to him, and to deny the Plan of Salvation with his eyes open to the truth of it.”²⁴

Matthew 12:34 “vipers” Three times Matthew elicits this image from Eden, likening the wicked in his audience to snakes or followers of the devil (Matthew 3:7; 23:33).

Matthew 12:36–37 “every idle word,” or empty, careless or thoughtless words (NIV, ESV, ISV). Jesus the Judge warns that our words will condemn ourselves.



Holy Spirit Window in St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican, Italy.
Photograph by Antoine Taveneaux via Wikimedia Commons.

Sign of Jonah

Matthew 12:38-42; Luke 11:16, 29-32

Matthew 12:39-40; Luke 11:29-32 “Sign of Jonah” The Gospels of Matthew and Luke use Jesus’ statement differently. In Matthew it is repeated twice (12:39; 16:4), both refer to a sign of Jesus’ resurrection, “as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale so will the Son of Man be.” In Luke, the sign of Jonah points to repentance. The Assyrians repented after Jonah’s preaching, and they will condemn the Jews who heard Jesus and did not repent. (Note how Luke repeatedly highlights the gentiles as the precursor to change in Christianity; Luke 4:24-27; 8:26-39; 10:1-8; 11:31.)

Matthew 12:42 Luke 11:32 “Queen of the South” is the Queen of Sheba, from 1 Kings 10:11-10. She exemplifies another gentile, who wisely came to honor Solomon.



Jonah and the Whale by Pieter Lastman, 1621. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Return of the Evil Spirit

Matthew 12:43–46, Luke 11:24–26

Matthew 12:43–46 “seven other spirits” In this story, Jesus emphasizes Satan’s power, and teaches humans to take personal responsibility to keep evil influences away. To do so, humans must fill their souls with goodness, and their lives with good habits. The JST connects Matthew’s account of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost with the seven evil spirits (see Bible appendix). The JST adds a section on Jesus, explaining how someone could succumb to denying God because the devils want to completely take over—with seven evil spirit representing a complete take over or a whole possession. Devils continue to tempt and derail pure people with good intentions. Even after a person has had the heavens open to them, Satan can tempt them. The JST warns that those who have received an inner cleansing from God (and Joseph Smith later taught, a sure witness), still need to be diligent to avoid temptation.

Jesus’ Spiritual Kindred

Matthew 12:46–50; Mark 3:31–35; Luke 8:19–21

Matthew 12:46–47; Mark 3:2–32; Luke 8:19–20 “mother and brethren” Joseph, Mary’s husband, is not present during Jesus’ ministry or passion in any of the Gospels. This leads us to question if he were still living. But the rest of the family came to visit Jesus. Mary and Joseph’s children are listed in Matthew 13:55–56 (James, Joses, Simon, Judas, and sisters). John 7:5 and Mark 3:21, both hint that Jesus’ half-siblings did not believe Jesus’ divine calling, yet. This may have prompted part of Jesus’ statement.

Matthew 12:48–50; Mark 3:33–35; Luke 8:21 “Whosoever shall do the will of God” become Jesus’ kindred. Luke adds “hear the word,” as well as “do it.” We find a similar message in the early Christian church across the world, “for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Romans 8:14; also see 3 Nephi 9:7; Moroni 7:26, 48). With the Spirit as their guide, they follow God’s will.

Header Image: Calling of the Apostles by Domenico Ghirlandaio, 1481. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

¹ In Romans 16:7. Paul mentions a female disciple named, Junia who was “well known to the apostles” (ESV), or “prominent among the apostles” (CEB, RSV, NRSV), or “outstanding among the apostles” (NIV), or “leaders among the apostles” (NIRV). As the various translation show, the verse can be read in many ways.

² My dissertation explored Joseph Smith’s understanding of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. By searching everything he we have recorded that he wrote or said on the subject, I am convinced that Joseph thought the power of God available to all covenant members of God’s kingdom regardless of gender or calling. The keys he saw differently. See Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Joseph Smith’s Doctrine of the Holy Spirit Contrasted with Cartwright, Campbell, Hodge, and Finney*, (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2010), appendix 4–5. For an abbreviated version, free online see: Lynne H. Wilson, “A New Pneumatology: Comparing Joseph Smith’s Doctrine of the Spirit with His Contemporaries and the Bible,” *BYU Studies*, 51.1 (Winter, 2012).

³ History adds to the biblical account recording the Apostles missions:

APOSTLE	DESTINATION
Simon Peter	Parthia [Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia], Britain
Andrew (Peter’s brother)	Cappadocia, Galatia, Bithynia, Scythia
Simon the Zealot	North Africa [Egypt, Cyrene, Mauritania, Lybia], Britain
James son of Alphaeus	Spain, (and possibly Britain and Ireland)
Thomas	Parthia, Media, Persia [Carman, Hyrcani, Bactria—or Iran and Afghanistan today], Northwest India
Bartholomew	Parthia, Media, Persia, Northwest India
Judas (Libbaeus Thaddaeus)	Assyria, Mesopotamia
Philip	Scythia, Upper (Northern) Asia Minor
Matthew	Parthia, Asiatic Aethiopia (Hindu Kush)
John	Gaul? (modern France)
James (brother of John)	Beheaded with a sword by Herod (Acts 12)
Matthias (replaced Judas Iscariot)	Dacia (Romania), Upper Macedonia
Paul (apostle to Gentiles, Israelites, kings)	Southern Asia Minor, Greece, Rome, Spain

⁴ The name Christians is not used until Paul preaches in Antioch with Barnabas. Earlier names of the movement were “the way” (Acts 9:2), and the “sect of the Nazarene” (Acts 24:5).

⁵ Mishnah, *Zeraim*, *Berakoth* 7.5.

⁶ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Seek Ye Earnestly* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1970).

⁷ James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1915), 667.

⁸ John the Baptist was imprisoned for speaking against Herod Antipas marrying his brother, Herod Philip's wife, Herodias (see LDS Bible Dictionary, p. 701).

⁹ Malachi 3:1 is quoted in: 3 Ne 24:1; Matthew 11:1; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27; JS-H 1:36. Malachi is also quoted in several other verses in D&C 45; 110; 138; LXX Exodus 23:20, is also similar to Malachi's promise.

¹⁰ A similar generalization about the Joseph Smith was written at his passing and as recorded in D&C 135:3.

¹¹ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1976), 275 (For original scribal spellings see the JosephSmithPapers.org). "How is it that John was considered one of the greatest prophets? His miracles could not have constituted his greatness. First. He was entrusted with a divine mission of preparing the way before the face of the Lord. Whoever had such a trust committed to him before or since? No man.

"Secondly. He was entrusted with the important mission, and it was required at his hands, to baptize the Son of Man. Whoever had the honor of doing that? Whoever had so great a privilege and glory? Whoever led the Son of God into the waters of baptism, and had the privilege of beholding the Holy Ghost descend in the form of a dove, or rather in the sign of the dove, in witness of that administration? The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world, a witness for the Holy Ghost, and the devil cannot come in the sign of a dove. The Holy Ghost is a personage, and is in the form of a personage. It does not confine itself to the form of the dove, but in sign of the dove. The Holy Ghost cannot be transformed into a dove; but the sign of a dove was given to John to signify the truth of the deed, as the dove is an emblem or token of truth and innocence.

"Thirdly. John, at that time, was the only legal administrator in the affairs of the kingdom there was then on the earth, and holding the keys of power. The Jews had to obey his instructions or be damned, by their own law; and Christ Himself fulfilled all righteousness in becoming obedient to the law which he had given to Moses on the mount, and thereby magnified it and made it honorable, instead of destroying it. The son of Zacharias wrested the keys, the kingdom, the power, the glory from the Jews, by the holy anointing and decree of heaven, and these three reasons constitute him the greatest prophet born of a woman."

¹² Kent Brown, *BYU Commentary: Luke a new translation?*

¹³ Hugh Nibley, "The Early Christian Prayer Circle," *BYU Studies*, 19, no. 1 (1978): 50. The quote continues: "The Kasr el-Wazz fragment says, 'We made a circle and surrounded him and he said, 'I am in your midst in the manner of these little children. . .,' he added, 'Gather to me, O holy members of my body, and when I recite the hymn, you say Amen.' The central act of the prayer circle was prayer, and it was 'as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples' (Luke 11:1-2) . . . In exactly the same situation in the Book of Mormon the resurrected Lord blesses the little children 'one by one,' but he begins his discourse to the Nephites by telling them three times that no one can approach him except as a little child. (See 3 Ne. 9:22, 11:37) The prayer circle is the nearest approach to the Lord that men make on earth—and they can approach him only 'as little Children.'"

¹⁴ James Harris, *New Testament and the Latter-Day Saints*, 94.

¹⁵ Mishnah, *Avoth*, 1:1; "raise up many disciples, and make a fence around The Law."

16 Mishnah, *Shabbath*, 7:2–4; 8:3.

17 Ibid., 22:6

18 Ibid., 17:2

19 Ibid., 14:3

20 Ibid., 6:10

21 Dallin Oaks, “Good, Better, Best,” *General Conference*, Oct 2007.

22 <https://www.lds.org/topics/disability>

23 Avraham Steinberg, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics* (Jerusalem, Israel: Feldheim, 2003), 106–107. The “improper behavior” included keeping one’s eyes open during conception.

24 Smith, *TPJS*, 358.



MATTHEW 13; LUKE 8, 13

JESUS' PARABLES PAINT HIS PORTRAIT

The Gospel of Matthew has five discourses. Chapter 13 is Matthew's third and central discourse on "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 13:11). It acts as the turning point, or middle, of Matthew's Gospel. Consistent with other ancient chiasmic literature, the messages at the center point are very important to the author's theology. Matthew's organization points to his messages that are central to Jesus' mission, which are the coming of the kingdom of heaven and what it takes to enter. Many of the parables in Matthew's Gospel begin with this phrase: "the kingdom of heaven is like . . ." (which Matthew's Gospel repeats 8 times in Matthew 13:24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52; 20:1–2). This pattern is unique to Matthew; even when Luke and Mark share the same parables, they do not include this phrase.

Matthew's Gospel places Jesus' sermon directly after several examples of unbelief (Matthew 11–12). Perhaps this is why the sermon is filled with parables—eight in chapter 13 alone! These eight parables come as twins—two about sowing, two about food, two kinds of treasure, two kinds of bringing forth. Joseph Smith saw them as speaking of the gathering of prepared Israel. The other Gospels place the same parables in different locations.

Perhaps Matthew organized the pairs as “two witnesses.” The parables teach the impatient the need for patience. Matthew 13 also draws attention to Jesus’ parables fulfilling Old Testament (OT) prophecy (Matthew 13:14–15, 35).

The Gospel of Luke places many of Jesus’ parables as dialogue along the journey as the Twelve and several noble women traveled with, and financially supported, Jesus’ ministry across Galilee (Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Suzanne are specifically mentioned, along with “many others,” Luke 8:2–3). The cost of discipleship rings through these verses.

INTRODUCTION TO PARABLES

The word “parable” is from the Greek “*paraole*,” meaning: “laying one thing beside another for comparative purposes. Metaphor, a comparing, or comparison of one thing with another, likeness, similitude; an example by which a doctrine or precept is illustrated; spec. a narrative, fictitious but agreeable to the laws and usages of human life, by which either the duties of men or the things of God are figuratively portrayed; earthly story with heavenly meaning.”

Most of the New Testament (NT) parables are found in the three Synoptic Gospels. Jesus explained that he taught in parables to unfold the secrets of heaven to those who could not understand yet. Biblical students commonly refer to this as the “Messianic Secret” (Matthew 3:10–17; Mark 4:10–12; Luke 8:9–10; and [Isaiah 6:9–10](#)). One third of Jesus’ NT teachings are found in the parables.¹

By teaching in parables, Jesus allowed the audience to comprehend his stories in different ways at different times. Parables allow one to learn on different levels within the same story; it was a form of teaching with love or compassion for the learner. Often it is easier for humans to remember and assimilate a story or parable better than didactic teaching. Jesus, the Master Teacher, reached out to teach his audience where they were.

NEW TESTAMENT PARABLES

Matthew has 23

Mark has 8

Luke has 24

Book of Mormon and Parables

Interestingly, there are no parables in Jesus’ teachings recorded in 3 Nephi, but we do find parables in the form of allegories elsewhere in the Book of Mormon (e.g. “the tree of life” in 1 Nephi 8–12; “the allegory of the olive tree” in Jacob 5). We can presume that those Nephites who heard Jesus preach a year after His resurrection had ears to hear, so that they did not need Jesus to teach in a hidden manner.² In Paul’s words, they were ready for “strong meat” (Hebrews 5:12, 14).

How to Get the Most out of Parables

Jesus used parables to provide a portrait of himself: “If Jesus had a self-portrait painted of himself while living in Palestine, it would not show us more about him than what we learn through his parables as they describe the daily life in Palestine. He has filled them with details to better understand him and his Father. Parables are described as pictures that leave a deeper impression on the mind than abstractions.”³

The parables can draw us into the crowd with those Galileans listening to Jesus. To join those disciples, as you study ask yourselves:

- What did Jesus intend to say to his audience?
- Did his audiences change? When and Why?
- What was the effect on the hearers?
- What are different levels of interpretation?
- “What was the question which drew out the answers?” (This was the Prophet Joseph Smith’s rule for interpretation or understanding scripture.⁴)



THE PARABLE OF FOUR SOILS OR THE SOWER

Matthew 13:1–23; Mark 4:1–20; Luke 8:4–15

I appreciate, “Four Soils,” as an alternative title for the parable, as it is more about the “soils,” than it is the “sower.” On one level, Jesus’ message is to teach us how to prepare our hearts to hear and grow his word. This is one of the few parables that all the Synoptic Gospels share. It is also the longest and possibly the best-known parable. It has a timeless nature, yet, “the story drawn from common life, portrays an uncommon message.”⁵

Matthew 13:1–2; Mark 4:1–3; Luke 8:4 “**multitude**” Matthew and Mark set the scene with Jesus beside the Sea of Galilee when a multitude gathered. In order for the whole crowd to hear him, Jesus stepped into a boat and sat down to teach those gathered on a beach. (Luke didn’t mention the shoreline or boat.)

Matthew included the detail that the crowd stood as Jesus taught. As I ask myself why would Matthew include this, I wonder if those listening to Jesus' words actually realized they were hearing the word of God, and respectfully stood in his presence.

Mark began the sermon with, "Listen!" (or "Harken" in KJV). This little detail adds to the feeling that the author was present (possibly Peter, or some other original source material⁶). Also, Mark alone included Jesus' chastisement to the disciples for not understanding the meaning of the parable (Mark 4:15).

Matthew 13:3; Mark 4:3; Luke 8:5 "A farmer went out to scatter seed" (CEV) The farmer or sower appears to be the storyteller—Jesus. In Matthew, the seed is the "kingdom," in Mark it is the "word," and in Luke, the "word of God." In all three cases, the seed is *fertile* and *fruitful*. These little seedlings represent Christians at different stages of conversion.

Farmers in ancient Palestine (and much of the world) spread their seed first, and then plow the seed into the soil. Without pre-plowing the soil, some seeds fall on hard pack, thorny, and rocky soils. *Scientific American* published the benefits of this ancient farming technique, including a lack of erosion and less water use.⁷ Regardless of its advantages, Jesus used this example of farming to describe his listeners as different types of soil. I've organized the parable with Jesus' explanation in parallel columns:

Image by Pexels on Pixabay



PARABLE

Matthew 13:4; Mark 4:4; Luke 8:5

“**fell beside the road**” (NAS), or wayside. Seeds were trodden down, and fowls¹⁰ came and ate the seed off the hard ground.

Matthew 13:5–6; Mark 4:5; Luke 8:6

“**fell on rocky ground**” (ESV). Without enough soil, the seedlings had no root and were scorched by the sun and died.

Matthew 13:7; Mark 4:7; Luke 8:7

“**thorns . . . choked the seedlings**” (BSB) The seedling cannot take root when thorns, or more established weeds, overpower their roots.

Matthew 13:8; Mark 4:8; Luke 8:8

“**fell into good ground**” has great potential allowing the seeds to grow and bear fruit—even thirty, sixty, or an hundred fold.

JESUS' EXPLANATION

Matthew 13:9; Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12

“**The sower**” scatters God’s word everywhere, but it is not understood—in part due to Satan’s efforts to remove it from the listener’s heart.

Matthew 13:20–21; Mark 4:16–17; Luke 8:13

“**hear the word . . . with joy**,” but then without roots, when they experience hard times or temptation, they became offended and lost faith.

Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:18–19; Luke 8:14

“**they who receive** the word among thorns” (Mark JST) are caught up with the cares of the world, lusts, and riches, which choke the Spirit’s voice.

Matthew 13:23; Mark 4:20; Luke 8:15 (JST)

“**. . . the good ground** are they who receive the word in an honest and good heart . . . keep what they hear and bring forth fruit with patience.”

Matthew 13:9–11, Mark 4:9–11, Luke 8:8–10 “the mysteries.” Jesus explained the parable to his disciples because they have “ears to hear” (Matthew 13:9; Mark 4:9; and Luke 8:8). Their hearts were prepared to learn more, even “the mysteries.” The NT uses the Greek word “mystery” (or mysteries) 27 times, but this parable is the only place where it is used in the Gospels (Matthew 13:11, Mark 4:11, Luke 8:10). The basic meaning is a “sacred secret,” dealing with silence. The Bible Dictionary explains that “mystery” as “a spiritual truth that was once hidden but now is revealed, and that, without special revelation, would have remained unknown.”

The Gospels of Mark and Luke refer to the mysteries as the “*kingdom of God*,” while Matthew’s Gospel deviates to say, “*kingdom of heaven*.” This had special meaning for Matthew’s Gospel, as we find it repeated 33 times—and nowhere else in the NT. Possibly Matthew used it for his Jewish readers who were more sensitive to the name “God,” and thus tried to avoid overusing it.

Matthew 13:14 “fulfilled.” Much of this parable is shared word for word with all three Synoptic Gospels. Yet, this verse is an interesting change. Matthew’s Gospel intentionally makes a detour to highlight this fulfillment of Isaiah. Matthew adds the tenth of fourteen “fulfillment” verses that he carefully organized throughout his Gospel. This verse is one of the six times Matthew pointed out that Jesus fulfilled prophecy from the prophet Isaiah.⁹ Interestingly, this is found in Isaiah’s vision of the throne of God and can be read as part of a temple text as well. Eye, ears, and hearts need to be opened for revelation for deepened conversion. Isaiah and Jesus show an interdependency between conversion and complete healing.

ISAIAH 6:9–10

9 And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but [they*] understand not; and see ye indeed, but [they*] perceive not.

10 Make the **heart** of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

*[*added in 2 Nephi 16:9]*

MATTHEW 13:14–15

14 ... By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:

15 For this people’s **heart** is waxed gross and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal.

Matthew’s text accuses individual’s hard-hearted obstinance for not responding to Divine requests—not God as the one who hardened their hearts (KJV is often laced with Calvinistic attitudes). The Sower generously spreads his word to all. Those who do not receive and nourish the seed, or word of God, do not listen for the still small voice. Our generation is also sympathetic to the power that distractions can have to overpower one’s hearing and understanding of God’s word. Sometimes the world is so loud, or our thoughts too crowded, to hear the quiet voice of revelation.

Modern Apostolic Emphasis

In April 2015 General Conference, Elder Oaks spoke about this parable. He focused on those who have committed to live the Gospel message. He encouraged seeking to find spiritual truths; “Spiritual food is necessary for spiritual survival.” He quoted two colleagues who discussed how they live the Savior’s teachings. First, how they deal with the “rocky” cares of the world, and second, how they prepare their “soil” to live a gospel centered life:¹⁰

1. Hugh W. Nibley had an interview where he was asked if we should “be accommodating of the world in

what we do in the Church.” Hugh replied: “That’s been the whole story of the Church, hasn’t it? You have to be willing to offend here, you have to be willing to take the risk. That’s where the faith comes in. . . . Our commitment is supposed to be a test, it’s supposed to be hard, it’s supposed to be impractical in the terms of this world.”

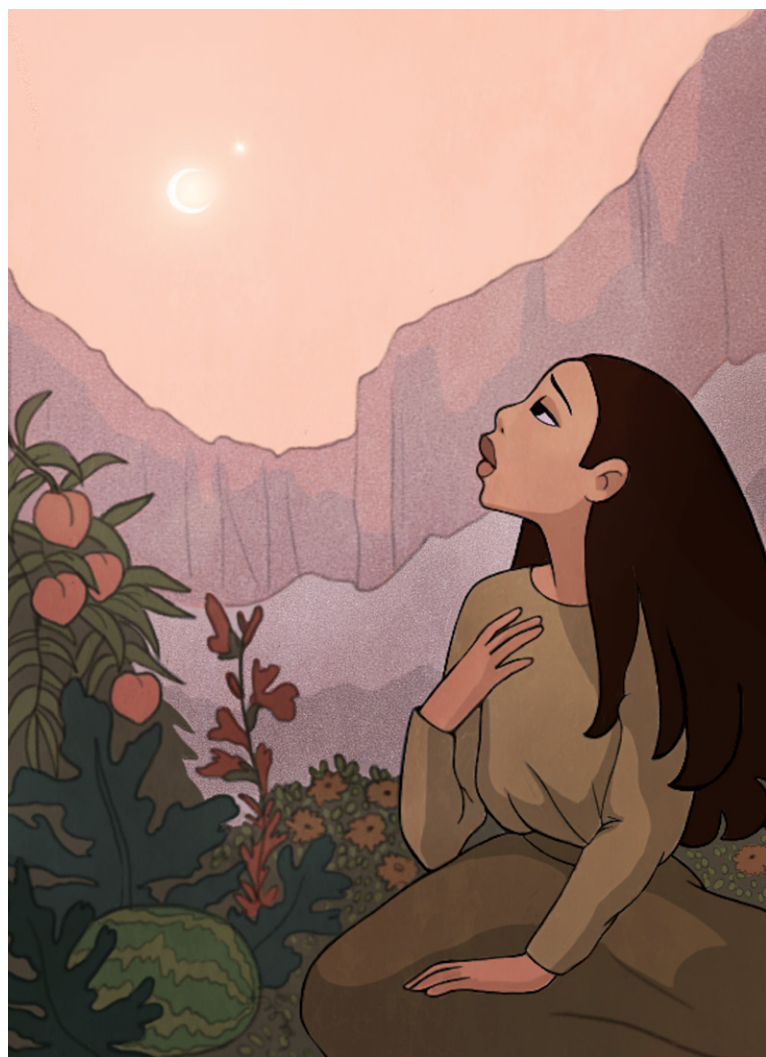
2. “I want to stress again the importance of really living what we claim to believe. That needs to be a priority . . . in everything we do...[We] believe that our vocation is to be leaven in society. But there’s a fine line between being leaven *in* society, and being digested *by* society.”¹¹

Joseph Smith’s Contribution

We also find phrases and ideas from this parable scattered throughout the Doctrine and Covenants (including: “sower” D&C 86:2; “an hundred-fold” D&C 78:19; 82:18; etc.). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught specially about this parable to the Elders of the Church:

I shall now proceed to make some remarks from the sayings of the Savior, recorded in the 13th chapter of his Gospel according to St. Matthew, which, in my mind, afford us as clear an understanding upon the important subject of the gathering, as anything recorded in the Bible. . . . Now mark the expression that which was sown in his heart. . . . Men who have no principle of righteousness in themselves, and whose hearts are full of iniquity, and have no desire for the principles of truth, do not understand the word of truth when they hear it. The devil taketh away the word of truth out of their hearts, because there is no *desire* for righteousness in them. . . .

We draw the conclusion, then, that the very reason why the multitude, or the world, as they were designated by the Savior, did not receive an explanation upon his parables, was because of unbelief. To you, he says, (speaking



Reap Your Reward by Courtney von Savoyye, First Place winner of the 2018 Book of Mormon Central Art Contest. This digital painting is a reflection on Alma 32 and how the seed of the word of God grows in one’s heart.

to his disciples,) it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. And why? Because of the faith and confidence they had in him. This parable was spoken to demonstrate the effects that are produced by the preaching of the word; and we believe that it has an allusion directly, to the commencement, or the setting up of the Kingdom in that age; therefore we shall continue to trace His sayings concerning this Kingdom from that time forth, even unto the end of the world.¹²

The bottom line is their lack of righteous desire leaves humanity vulnerable to Satan's temptations. But with the help of God's "word" (repeated six times in Matthew's discussion of the parable) we can move from being hard hearted, rocky, or thorny at times in our lives, to becoming good soil to nourish the Spirit—ready to produce the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).

THE PARABLE OF THE TARES

Matthew 13:24–30; 36–43

The second of the "twin parables" about sowing is the enemy who came and sowed tares.

Matthew 13:25 "sowed tares among the wheat" Tares are a weed called "bearded darnel." It looks the same as wheat until it comes to ear. The roots are often intertwined, so farmers do not want to pull them prematurely or they may lose the crop (Matthew 13:29). Tares are poisonous—they taste bitter and when eaten separately or in bread, can cause dizziness, vomiting, convulsions, or death.¹³

The Prophet Joseph also saw this parable as being about the gathering of Israel, or those who will become God's people. D&C 86:1–7 speaks of the tares sown by Satan after Jesus' and the apostles' deaths. Satan and his angels are the enemies who sewed the tares. The timing is described as the last days: "But behold, in the last days, even now while the Lord is beginning to bring forth the word, and the blade is springing up and is yet tender—the angels are crying unto the Lord day and night, who are ready and waiting to be sent forth to reap down the fields; But the Lord saith unto them, pluck not up the tares while the blade is yet tender (for verily your faith is weak), lest you destroy the wheat also" (D&C 86:4–6).



The Enemy Who Sows by James Tissot.

Matthew 13:30 “grow together until the harvest” God’s kingdom is on the earth again, but the delayed harvest, or eschatological judgment, has to wait until the fruit is ripe. The Saints are not yet ready. When the Savior will return, He will open His Millennial reign, and Satan will be bound. There will also be a final judgment, at the end of the Millennium. Burning is used as an image for judgment. The JST reverses the order so that the wheat is gathered first and the tares are burned second.

Matthew 13:37–39 “He answers” Matthew’s text includes the Lord’s interpretation of this parable a few verses after the parable when they left the public setting and the disciples are alone with the Lord. Jesus explains:

PARABLE ELEMENT	INTERPRETATION
Field	World
Good Seed	Children of the kingdom
Tares	Children of the wicked one
Enemy	Devil
Harvest	End of the world
Reapers	Angels

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught this parable is a brief history of the kingdom of God on earth from the days of Jesus to the Millennial Day.¹⁴ He saw the tares as corruption within the church or Christianity:

The wheat and tares must grow together till the harvest; at the harvest the wheat is gathered together into the threshing floor, so with the Saints the stakes are the threshing floor. Here they will be threshed with all sorts of difficulties, trials, afflictions and everything to mar their peace, which they can imagine, and thousands which they cannot imagine, but he that endures the threshing till all the chaff, superstition, folly and unbelief are pounded out of him, and does not suffer himself to be blown away as chaff by the foul blast of slander, but endures faithfully to the end, shall be saved.¹⁵

Early Church fathers share other interpretations: Irenaeus (c. 180) taught that “The field is the world... The apostate angel who is the enemy for he was envious of God’s workmanship and took in hand to render this workmanship into something at enmity with God. . . . For this reason the Lord commanded his disciples to be on guard.” Clement of Alexander (c. 195) taught “that heresies would be sown among the truth, as ‘tares among the wheat,’ was foretold by the Lord.” Victorinus (c. 280) taught “The Apocalypse shows that these reapers, shepherds, and laborers are the angels.”¹⁶

THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

Matthew 13:31–32; Mark 4:30–32; Luke 13:18–19



The Parable of the Mustard Seed. Photograph by Sheila Sund via Flickr.

The next of the “twin parables” is about food—mustard seeds and leaven. Jesus likened the “kingdom of God” (or “kingdom of heaven” in Matthew) to the potential found in a small seed that grows into a tall productive fruitful plant. Along the Sea of Galilee mustard flowers grow up to ten feet high. The flowers become pods filled with seeds that are used as a spice to make mustard, and as food for birds.

This parable has been used to describe Jesus, who was seen by some as insignificant as a seed, but “He abundantly bestows salvation on all humanity.”¹⁷ Also the seed is Jesus’ words or message which grew to beautify and fill the whole earth. The Prophet Joseph applied this parable to aspects of the restoration:

3. **The Book of Mormon:** “[will] spring up in the last days, or in due time; let us behold it coming forth out of the ground, which is indeed accounted the least of all seeds, but behold it branching forth, yea, even towering, with lofty branches, and God-like majesty, until it, like the mustard seed, becomes the greatest of all herbs. And it is truth, and it has sprouted and come forth out of the earth, and righteousness begins to look down from heaven, and God is sending down His powers, gifts and angels, to lodge in the branches thereof. The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a mustard seed.”
4. **The Restored Church:** small initially as “the mustard seed is small, but bring[s] forth a large tree, and the fowls lodge in the branches.”¹⁸
5. **Angels:** represented as birds in the parable, who “come down, combine together to gather their children, and gather them. We cannot be made perfect without them, nor they without us; when these things are done, the Son of Man will descend, the Ancient of Days sit; we may come to an innumerable company of angels, have communion with and receive instructions from them. . . . We may have the fowls of heaven lodge in the branches.”¹⁹

THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN OR YEAST

Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20–21

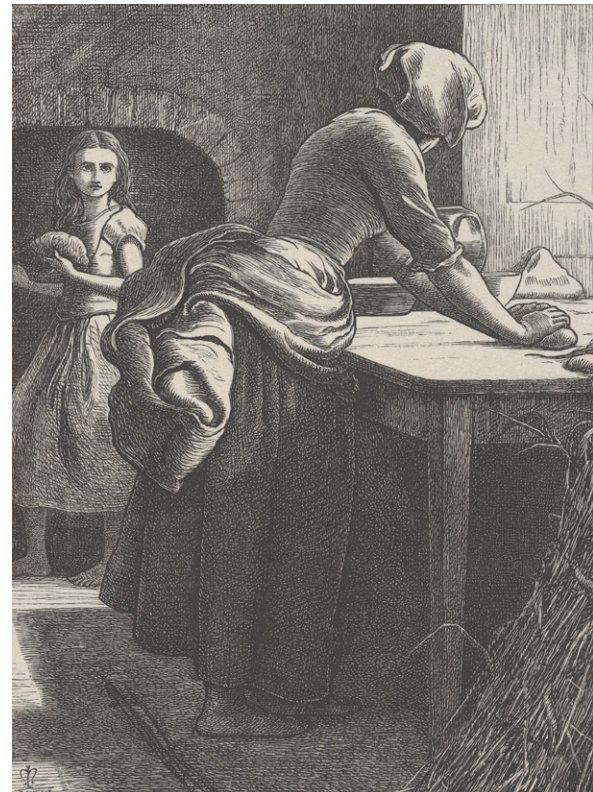
Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20–21 “leaven” Looking for “twin” relationships in the parables, note how Jesus in the last parable had a man planting, and now has a woman baking. The early church writers wanted to include this balance of both genders working to build the kingdom of God.

In the OT, leaven is often the symbol of corruptibility, but here it is used as a contrast and for its dynamic power. The message is that the kingdom of God is “hidden” in the flour and will permeate everything. Jesus taught it with numbers that produced a great shock value. We need to look beyond the Greek measurements to appreciate Jesus’ hyperbole in his story telling. A container big enough to hold “three measures” also held 432 eggs, or 9 to 10 gallons. It was an enormous size. This woman put in a little yeast, but then added “three measures” of meal/flour or 110 pounds/50 kg, making bread to easily feed 150 people or more.²⁰

Joseph Smith used this parable to highlight the role of the “three witnesses” as the “three measures” as well as the priesthood as the leavening that multiplied into plenty of bread:

It may be understood that the Church of the Latter-day Saints has taken its rise from a little leaven that was put into three witnesses. Behold how much this is like the parable: it is fast leavening the lump and will soon leaven the whole. . . . Three measures of meal, undergoing the purifying touch by a revelation of Jesus Christ and the ministering of angels, who have already commenced this work in the last days which will answer to the leaven which leavened the whole lump. It alludes expressly to the last days, when there should be little faith on the earth and it [will] leaven the whole world. There shall be safety in Zion and Jerusalem and [among] the remnants whom the Lord shall call. It refers to the priesthood.²¹

The yeast can have many interpretations, including how the Spirit touches a life by contact with truth, which can then grow. Missionaries share God’s word, one convert at a time—which grows into the



Parable of the Leaven by John Everett Millais. Wood engraving cut and printed by Dalziel Brothers, 1864. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

righteous leavening of the world. The Gospel has an expansive force within itself and will spread by transforming one grain at a time.

Setting Change and Fulfillment Passage

Matthew 13:34b-36

Matthew stopped his string of public parables when Jesus sent the multitude away and entered into “the house” (which house? Peter’s mother-in-law’s perhaps?). Jesus’ disciples followed him and then Matthew included several shorter parables given in this private setting. But first, Matthew paused to share another fulfillment passage (his 11th out of 14), which precedes Psalms 78:2. The private setting opens the way for the disciples to ask the Lord for the interpretation of the tares (which is included above). Following this, Matthew returned to recording four more parables of the kingdom of heaven.

THE PARABLE OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE

Matthew 13:44



Parable of the Hidden Treasure by Rembrandt, ca. 1630. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Each of these parables continues to offer Jesus' descriptions or analogies of the kingdom of heaven. In addition to these next two parables lining up as the hidden treasure and hidden pearl, Matthew also has an interplay between the hidden treasure and the hidden leaven, and masterfully correlates the smallness of the pearl with the mustard seed.

Matthew 13:44 “treasure hid” Jesus speaks of a poor day-laborer or traveler finding a great hidden treasure. His morality is not in question because he bought the field. The point is that the kingdom can be present and yet not perceived by many travelers. During the centuries of invasions that swept over Palestine, we learn that people hid their treasures in the ground (Proverbs 2:4; Sirach 20:30; etc.). At the time of the NT, we see this in Qumran with the threat of Roman destruction in AD 68–70, the Essenes hid their treasured parchment and copper scroll in caves.

“Joy”: The word “joy” is important—the kingdom of heaven is about finding eternal joy. It is also a story about sacrificing everything for the treasure of the kingdom or a testimony. The Prophet Joseph Smith used this parable to illustrate the gathering: “Nothing but [the] Kingdom being restored can save the world. Like unto a treasure hidden in a field. This figure is a representation of the [Kingdom] in the last days.”²² The Prophet saw the purchasing of the treasure as the sacrifices required of the Saints, “selling all that they have, and gathering themselves together unto a place that they may purchase for an inheritance.”²³ Membership in God's kingdom requires the sacrifice of everything God asks for.

THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

Matthew 13:45–46

Matthew 13:45–46 “A pearl” was a rare treasure and in great demand in the ancient world. Pearls were a sign of wealth and often valued more highly than gold. As a comparison, from the time of the NT, Cleopatra supposedly had a pearl worth 6 million sesterces (the equivalent of 1.5 million days-of-labor at minimum wage, or billions of dollars).²⁴ From the OT, Job used pearls as a comparison to what he valued the most: “the price of wisdom is above pearls” (Job 28:18, ESV).



When we look at the two treasure parables together, it is the find that is most important. Both discoveries are a surprise. They also contrast the rich and poor. Both parables speak of the need for a total self-surrender to receive the kingdom of heaven. Jesus' hyperbole sets the stage to teach the cost of discipleship to his apostles.

Christian Fathers

Two early Christian fathers had interesting observations about this parable. Clement of Alexandria (~AD 195) wrote, "Jesus is a pearl of translucent and purest radiance." Origen (~AD 245) wrote, "There are many merchants engaged in many forms of merchandise. However, the kingdom of heaven is not likened to any of these except the one who is seeking beautiful pearls. And he has found one pearl equal in value to many—a very costly pearl that he has bought in place of many pearls. I consider it reasonable, then, to make some inquiry into the nature of the pearl. Please note that Christ did not say, 'He sold all the *pearls* he had.' For he had not only sold those pearls he had bought . . . but also sold everything that he had."²⁵

Joseph Smith

The parable was also used by Joseph Smith equating it to sacrifice for Zion. He quoted the parable and then added, "The Saints again work after this example. See men traveling to find places for Zion and her stakes or remnants, who, when they find the place for Zion, or the pearl of great price, straightway sell that they have, and buy it."²⁶



THE PARABLE OF THE FISH NET

Matthew 13:47-50

This parable about fishing was especially meaningful to half the apostles who were fishermen, with at least four who were professional fishermen. (John 21:2 records Peter, Andrew, James, John, Thomas, Nathaniel, and two unnamed).

Matthew 13:47 “net”: In Greek the net is “*sagene/seine-net*’ with floats on the top edge and weights at the bottom. When the net was thrown into the water it encircled the fish and then was dragged up on the shore. The net naturally gathered fish indiscriminately.”²⁷ Fishermen often set their nets out at night because the fish swam closer to the surface for warmth. In Matthew, Jesus referred to “every kind” of fish included in the net, probably referring to missionary work, as this is the group he has called as fishers of men” A normal catch would have large and small fish. Of the fish, the small and “unclean” fish were thrown back in, and the large “clean” fish were kept. (For the Mosaic dietary code, see Leviticus 11.)

Matthew 13:48 “when it was full”: Jesus described waiting until the net is “full/*eplērōthē*” meaning: “complete; consummate; a number; to make complete in every particular, to render perfect; to carry through to the end, to accomplish, carry out.” It speaks of spiritual readiness as well as physical completion.

Joseph Smith recited this parable when speaking on the Last Days:

For the work of this pattern, behold the seed of Joseph, spreading forth the Gospel net upon the face of the earth, gathering of every kind, that the good may be saved in vessels prepared for that purpose, and the angels will take care of the bad. So shall it be at the end of the world-the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire, and there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth”²⁸

Matthew 13:49-50 “at the end of the world” Jesus offered an eschatological interpretation of judgment with angels separating the just and unjust. Matthew’s text records the theme of God’s judgment of the unrighteous again, word for word, “cast them into the furnace of fire. . .” (13:42; 50). JST changed it a bit as we see in the footnotes.

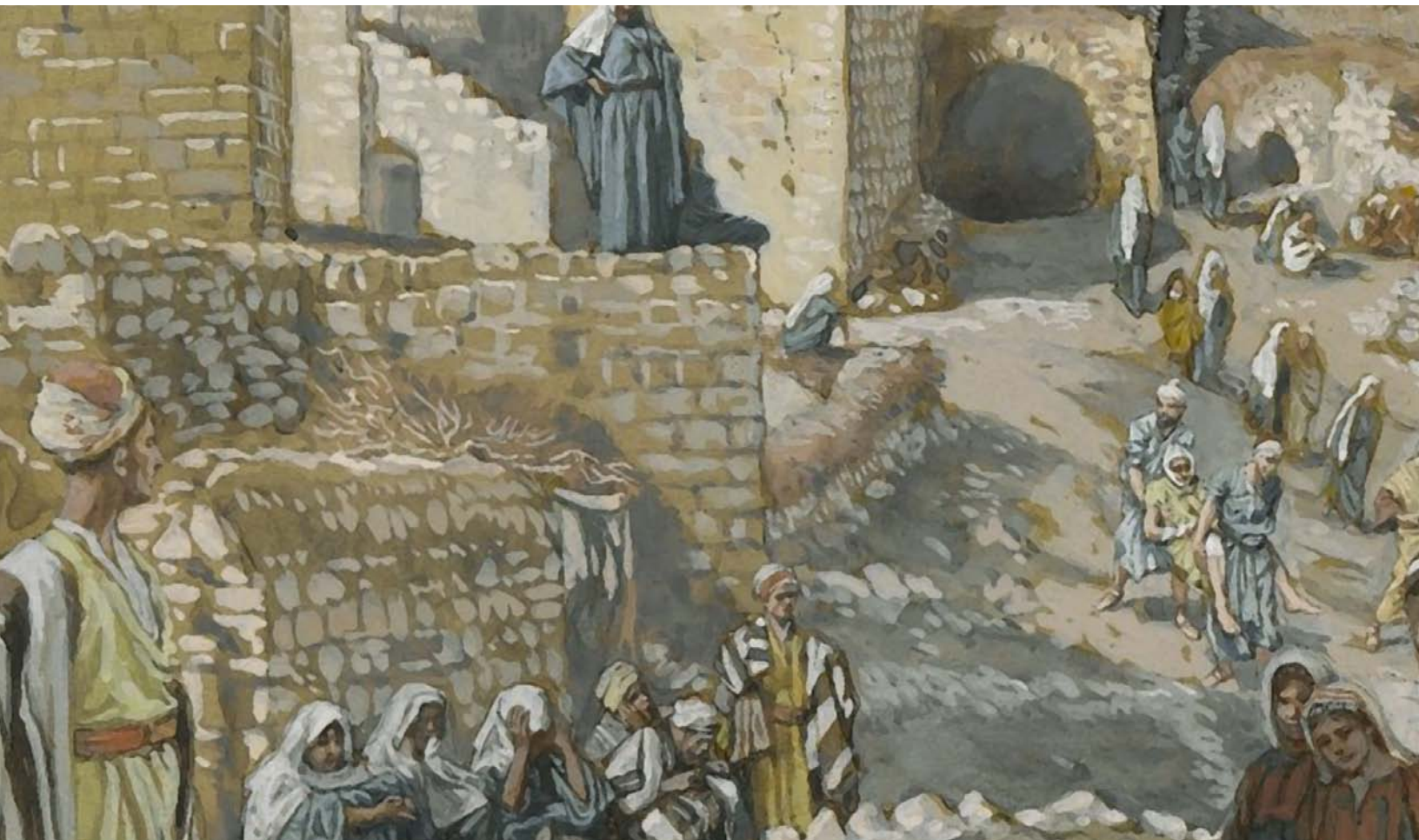
THE PARABLE OF THE HOUSEHOLDER

Matthew 13:52

Matthew 13:52 In the Jewish world, scribes were scholar teachers who interpreted the Torah. Jesus called for a new type of scribe, “which is instructed into the kingdom of heaven.” These new scribes, who have been taught by Jesus (which included Matthew himself), would need to go through the traditions, the learnings, the scriptures and separate out, or find new things in light of the Gospel. Everything takes on a new light through understanding Christ’s Plan of Salvation. “At its heart the gospel consists of ‘new things,’ and that newness must never be underestimated. But for Matthew, these ‘new things’ presuppose and are fundamentally loyal to the ‘old things.’”²⁹ Matthew’s Gospel is an example of a new scribe who ties the OT and the NT together.

In 1835, the Prophet Joseph summarized his message to the Elders by repeating this parable and then said:

For the works of this example, see the Book of Mormon coming forth out of the treasure of the heart. Also the covenants given to the Latter-day Saints, also the translation of the Bible—thus bringing forth out of the heart things new and old, thus answering to three measures of meal undergoing the purifying touch by a revelation of Jesus Christ, and the ministering of angels, who have already commenced this work in the last days, which will answer to the leaven which leavened the whole lump.³⁰



JESUS RETURNS TO NAZARETH

Matthew 13:53–58

Similar to Luke’s record of Jesus’ visit to his little hometown of Nazareth, the locals do not appreciate him as anyone different than they anticipated—the son of Joseph the “builder/*tektonos*” (ISV). Jesus’ family is mentioned here and in Mark 6:3, both mentioning at least six other siblings (as the daughters are not numbered—which suggests there were several). For the people of Nazareth, their rejection of Jesus came at the tragic cost that they were not able to receive his miraculous healings, “because of their unbelief.”

Header Image: The Exhortation to the Apostles by James Tissot.

Below: He Went Through the Villages on the Way to Jerusalem by James Tissot.



ENDNOTES

¹ John W. Welch, Jeannie S. Welch, *The Parables of Jesus: Revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communication, 2019).

² Understanding that Jesus came almost a year after His resurrection is seen by comparing two editorial statements by Mormon: The great storm at Jesus' death came "in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month on the fourth day" and Jesus appeared "at the ending of the thirty and fourth year" (3 Nephi 8:5; 10:18–19).

³ Joseph Fichtner, *Many Things in Parables: Reflections for Life* (New York: Alba House, 1988).

⁴ Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, Reprint, 1980), vol. 5. 261. This is taken from the prophet's Journal, kept by Willard Richards, Jan. 29, 1843.

⁵ Kent Brown, Eric Huntsman, *Brigham Young University New Testament Commentary: The Testimony of Luke—A New Rendition* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 392.

⁶ As described in an earlier week, early Christian historians recorded that Mark recorded Peter's Gospel.

⁷ David Huggins, "No Till: How Farmers are Saving the Soil by Parking their Plows," *Scientific American* (July, 2008).

⁸ The early Christian father, Cyril of Alexandria, saw the "birds" as wicked spirits: "Let us look, as from a broader perspective, at what it means to be on the road. In a way, every road is hardened and foolish on account of the fat that it lies beneath everyone's feet. No kind of seed finds there enough depth of soil for a covering. Instead, it lies on the surface and is ready to be snatched up by the birds that come by. Therefore those who have in themselves a mind hardened and, as it were packed tight do not receive the divine seed but become a well-trodden way for the unclean spirits. These are what is here meant by 'the bird of the heaven.' But 'heaven' we understand to mean this air, in which the spirits of wickedness move about, by whom, again, the good seed is snatched up and destroyed. Then what are those upon the rock? They are those people who do not take much cares of the faith they have in themselves. They have not set their minds to understand the touchstone of the mystery. The reverence these people have toward God is shallow and rootless. It is in times of ease and fair weather that they practice Christianity, when it involves none of the painful trials of winter. They will not preserve their faith in this way, if in times of tumultuous persecution their soul is not prepared for the struggle."

⁹ Ten of the citations refer to "fulfilling" the spoken words of the prophet, and twice to what is "written" by the prophet. As mentioned earlier, fourteen represents "David/DVD" in Hebrew orthography, to witness that Jesus was the chosen son of David and the Promised Messiah. The 14 examples are Matthew 1:22; 2:5, 15, 17, 23; 3:3; 4:14; 8:17a, 12:17; 13:14a, 35, 21:4; 26:56; 27:9a.

¹⁰ Dallin H. Oaks, *General Conference*, "The Parable of the Sower," April 2015.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, quoting Catholic Arch Bishop, Charles J. Chaput, "The Great Charter at 800."

¹² Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, 2:264–267.

¹³ *New Testament Institute Manual*, 72.

¹⁴ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1976), 96–102.

¹⁵ Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, 4:451.

- ¹⁶ David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Belief: a reference guide to more than 700 topics discussed by the Early Church Fathers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 496–497.
- ¹⁷ Bercot, *Early Christian Belief*, 495. You can see the change in thought from approximately AD 195, when Clement of Alexandria described the seed as Christ’s salvation, to AD 390, when the *Apostolic Confessions* describe the parable: “The Lord has taught us that the word is like ‘a grain of mustard seed,’ which is of a fiery nature. If anyone uses it unskillfully, he will find it bitter. For in the mystical points, we should not be rash, but cautious.”
- ¹⁸ Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, 2:268.
- ¹⁹ Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, 3:389. Also see similarities with Daniel 4:21; Psalms 103:12; Ezekiel 17:22–24.
- ²⁰ Brown, *Luke*, 667.
- ²¹ Kent Jackson, *Joseph Smith’s Commentary on the Bible*, 97
- ²² Andrew F. Ehat, and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 13.
- ²³ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet*, 101.
- ²⁴ David Matz, *Daily Life of the Ancient Romans* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 28. *The European Magazine, and London Review*, 1813, Volumes 63–64. Other sources have the value of the pearl at different levels, but all over the equivalent of a billion dollars now.
- ²⁵ Bercot, *Early Christian Belief*, 495–7.
- ²⁶ Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, 2:272.
- ²⁷ Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *The Challenge of Jesus’ Parables, McMaster New Testament Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 119.
- ²⁸ Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, 2:272.
- ²⁹ Longenecker, *Jesus’ Parables*, 121.
- ³⁰ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet*, 102.



MATTHEW 14; MARK 6; LUKE 13; JOHN 5–6

FEASTS AND FULLNESS

This portion focuses on feasts. Starting with a pilgrimage feast that Jesus attended in Jerusalem (John 5), then moving to a birthday feast in Herod Antipas' palace where John the Baptist's death was negotiated (Matthew 14:3–12; Mark 6:17–29), followed by Jesus' feast in the Galilean wilderness feeding 5,000 and then 4,000 men plus women and children (Matthew 14:21), and ending with Jesus' sermon on the "Bread of Life" (John 6). In these last two feast experiences, Jesus takes on the mantle of Moses by offering bread/manna from heaven.

Through this section on feasts, Mark includes motifs of fullness (Mark 6:43; 8:8), in contrast to the Jewish dietary restrictions (Mark 7:1–30). Particularly in the Bread of Life sermon, Jesus teaches what is lacking in the Jewish feasts, and how He fulfills that.

Book of Mormon Commentary

The Book of Mormon gives a key to identify the Messiah. This also allows readers to find deeper appreciation for Jesus' mission. The Book of Mormon instructs the reader to look for types and shadows to point to the Messiah/Christ. Two examples follow:

- “Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him” (2 Nephi 11:4).
- “Therefore, if ye teach the law of Moses, also teach that it is a shadow of those things which are to come” (also see Jarom 1:11; Hosea 12:10; 1 Corinthians 10:1–11).

God organized the history of the Children of Israel and the Law of Moses to have a reciprocal relationship with the Promised Messiah / Christ.

JOHN'S GOSPEL

John's Gospel repeatedly demonstrates how Jesus came to set things right. In so doing He cleansed far more than the Temple. He attacked false traditions, cut through the oral laws, and corrected falsehoods. In all this, He fulfilled the Law of Moses and He restored the higher law. In each of the seven miracles and seven sermons that John compiles in his Gospel, he shows Jesus replacing distorted doctrines with truths.¹ The first two miracles in the Gospel of John are: turning water to wine (John 2), and healing a nobleman's son (John 4). In John 5–6, we find the third, fourth, and fifth miracle (healing the lame man at Bethesda, feeding five-thousand, and walking on the water). These same chapters include the third and fourth sermons (The Father and Son's shared work, and the Bread of Life). Each miracle figuratively demonstrates Jesus replacing a false tradition with His teachings and Atonement. As a reminder, while making the wedding wine in purification jars, Jesus figuratively demonstrated how His blood/wine will replace the old purification laws. Next, He cleansed the temple, to cut out unclean and false practices. Now starting in chapter 5, John's Gospel focuses on Jesus replacing each of the Jewish pilgrimage feasts.²

Jesus Heals at the Pool of Bethesda: John's 3rd Miracle

John 5:2–47

John 5:1 “feast” John does not tell us which Jewish feast motivated the Lord's trip to Jerusalem. Jews celebrate three major feasts as pilgrimages to Jerusalem each year: Passover or the Feast of Unleavened bread (early spring), Pentecost (50 days later—remembering 50 days after Moses left Egypt and returned to report to God in Matthew. Sinai), and the Feast of the Tabernacles (fall—remembering the 40 years in the wilderness, and end of

the harvest). I question the footnote, which suggests the feast was Passover. John 6:4 says the Passover is coming soon (also John 2:23 was a Passover). As John appears to be organized chronologically, this would suggest it was another of the other two major feasts. The biblical scholar Raymond Brown finds more resemblance to Pentecost with references to the covenant at Sinai covenant and in John 5:22, 30, 42, 46.³

I love the precedent of gathering with believers to worship and learn at the Temple.



Christ Healing the Sick at Bethesda by Carl Heinrich Bloch, 1883. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

John 5:2 “Bethesda” possibly from Aramaic, “House of Mercy” or in Hebrew *Bethzatha* “House of Olives” (*beth* is “house of,” i.e. Bethlehem = house of bread). When runoff from the Hinnom Valley was dammed on the west side of Jerusalem, reservoirs formed. Pre-Herodians called the reservoir, “the sheep pool.” The double pool was just north of the Temple gate known as “*probatike*/pertaining to sheep,” or the gate where the sheep came into the temple for sacrifice. The RSV, NAS, NIV use “sheep gate” not market. Five porticoes (RSV), or porches (KJV), or colonnades (NEB) surrounded the twin pools: four around the sides and one between them. Locals ascribed some sort of medicinal or curative properties to the pool.

John 5:3–4 “impotent folk” The sick gathered at the pool because a pagan tradition claimed that an angel came down and “troubled/stirred” the water in the twin pools which enabled healing. Archeologists discovered a shrine to a pagan god of healing there (probably the Greek god, Asklepios). Perhaps one reason why Jesus went there was to show God’s healing power compared to pagan superstitions.



The Pool of Bethesda by Robert Bateman, 1877. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

The best Greek manuscripts of the Gospel of John do not include the second half of verse 3 through 4 (likewise the RSV, NEB, NIV). These ideas were probably added later (possibly written in the margin as an explanation) as a reflection of popular opinion—but it appears they were not John’s words.

John 5:5–7 “Wilt thou be made whole?” I like reading Jesus’ questions as if they were to me—and answering them in my scriptural margins. Jesus’ question suggests more than physical healing—I believe our spirit and body are knit together in many illnesses. Jesus’ ability to make us “whole” requires healing of all aspects of life (including throwing out falsehoods).

The miracle clarifies Jesus’ work. The miracle was not requested by faith, but Jesus explained it was done as a Messianic sign to teach that healing comes from the Christ or Messiah. The invalid admitted he didn’t have a servant or friend, which may have initially drawn Jesus to him.

John 5:8 “take up thy bed and walk” The man’s “bed” was probably a “mat” (NIV, JB) or “pallet” (RSV, NAS).

John 5:9 “immediately” (1st of 5 times.) Often the *miracle* is actually in the timing. Natural laws will continue to happen, but when nature bends to fit God’s voice at the right time, it is a miracle (i.e. there were earthquakes before and after, but for the earthquake to coincide with Saul/Paul’s vision made it miraculous; seagulls have vomited before, but to have thousands of bulimic seagulls arrive right after fervent prayer to help save the saints’ crops was miraculous, etc.). Think too, of the invalid’s timing. The healing was immediate—giving one pause to wonder what it would feel like after 38 years of not moving your ligaments and muscles?

John’s Gospel clearly emphasizes that Jesus performed this miracle on the Sabbath. The authors of all four Gospels point out that Jesus repeatedly and intentionally healed on the Sabbath.⁴ These healings would have stood out and as very offensive to the Pharisees (and all those who adopted the hundreds of Sabbath oral laws). The Sabbath oral laws were recorded later. Rabbis identified 39 types of work that they felt should be forbidden on the Sabbath.

39 FORBIDDEN SABBATH ORAL LAWS

1. Sowing 2. Plowing 3. Reaping 4. Binding sheaves 5. Threshing 6. Winnowing 7. Selecting 8. Grinding 9. Sifting 10. Kneading 11. Baking 12. Shearing wool 13. Washing wool 14. Beating wool 15. Dyeing wool 16. Spinning 17. Weaving 18. Making two loops 19. Weaving two threads 20. Separating two threads 21. Tying 22. Untying 23. Sewing two stitches 24. Tearing 25. Trapping 26. Slaughtering 27. Flaying 28. Salting meat 29. Curing hide 30. Scraping hide 31. Cutting up hide 32. Writing two letters 33. Erasing two letters 34. Building 35. Tearing a building down 36. Extinguishing a fire 37. Kindling a fire

JESUS’ HEALINGS ON THE SABBATH

Matthew 12:10	A withered hand
Mark 1:29–31	Peter’s mother-in-law
Mark 2:32–33	Many diseased
Mark 3:1–6	A man’s withered hand
Luke 13:10–17	a crippled woman
Luke 14:1–6	A man with dropsy
John 5:1–18	A lame man

Rabbis further augmented these 39 laws by hundreds of other laws that micromanaged Sabbath observance. For example, the guideline forbidding sowing or plowing, was added to with “oral laws” that directed no scattering two seeds, no sweeping up dirt, nor breaking a single clod. *New Testament Studies in Scripture* explains:

. . . Plucking one blade of grass was sin, watering fruit or removing a withered leaf was forbidden, picking fruit, or even lifting it from the ground, was reaping; cutting a mushroom was a double sin, one both of harvesting and of sowing, for a new one would grow in place of the old; fishing or anything that put an end to life ranked with harvesting; rubbing ears of corn together, or anything else connected with food, was classified as binding of sheaves.’ One could spit upon a rock but not upon the ground, for by scratching the earth you were guilty of cultivating. You could eat an egg laid by a fryer on the Sabbath but not an egg laid by a laying hen, because it was not the work of a fryer to produce eggs. Such distinctions, which went on endlessly, included prohibition against administering to the sick or afflicted. A broken bone could not be set or a dislocated joint put back, for if this were done, the body would start to heal itself, thus causing it to work. However, it was ruled that labor could be performed to save life.⁵

Many of Jesus’ healings on the Sabbath specifically attacked these oral traditions (i.e. take up thy bed and walk, He spat in the dirt and made clay, Matthew 15:1–20; Mark 7:1–23; Luke 11:37–4; etc.). Currently, our culture has gone to the opposite extreme with a lack of Sabbath observance. Jesus restored the Sabbath day as not only a day of rest but also a day of doing God’s work, and wholehearted worship.

Jesus Reveals New Sabbath Standard

John 5:10–18

John 5:10–11 “it is not lawful” By obeying Jesus, the healed man disobeyed the rabbinic oral laws. Do you think Jesus intentionally told him to pick up his bed? I do! It sounds like Jesus is trying to tear down erroneous traditions.

John 5:12–13 “who” Interestingly, Jesus performed the miracle without letting the crippled man know who he was. I presume many miracles are performed in our behalf without our knowing or giving proper credit. Did this require more personal faith? I assume that the healed man became a Christian or else we wouldn’t know the details of 38 years, etc. The puzzling part is why are the inquisitors more concerned about their laws than the man’s healing?

John 5:14 “Jesus findeth him” as He does for each of us. After they meet up again, Jesus’ poignant counsel is very interesting: “sin no more, lest a worse thing come.” I really feel that Jesus is teaching about our souls, “thou art made whole,” not just the outward manifestation of illnesses but purified inside too. Does inner cleansing always come with physical healing? In the modern world, we usually don’t see every sin leading to sickness; yet

Jesus is more worried about the purifying of souls than of bodies.

John 5:15 “told the Jews that it was Jesus” You wonder about the peer pressure from the Jewish leaders that led the man to go report Jesus’ name to them. Did the man realize they hoped to kill Jesus?

John 5:16–17 “My Father worketh” Again Jesus does not answer the question directly, but uses this opportunity to declare his Divine Son-ship. Jesus must work because His Father “is working still” (RSV or “has never yet ceased His work” NEB). He clarifies what work is appropriate on the Sabbath. Jesus also justifies His healing by explaining His authority, but they do not understand.

John 5:18 “kill him” In addition to wanting to stone Jesus for breaking the Sabbath, now they added blasphemy to the list. These Jews felt that when Jesus made himself equal to God, Jesus multiplied the number of Gods, which was against the first of Moses’ Ten Commandments.



The ruins of the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. Photo by Berthold Werner via Wikimedia Commons.

The Son and Father Work in Harmony: Jesus’ Third Discourse in John

John 5:19–47

John 5:19–20 “the Son can do nothing of himself, but what He seeth the Father do” The third discourse in John begins with one of John’s favorite themes: The Father sent Jesus to do His Father’s work. Jesus does not selfishly claim His ideas and miracles for His own honor, but credits His Father. It agrees with Jesus’ words in 3 Nephi 11:11, “I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning.”

Note the John 5:19 verb choice, “... sees his Father doing.” (NIV). Did Jesus have visions of the work He was to do? Did He see what His Father had done? Do these verses help us understand the atonement better? In any case, Jesus’ special tutoring included knowing the Father’s work.

- Joseph Smith taught, “It is the first principle of the gospel to know for a certainty the character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another, and that he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did. The scriptures inform us that Jesus said, ‘As the Father hath power in himself, even so hath the Son power’—to do what? Why, what the Father did. The answer is obvious—in a manner to lay down his body and take it up again. Jesus, what are you going to do? To lay down my life, as my Father did, and take it up again. Do you believe it? If you do not believe it, you do not believe the Bible.”⁶
- Pres. John Taylor quoted this verse when he taught, “[Jesus] is the brightness of his Father’s glory and the express image of his person. Also, he doeth what he seeth the Father do, while we only do that which we are permitted and empowered to do by him.”⁷
- Lorenzo Snow likewise expounded on this verse, “[Jesus] came into this life to do the will of his Father, and not his own will. Our desire and determination should be the same. When things come up that require an exertion on our part, we should bring our wills into subjection to the will of the Father, and feel to say, what is the will of our Father, whom we are here in the world to serve?”⁸

John 5:21 “as the Father raiseth up . . . even so the Son quickeneth” Jesus again proclaims His Messiahship. To “quickeneth” means “gives life” (RSV, NEB, JB, NAS, NIV).

John 5:22 “The Father . . . committed all judgment unto the Son” The judgment after death is a reality to Jesus’ audience. He will be the main judge (but many prophets will join Him at the judgment bar to testify—Nephi, Mormon, Moroni, etc.).

John 5:25, 28 “the dead shall hear . . . all that are in the graves shall hear his voice” Jesus introduces the topic that His mission included organized missionary work in the Spirit World. Later, 1 Peter 3–4 elaborates on this topic. In turn, Peter’s epistle stimulated President Joseph F. Smith’s revelation on missionary work in the spirit world (D&C 138).

John 5:26 “The Son to have life in himself” This may have multiple meanings—one refers to Jesus’ control over His own death. Is Jesus’ message of a future resurrection understood and accepted by his audience? This life is only part of the picture. Disciples with faith hope for delayed gratification.

John 5:29 “they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life” While translating the Bible, when the Prophet Joseph Smith reached this verse, he and his scribe, Sidney Rigdon, received the great vision recorded in D&C 76. Joseph’s time studying the Bible for a new translation became the stimulus to ponder and ask for more understanding. The Lord used this learning process to restore many new doctrines. This pattern used in personal scripture study to stimulate prayerful questions may become a window to inspiration as well.



The Father and the Son by Jasmain G. Rappleye

The word “damnation” at the end of this verse refers to the stopping of one’s progression. It is also translated judgment or *condemnation* (ESV, NET). In the JST, the last phrase reads: “*in the resurrection of the unjust.*” This points to the last judgment, a repeated eschatological theme that became the hope of Christians.

John 5:30 *And shall be judged of the Son of Man For as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; For I can of mine own self do nothing; because I seek not mine own will . . .”* (JST)

Witnesses of Jesus

John 5:31–47

John 5:31–39 “**There is another who testifies of Me**” (NASB) Jesus presented his claim, and now outlines four witnesses (twice as many as needed in the Law of Moses) that have testified of His Divinity: John the Baptist (v. 33–35), His works (miracles/message v. 36), His Father (v. 37–38), and the Mosaic and ancient scriptures (v. 39).

John 5:34 “[John the Baptist] received not his testimony of man, but of God, and ye yourselves say that he is a prophet, therefore ye ought to receive his testimony” (JST)

John 5:40 “yet you refuse to come to Me” The tragic conclusion is that, even with double the amount of legal witnesses, Jesus’ hearers do not believe in Him.

John 5:41–44 “ye have not the love of God in you” Jesus is not motivated by human praise. His glory is not from human sources. It appears that the Jewish authorities desired human praise more than God’s love, given through His Son’s atonement.

John 5:45–47 “Moses” Even the Jews own beloved law giver, Moses himself, will accuse those who rejected Jesus. The Law of Moses was to lead men to the Messiah, but they missed His signs and thereby rejected His message.

THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

Mark’s Gospel begins the 3rd Section of Jesus’ Galilean Ministry

Mark 6:6–8:21

Mark 6:6–13 Mark’s Gospel repeats the same message three times to separate Jesus’ Galilean ministry into three sections.⁹ Each time, the author summarizes Jesus’ recent travels followed by a commission for His disciples to serve a mission: Mark 1:14–15; 3:13–19; and 6:7–13. After the last time, the author turns to describe the public opinions about John the Baptist death.

John the Baptist’s Death

Matthew 14:1–12; Mark 6:14–29; Luke 3:19–20

Matthew 14:1–2; Mark 6:14–16 “Herod Antipas the tetrarch” was one of the four “puppet kings” that Rome authorized to replace his father, Herod the great builder.¹⁰ Herod Antipas governed Galilee and the Transjordanian region of Perea from the time of his father’s death, sometime between 40 BC, until his own death in 39 AD.¹¹ It appears that like his father, he has some paranoia and jitters—to the degree that he feared that the miraculous stories he heard about Jesus’ healings, were actually performed by John the Baptist as a spirit possibly back from the dead. With this bridge, Matthew and Mark give a flash back to John the Baptist’s death.

Matthew 14:2–5; Mark 6:17–20 “bound him in prison” Earlier, John the Baptist, following Lev 18:16, spoke out against the unlawful union between Herod Antipas and his brother’s ex-wife, Herodias (who was also their niece).¹² It made Herodias mad enough that she wanted to kill the prophet. But her husband, Herod Antipas, “knowing him to be a righteous and holy man” (Mark 6:20, NIV), would not let him be killed, but silenced the prophet by binding him in prison. Mark’s Gospel gives the most detailed account of John the Baptist’s imprisonment and death.

Matthew 14:6-7; Mark 6:21-23 “birthday . . . banquet” Herod Antipas’ birthday feast included his inner circle of lords, military commanders, and leaders of Galilee. For entertainment at the all-male party, Herodias’ daughter from her first marriage, Salome, danced for her step father and guests. She completely wowed him and, with probably too much wine, Herod Antipas promises the dancing girl anything she wants “up to half my kingdom” (the same phrase the King offered to Queen Esther 5:3, 6; and Lamoni’s father offered Ammon in Alma 20:23). Herodias saw this opportunity to finally get her wish to kill John the Baptist and instructs her daughter to join in her scheme.



The Beheading of St. John the Baptist by Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, ca. 1869. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Matthew 14:9-12; Mark 6:25-29 “the king was exceeding sorry,” and regrets his rash promise, but to save face in public, Herod Antipas has John the Baptist beheaded. The head is delivered to Salome and his body buried by his disciples. The two females will join Herod on judgment day for killing a prophet of God. We trust that God allowed John the Baptist’s martyrdom because he had finished all that was required for his mortal mission and was ready for his eternal reward. He had more to perform on earth, though, as he restored the Aaronic priesthood to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery on May 15, 1829, near the bank of the Susquehanna River in Harmony, PA (D&C 13).

Matthew 14:13a “when Jesus heard this He withdrew” Matthew describes Jesus’ desire to mourn the loss of His cousin and forerunner prophet (Mark 6:32; Luke 9:10; John 6:1 have Jesus going away to a quiet place to discuss their missions).

Jesus Feeds 5,000 men plus women and children

Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Lk 9:10b-17; John 6:1-15

Feeding of 5,000 stands out as one of Jesus’ greatest miracles. It echoed the manna that fed the children of Israel in the wilderness. It was so important that it is one of four events that all four Gospels include between the time of Jesus’ baptism and passion. The four major events are His: (1) Cleansing of the temple (in each Gospel it happens only once, but at different times); (2) Healing the official’s son; (3) Feeding 5,000; (4) Triumphal entry.

Matthew 14:13; Mark 6:32; Luke 9:20; 6:1 “withdrew” Matthew and Mark set this miracle after John the Baptist martyrdom when Jesus tried to leave the crowd and go into a quiet place, I presume, to mourn the passing of His cousin. Luke (who was not an eye-witness, Luke 1:1–2) places the miracle after the apostles return from their mission and John after the sermon that ends with comparisons of Moses and Jesus. All four have the miracle set in a lonely or country setting across the Sea of Galilee (landing in Bethsaida—Luke 9:10).

Matthew 14:14; Mark 6:33; Luke 9:11a; John 6:2 “crowds” Jesus’ fame has grown from both his miracles and teaching. A crowd appears to be searching for Him and hears He is in a boat, and takes the land route to greet them when they land. Jesus’ multitude follows Him, but (or possibly, *therefore*) he went up to the mountain with only His select few disciples.

John 6:3 “mountain” John alone has Jesus climbing a mountain (Whenever mountains are mentioned in the scriptures, look for temple symbolism). The mount setting ties to Moses on Sinai, just before the time when the children of Israel received manna (Exodus 16). John recorded that Jesus “sat” which is how the ancient Rabbi’s taught.



The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes by James Tissot.

John 6:4–5 “Passover was nigh” (YLT). This means Galilee is at its loveliest—the rainy season is nearly over, the weather is warm, spring flowers and green grass drape the hillsides. The prophet Joshua (who was a type of Jesus in name and deed) entered the Promised Land on Passover day. The day they entered, the manna ceased (Joshua 5:12). According to rabbinic and apocryphal sources, “The expectation grew that the Messiah would come on Passover, and that the manna would begin to fall again.”¹³

Matthew 14:15; Mark 6:34; Luke 9:11 “He received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them” Jesus had compassion on the crowd, or as Mark reads: “as sheep without a shepherd” (Mark 6:34). Luke includes that Jesus taught as part of His healing.

Matthew 14:16; Mark 6:36–37; Luke 9:12–13; John 6:5–7 “give them something to eat” Look for the similarities between the Lord and Moses. Both felt responsible to feed their followers—manna and bread. John includes a dialogue between Jesus and Phillip. Jesus asks him questions that develop Phillip’s faith. Phillip answers the Lord that 200 *denarii* (or 200 days wages for a laborer) would not be enough money to buy the bread, even if it were feasible.

Matthew 14:17; Mark 6:38; Luke 9:13b; John 6:9 “five barley loaves and two fishes” John includes that a lad had brought the food (Did his mother carefully prepare his meal and ask him to bring back any news?). Barley was the bread of the poor, and the early spring crop. In the early Christian church, barley bread was used for the Eucharist/sacrament.¹⁴ Elisha the prophet also performed a similar springtime miracle in 2 Kings 4:42, where he used 20 small barley loaves to feed 100 men (at a time when 3 loaves, or rolls, made up one meal). Some have seen symbolism in the sum of 5 barley loaves and 2 fishes totaling 7, a favorite number in scriptures as a symbol of whole, complete, and perfection.

Matthew 14:18–19a; Mark 6:39–40; Luke 9:14–15; John 6:10 “sit down by companies” All four Gospels include the detail that Jesus had them sit on the grass, and Mark 6:40 adds, in groups of “hundreds and fifties.” Again, we see another parallel with Moses who similarly organized the children of Israel.

Matthew 14:19b; Mark 6:41; Luke 9:16; John 6:11 “Blessed and broke” This miracle is more than an evening meal. Far more miraculous than the duplication of food, Jesus used this miracle as a sign of His Messiahship. As the only miracle of nature shared by all four Gospels, we assume that the evangelists knew its significance. The Old Testament prophecies and rabbinic literature foretell of a time when manna or miraculous food will return in the Messianic age (Psalms 78:19; 81:16; Isaiah 25:6; 65:13–14).

The miraculous feeding is also a type of the Messianic feast and foreshadows the sacrament introduced at the Last Supper. The chart below points out the parallels between the miracle and the first sacrament:

Jesus' Miracle of the 5,000

	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
Took bread	Matthew 14:19	Mark 6:41	Luke 9:16	John 6:11
Looked into heaven	Matthew 14:19	Mark 6:41	Luke 9:16	
Blessed/Gave thanks	Matthew 14:19	Mark 6:41	Luke 9:16	John 6:11
Broke	Matthew 14:19	Mark 6:41	Luke 9:16	
Gave/Distributed	Matthew 14:19	Mark 6:41	Luke 9:16	John 6:11

Last Supper Sacrament

	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	1 CORINTH
Took bread	Matthew 26:26	Mark 14:22	Luke 9:16	1 Corinth 11:23
Blessed/Gave thanks	Matthew 26:26	Mark 14:22	Luke 22:19	1 Corinth 11:24
Broke	Matthew 26:26	Mark 14:22	Luke 22:19	1 Corinth 11:24
Gave/Distributed	Matthew 26:26	Mark 14:22	Luke 22:19	

“Give thanks” in Greek is “*eucharisteo*/eucharist,” the Catholic name for the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. The sacrament symbolism is clear, and certainly the Lord was teaching on several levels the blessings that will come from His hand as the Bread of Life. Jews typically offered this prayer over their bread, “Blessed are you oh Lord, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.”¹⁶ Jesus provided bread to all present (which contrasts with Satan’s temptation to create bread for himself only). Jesus’ bread from the Father blessed far more than the thousands present. His example has been followed by millions of Christians in remembering Him as they remember the Lord’s Supper or share their daily bread.

Matthew 14:20; Mark 6:42; Luke 9:17; John 6:12 “eaten their fill” Like all of Jesus’ gifts, there was an abundance: all were invited to eat their fill of bread and fish (probably salt dried or smoked), or as the synoptics say, they ate until they were “satisfied.” This also happens in 3 Nephi 20:3–9 as a sacramental feast.

Matthew 14:20b; Mark 6:43; Luke 9:17b; John 6:12–13 “gather up the left over” (NASB)

- What do you think the leftovers symbolize? The use of twelve? The fact that they were full?
- Does the twelve harken to the twelve tribes of Israel to help make the connection with those filled with the manna provided by Jehovah each day?

- The twelve extra baskets could represent the responsibilities of the Twelve Apostles to spiritually feed the followers of Christ.
- The fragments filled each basket, representing how the Lord stretches each person's basket (heart, mind, capabilities) enough to carry the load He asks them to carry. If we follow Him, He will not overburden us.
- Gathering the fragments may represent the way we should live—by every word of the Lord—nothing can be left out; we must take all of it.

Matthew 14:21; Mark 6:44; Luke 9:14; John 6:10 “beside women and children” The Synoptic Gospels end the story with the number of people (which is especially impressive in an area where most small towns were populated with a few hundred. Even the local big city, Capernaum only had a population of 1,500 at the time). Matthew's account alone gives the addition of “women and children” to the five thousand men. This is unusual on two fronts.

- First, strict Jews discouraged women and their daughters from leaving their homes. Women were not encouraged to even go to the market. This was less enforced in Galilee than in Jerusalem or other big cities (including from Philo in Alexandria).¹⁷ Generally speaking, at the time the genders were to segregate.
- Secondly, women at the time did not join in learning settings. Girls were not given a public education (as the boys were), and all education was centered on domestic skills.¹⁸

Both of these add up to show how Jesus disrupted the cultural baggage. He invited and encouraged women and children to be in His presence and to prioritize learning of Him. Across the NT, we see Jesus speaking to women, touching, teaching, and asking them to be His witnesses. He made an abrupt and radical change from the Pharisaic culture in hope of restoring the mutuality established in the Garden of Eden.

John 6:14–15 “This is of a truth that prophet” This refers to the prophet that God promised would be like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18; 1 Nephi 22:21) and they were right, but they did not understand what “that prophet” was asking them to do. John ends his retelling by including the crowd's desire to force Jesus to be their king. This was not the Lord's purpose, so He “withdrew again to the mountain.” By repeating this setting again, and then moving into the next setting of John's fifth miracle when Jesus walked on the water, the text further typifies the Mosaic exodus:



	EXODUS	JOHN 6
Goes to a mountain	Exodus 3:1	John 6:3, 15
Multiplies signs	7:10–11, 19, 8:5, 17	6:2, 26, 30
Near Passover	12:2–3	6:4
Manna	16:2–7	6:31, 49, 58
Manna/Bread	16:15	6:7, 23
Manna called bread from heaven	16:3–4	6: 31, 35, 50–58
Gathered by 12	16:16–21	6:12–23
Fled by going through/on water	14:13–16	6:16–21
Sea crossing at night	14:21	6:18
“I am that I am” / “It is I”	3:14	6:20
Mention of shore	14:30	6:21
Murmurings	16:7–8; Num 14:27	6:43–46

Matthew 14:22–25; Mark 6:45–48; John 6:16–19 “even was now come . . . a great wind blew” The disciples leave in a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee/Tiberius in the evening (another tie to Moses’ first Passover as it was night when Israel arrived at the sea). Matthew 14:25 says it was between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m. when they see the Lord. The dimensions of the sea are about 7 x 12 miles. They had only rowed 25–30 furlongs (about 3–4 miles) when Jesus joined them walking on the sea. The storm may have been a result of Satan’s efforts on the water to distract or thwart Jesus’ work.

Matthew 14:27; Mark 6:49; John 6:19–20 “Jesus walking on the sea” Between the darkness and the storm, the disciples are “terrified” (NIV, “alarmed,” AB, “frightened” NAS) when they see something walking on the water. Jesus calms them down by calling to them, “it is I.” He uses the Divine name given to Moses on Sinai, “I am” or “It is I.” When we remember who He is, our faith and trust grow.

“Be of good cheer” The timing of this direction (or commandment?) from Jesus is interesting. This phrase is given repeatedly in scripture. Interestingly, it is often given in times of great fear or alarm (i.e. after Paul is attacked and nearly “pulled in pieces,” Acts 23:10–11; in the middle of Paul’s ship wreck, Acts 27:22, 25; after Jesus tells His apostles of His upcoming death, John 16:33; when the believers are about to be destroyed, 3 Nephi 1:13; after a very dangerous trip and seeing the devil on the water, D&C 61:36; etc.). The timing makes the message all the more meaningful. In our scariest hours, the Lord wants us to trust that He is there, aware, and will make sure it all ends well.

Matthew 14:28–32 “bid me come unto thee”

Eager Peter wants to join the Lord, and does. But like most disciples, when their focus is moved from Christ to the winds, they begin to sink with fear and doubt. Peter calls out, “Lord save me” and Jesus stretches His hand out to catch him. The physical action represents Jesus’ role as our eternal Savior and Redeemer. This is a physical example of the verbal promise repeated throughout the OT, “my hand is stretched out still.”²⁰ This interaction between Peter and the Lord is encouragement to all believers who lose focus at times.

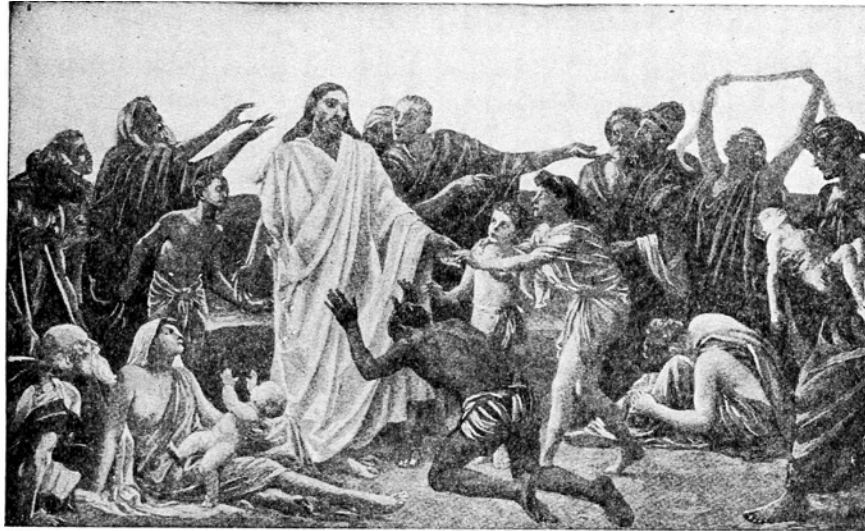


Image from page 238 of “Hurlbut’s Life of Christ for young and old” (1915). Image via Flickr.

Matthew 14:29–33; Mark 6:49–52; John 6:21

Three miracles occur here: 1) Jesus (and Peter for a short time) walk on water, 2) the storm stops instantaneously when Jesus’ steps into the boat, and 3) the boat “immediately was at the land,” thus traverses the last 3–5 miles to the shore. While Mark includes the apostles puzzling over the miracle, Matthew has the apostles worshipping Jesus in the boat.

Jesus Heals in Gennesaret or Ginasor

Matthew 14:34–36; Mark 6:53–56; John 6:22–25

Matthew 14:34–36; Mark 6:53–56; John 6:22–23 “as many as touched were made perfectly whole” While John’s crowds try to figure out how Jesus’ miraculous crossing the sea happened, Matthew and Mark record the crowd swarming Jesus for His healing touch. Even those who touched the “border of his garment” were healed (Mark 6:56). The text sounds like not only were their bodies healed, but they were also emotionally and spiritually “made perfectly whole” (Matthew 6:56). Those who touched the border or “fringe” or “tassels” (NIV) of Jesus’ garment, were reaching for a sacred place in Hebrews’ clothing. Numbers 15:39 explains, that the “tassels [are] for you to look at, so that you may remember all the commandments of the LORD, that you may obey them” (BSB). Thus, in addition to acknowledging Jesus as a healer, they are seeing Him connected to God’s ancient law to the children of Israel. After the Lord’s resurrection, a similar crowd will follow Peter to again seek God’s healing power, thus demonstrating literarily how Peter walked with Jesus’ authority (Acts 5:15).

John 6:24 “Capernaum” Jesus, the apostles, and the multitude meet up in Capernaum (the home base for Jesus’ Galilean ministry). Perhaps they are staying at the home of Peter’s mother in law home (Mark 1:30). Archeologists found grinding mills for making flour in Capernaum. Perhaps this is why Jesus chose this setting for the

“Bread of Life” sermon. Furthermore, John recently motioned that it was the season of Passover (a one-night feast) followed by the “Feast of Unleavened Bread” (seven days of feasting). Symbolically, Jesus fulfills the role of the hidden unleavened bread or *afikoman* (the bread that is broken and hidden, that signifies the hidden promised Messiah in the Passover feast).

John 6:25 “Rabbi” Note now that the people address Jesus as a teacher or “Rabbi,” but not “King” or “prophet.” In each village, a rabbi was a teacher, and a chief rabbi was usually the most educated in the law and led the people of the town spiritually. The crowd asks Jesus about His miraculous crossing, but He responds that He came from heaven. Jesus’ answer turns into a sermon that stretches their minds to deeper theological views on His Divinity.

Jesus Preaches the Bread of Life Sermon: Fourth Discourse in John

John 6:26–53

John 6:26–27a “Labor . . . unto everlasting life” Jesus taught a group in the synagogue in Capernaum (John 6:59) that they should not seek for perishable food, but for lasting eternal nourishment which He alone can give. The JST adds an important addition from Jesus’ lips (in italics), “Ye seek me, not *because ye desire to keep my sayings, neither* because ye saw the miracles.” What the Lord asks is that we believe, learn, and live His teaching.

John 6:27b “Son of Man” Jesus refers to Himself with this title, but so did Old Testament prophets. The Old Testament and Book of Mormon (adding more evidence that it is an ancient text) always use the phrase for sons of Adam. The New Testament and Doctrine and Covenants always use the title for Jesus. The Pearl of Great Price cites it sixteen times for Jesus, and once for Moses.

Usage of “Son of Man”

H = Human, D = Divine

OT		NT		BOM		D&C		POG	
Isaiah	2 H	Matthew	3 D	2 Nephi 8:12	1 H	D&C	16 D	Moses	1 H 8 D
Job	2 H	Mark	15 D					Abraham	1 D
Jeremiah	2 H	Luke	25 D					JS–Matthew	7 D
Ezekiel	92 H	John	12 D						
Daniel	2 H	Acts	1 D						

Perhaps the reason why we see such a clear delineation is the timing of when the book claims to be written. Those books written after the time of Jesus use the title as Jesus did. Only in texts initiating from the Mosaic Law do we find it referencing humanity. This also speaks to the Book of Mormon as an ancient text—stemming from



Image of bread by zefe wu via Pixabay.

the period of the Mosaic Law. In the texts claiming origins from Adam through Abraham we find the Divine references, probably from Enoch's record, now found in Moses 6:57:

Teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent . . . [to] dwell in [H]is presence; for, in the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is his name, and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man, even Jesus Christ, a righteous Judge, who shall come in the meridian of time.

This usage is an example of precious knowledge coming and leaving the earth at different times through periods of apostasy and restoration. Jesus restored the information, but His audience in Capernaum may not have known Enoch's information.²¹ This is probably why his audience did not recognize that Jesus was telling them that He was the Son of God.

Note the future tense "Son of man *shall* give," pointing to Jesus' great eschatological miracle of immortality and Eternal Life for all mankind. However, the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) changed this to the present tense: "*hath power to give.*" This change also brings Jesus' saving work into the present—lives now. Jesus further promises that those who labor for everlasting life will be "*sealed*" by God the Father. This has a special significance to those who believe in sealings as ordinances binding families in heaven.

John 6:28–29 “What shall we do, that we might work the words of God?” The Jews understand enough to ask what they should do, but they are still on the material level, unable to realize that their job is to believe in Him. Jesus teaches that faith in Him requires work.

John 6:30–31 “what [further] sign” When the Jews realized that Jesus was not going to provide for their physical needs again, they asked for another sign. The Jews bring up the Mosaic exodus themes. Some rabbis taught that Moses’ greatest miracle provided manna. They claimed that manna was angels’ food. These stories went so far as to assume that manna had a diverse taste to suit all ages and desires (but to all Gentiles it was bitter). Moreover, they also looked for a Messiah who would give them an unfailing supply of manna.²³ Their false expectations got in the road of seeing Jesus’ miracle for what it was—a sign of the Promised Messiah.

John 6:32 “the true bread from heaven” Jesus answers their request for another sign by teaching them the greatest of all signs or miracles—but they do not realize that Jesus is their Creator God, Jehovah, and Emanuel. Jesus uses the same teaching pattern that we find in Jewish exegesis. In the Torah, Deuteronomy 8:3 also taught the children of Israel that “man doth not live by bread only, but by every word . . . of the LORD” (also see Proverbs 9:5). The true or real bread belongs to eternal realms, as opposed to our natural or passing realm.²⁴ The realm of the Spirit testifies of all truth. John’s text carefully goes from the past tense (40 years in the wilderness) to the present tense (“gave” to “giveth”). This emphasizes that God is still in control, moving forward (i.e. those who ate manna are now dead, but heavenly bread will sustain Eternal Life).

John 6:33–34 “give us this bread” This dialogue is much like the one between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well when Jesus offers her “living water” (John4:11). Both audiences are not understanding Jesus’ beautiful offer. We are all learning the same things at different times.

PART 1—John 6:35–50

John 6:35 “I am” This is the first of four “I am” statements that Jesus uses in this sermon (and 60 in John’s Gospel). Jesus uses it here to testify that He is Jehovah, the God that spoke to Moses from the burning bush on Sinai.

John 6:37 “come to me” Now the Lord will not reject anyone who comes unto Him (in contrast with Eden where all are driven out of God’s presence).

John 6:38 “I came down from Heaven” Here comes John’s logos theme again—Jesus is an ambassador of His Father. His motivation is not selfish, nor governed by what His audience wants. He says, “I came to feed you spiritually not physically; I came to teach God’s truth, not yours; I came to throw out legions of devils from your lives, not legions of Romans.”



Gathering of the Manna by James Tissot.

John 6:39–40 “all which He has given me” includes all sons and daughters descending from Adam and Eve. Just as He left no fragments of bread behind, He will leave no humans behind. Jesus loses none who came into mortality—He died for them all. Resurrection and immortality will be given to all mortals. Those who receive the highest blessings of the Melchizedek priesthood, in this life or the next, will see God and are promised to live with Him again in Eternal Life or exaltation. The JST adds, “*in the resurrection of the just,*” emphasizes the different resurrections. By the time Joseph got to this chapter in John, he had already received the vision of the degrees of glory (D&C 76:15). I think the JST reflects that.

John 6:41–43 “murmuring” plagues every generation of unbelievers (Exodus 16:28) and, in some generations, believers.

John 6:44 “I will raise him up” The JST adds a missing conditional, “No man can come unto me, except *he doeth the will of my Father who hath sent me. And this is the will of him who hath sent me, that ye receive the Son; for the Father beareth record of him; and he who receiveth the testimony, and doeth the will of him who sent me, I will raise up in the resurrection of the just.*” Humans receive more knowledge about God, as they are drawn to Jesus and learn from the Holy Spirit (also D&C 88:63; 2 Nephi 27:25).

John 6:45 “these shall all be taught of God” This JST addition links this beautiful blessing with those who receive the resurrection of the just. The prophet that Jesus quotes is Isaiah 54:13 (from the Greek Septuagint, LXX).

John 6:46–47 “He that believeth on me hath everlasting life” We love this verse because John teaches that those “of God” or those repentant people who have received the Savior’s purification, can and will see the Father.

John 6:48–50 “I am the bread of life” Jesus clarifies the symbol of “bread.” These Jews pride themselves on their ancestors, but they died. Jesus is the way to receive Eternal nourishment. He provides substance or bread for everlasting life. Eternal life and all other good things in our entire universe, past, present and future, are all made possible through Jesus’ atonement. In our mortal state, food/bread, sustains existence temporarily. Jesus reminds his audience that even though their ancestors were divinely fed with manna, they all experienced physical death. But if we eat and internalize the bread (i.e. words and life example) that Jesus offers us—in connection with His atonement—He can sustain us with everlasting life (John 6:50 and 6:58 repeat).²⁴

John 6:51 “living bread” Jesus adds a theme from Eden: Death comes to the earth, but living bread has powers like the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:3). The Tree of Life provided a way to live forever, just as Jesus’ living bread does. Jesus’ atonement becomes the way to receive the Tree of Life. Jewish synagogues used a 3-year cycle of scripture reading each Passover that reflected these scriptural themes from Genesis 1–8; Exodus 11-16; Number 6-14.²⁵

John introduced his Gospel with, “the Word had become flesh” (John 1:14). Then at Jesus’ baptism, He introduces a new life, that comes when we are “born again” (John 3:3). If baptism gives us new life, then the sacrament or the “Bread of Life” is food to nourish that new life. The metaphor of eating to represent internalizing something was familiar to Christ’s audience, like we “devour a book” (Isaiah 3:1 also uses it).²⁶ Furthermore, each Jewish family would have been preparing for the Passover—to eat the roasted sacrificial lamb, drink the new wine, and unleavened bread. These symbols must have been on their mind.



Giovanni da Modena. Fresco in the church of St. Petronio of Bologna.

PART 2—John 6:52–58

John 6:52–53, 55–56 “eat the flesh . . . drink his blood” Jesus words to eat and drink His flesh and blood were extremely offensive to many. They interpreted it as cannibalism. Jesus knew this. I think he presented in a way to have them think harder. We now look back on these symbols for Jesus’ atoning sacrifice during our sacrament. In addition to a sacrament symbol, Hebrews used “flesh and blood” as an idiom for “the whole man.” By asking them to eat and drink, Jesus invites the audience to take part in the great At-one-ment. But they only heard the physical shocking level. It was especially offensive because blood was unclean to a Jew. Their entire sacrificial ritual at the temple was arranged to dispose of the blood carefully without contaminating anyone. Even menstru-

ating women had to leave the camp of Israel for their “uncleanliness” for seven days (Leviticus 12:5; 15:25). Likewise, after childbirth, a woman was unclean for 40 days after a baby boy, and 80 days after a baby girl (as woman was created second so the time is doubled). It was so offensive that it blocked them from having ears to hear.

John 6:54 “resurrection of the just” is consistently added by the JST to change all the “last day” references to references of the first resurrection.

John 6:57 “living Father” Nowhere else in the NT do we find this beautiful title for our Heavenly Father. Through Jesus’ mediation, He offers humanity a bridge to share in God’s life.

John 6:59–60 “who can hear it?” Jesus ends His sermon with the dramatic call to completely apply His message—let His mission and message nourish you and allow you to grow. This is not the way most heard it though. This sermon became a turning point for Jesus’ followers. Sadly, there is a great falling away after this sermon.

John 6:61 “Does this offend you?” (NIV) It sounds like even some disciples (the same that crossed the sea in 6:16?) are “scandalized” (Greek)

John 6:62–63 “it is the spirit that quickeneth” Jesus asks if they could understand His meaning if they understood His premortal glory. When trying to understand the Lord (or any scripture), Jesus teaches how to use a spiritual interpretation. Jesus’ words are life giving if we will understand them by His Spirit.

John 6:64 “believe not” John explains that Jesus knew that someone would betray Him from the beginning of His mission. I don’t know if this directly relates to Judas Iscariot or perhaps just generally (verse 71 sounds like Jesus knew the betrayer was Judas by that time).

John 6:65 “except he doeth the will of my Father who hath sent me” This JST addition opens the doorway for all to try to come unto Christ, nor just those elected (remember the KJV translated were immersed in predestination).

John 6:66 “disciples went back” We see John’s “rejection theme” again. What are the “hard sayings” (John 6:60) that might keep us away in the future?

John 6:67 “the twelve” John’s first reference to the Twelve Apostles finds them already organized into a quorum. The number 12 is consistently used in scripture as the organization of God—both in the heavens with 12 months, 12 constellations, and on earth with the 12 tribes, 12 Apostles. You can feel for Jesus’ disappointment and sorrow as He asks His organized body of special witnesses, “Will you also go away?”

John 6:68–69 “Thou hast the words of eternal life” Peter responds as the spokesman for the Twelve, showing his commitment and belief with a beautiful testimony that must have comforted the Lord.

John 6:70–71 “one of you is a devil” The symbol of the ever-present diabolical influence is here in the person of Judas Iscariot. I think it is interesting to know that Judas’ last name in Hebrew means, “man = Is of the city = *cariot*.” Tradition says he was from a Judean village, *Kerioth*, just outside of Jerusalem—but that is not substantiated. However, we see evidence that he was proud and possibly did not share the kinship that other members of the twelve felt. The message whispers, “be careful,” never assume we are on the Lord’s side until we have passed all of life’s trials.

Header Image: Miracle of the Bread and Fish by Giovanni Lanfranco, ca. 1620. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Below: Image by dh_creative via Pixabay.



ENDNOTES

1. The *seven miracles* or signs included in John's Gospel are: 1) John2:1–11, changed water to wine; 2) John4:46–54, healed an official's son; 3) John5:1–15, healed a paralytic; 4) John6:5–14, fed 5,000+; 5) John6:16–24, walked on the water; 6) John 9:1–7, healed the blind man; 7) John11:1–45, raised Lazarus from the dead. The *seven public sermons* in John's Gospel are: 1) John3:1–36, Nicodemus on new birth; 2) John4:1–42, woman at the well on living water; 3) John5:19–47, the Divine Son; 4) John6:22–66, the Bread of Life; 5) John7:1–52, the Life-Giving Spirit; 6) John8:12–59, I am the Light of the World; and 7) John10:1–42, The Good Shepherd.
2. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John: A concise Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988), 39.
3. Raymond Brown, *The Anchor Bible Series: John 1–X* (New Haven, CT: Yale Press).
4. Matthew 12:10–12; Mark 1:23–26; Luke 13:14; 14:3–4; John 5:9; 9:14; etc. Similarly, Jesus teaches that He is the Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5).
5. New Testament Studies in Scripture, 280.
6. Andrew Ehat and Lyndon Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses* (SLC, UT: Bookcraft, 1980), 357; corrected spelling taken from History of the Church, 6:305.
7. John Taylor, *An Examination into and an Elucidation of the Great Principle of the Meditation and Atonement of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ* (SLC, UT: Deseret, 1893), 136.
8. Lorenzo Snow, "Unchangeable Love of God," Sermon delivered in the SLC Tabernacle, Sunday Sept 18, 1898. Also recorded in: *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow* (SLC, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of LDS, 2013).
9. Joel Marcus, *The Anchor Yale Bible: Mark 1–8, vol 27* (New Haven, CT: Yale and Doubleday, 2000), 381.
10. King Herod the Great was not great in the sense of being a great ruler; instead he was a murderous, paranoid tyrant. So I have chosen to adopt the phrase, "Herod the Great Builder" in my reference to him.
11. Marcus, *Anchor: Mark 1–8*, 392.
12. Herodias was also both husbands' niece. The Gospel of Mark confused the name of the first husband as Philip (who was actually Herodias' son-in-law). Josephus says Herodias' first husband's name was also Herod.
13. Brown, *Anchor: John*, 265.
14. *Ibid.*, 248.
15. *Ibid.*, 265; also see II Baruch 29:8.
16. Brown, *Anchor: John*, 234.
17. Judaeus Philo, *Special Laws III.*, 7 vols. (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1967), 3.169, 171. The Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (20 BC to AD 50) described his view of the ideal separation of men and women in public: "Marketplaces and council-halls, law-courts and gatherings, and meetings where a large number of people are assembled, and open-air life with full scope for discussion and action – all these are suitable to men both in war and peace. The women are best suited to the indoor life which never strays from the house . . . A woman then, should not be a busybody, meddling with matters outside her household concerns, but should seek a life of seclusion." His ideas are matched by

Josephus, Sirach, and later, the Mishnah. See Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. 22 vols. (Detroit, NYC, San Francisco: Thomson Gale, 2007), 21:161. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, B.L. Bandstra and A.D. Verhey, "Sex," 4. 431.

18. Philo, *Hypothetica*, 7:14; "The husband seems competent to transmit knowledge of the laws to his wife, the father to his children, the master to his slaves." Other men felt it a sin to education their daughters. Tal Ilan, *Jewish women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 191. Skolnik, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 6.323.
19. Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of Women in the New Testament* (Palo Alto, CA: Good Publ., 2015), 13-34.
20. Exodus 6:6; Deuteronomy 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 9:29; Isaiah 5:25; 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4; etc. The question I asked myself after reading these references was the hand or arm of the Lord "stretched out still" in strength, mercy or punishment? In a preliminary study, I found the following numbers associated with all the biblical references to God's stretched out arm or hand. It referred to: strength 35 times, mercy 7 times, and punishment 6 times. However, I wonder if God's hand of punishment is actually, in the eternal scheme, an act of loving help.
21. A book of Enoch was discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls dating to 300 BC. Other books of Enoch also appear ancient, but they do not include this title for God the Father and His Son.
22. James Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 347.
23. Brown, *Anchor: John*, 300.
24. Kent Jackson, Robert Millet, *Studies in Scripture*, 5:293.
25. Brown, *Anchor: John*, 279
26. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 348.



MATTHEW 16–17 MARK 9; LUKE 9

SIGN SEEKERS AND SIGN RECEIVERS

Introduction

In these chapters, Jesus is still in Galilee, primarily north of the Lake or Sea of Galilee. Remember the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke—arrange everything geographically. After Jesus’ baptism, they tell all the stories of Jesus’ Galilean ministry, and then include one trip south to Jerusalem for the last week of His life. The Synoptic Gospels have no mention of a three-year ministry, so we do not know exactly when these events happened.¹ Only John includes Jesus traveling back and forth several times to Jerusalem for three Passovers, and other feasts including Tabernacles, Dedication (Hanukah), and possibly Pentecost.² We assume these events happened sometime in the second or third year of Jesus’ ministry as they come after the feeding of the 5,000 (which falls at the second Passover in John 6:4).

Pharisees Seek another Sign

Matthew 16:1-4; 12:38-39; Mark 8:11-13; Luke 12:54-56

Matthew 16:1 (Matthew 12:38; Mark 8:11; Luke 11:16) “Pharisees and Sadducees” The Synoptic Gospels repeat a similar request for Jesus to show “a sign from heaven” four times—each ending with “the sign of Jonah.” Each time, the account has a slightly different audience (“scribes and Pharisees” in Matthew 12:38; “Pharisees” in Mark 8:11; and “others testing him” in Luke 11:16), suggesting that people repeatedly asked Jesus for a sign of his Messiahship. Their testing sounds similar to Satan’s temptations as they ask “him to show them a sign from heaven” (Matthew 16:1, NIV).

Pharisees were one of the four popular divisions within Judaism at the time of the New Testament (NT). Their name means, “separatists.” According to Josephus, there were 6,000 Pharisees, and they were “the most accurate interpreters of the laws.”³ They emphasized purity, supported the oral laws, tithed money and food, believed in the resurrection, and strictly observed the Sabbath.⁴ They were the longest lasting group, and even survived the destruction of the Second Temple (AD 68–70). Their records and rabbinic interpretation of the Law are recorded in the Mishnah.

Sadducees were a smaller group within the four divisions of Judaism. They filled the seats of the chief priests’ and high priest in this late Second Temple era. Sadducees usually stayed close to the Temple. Matthew 16 is the only place in the NT that we find Sadducees traveling from Jerusalem up to Galilee. They came to inquire after the amazing things they heard about Jesus (we also read of them traveling to hear John the Baptist in Bethabara,

The Pharisees Question Jesus by James Tissot.



but that was closer to Jerusalem). They focused their belief on the Temple and in the Torah (the first five books of Moses). They did not believe in a resurrection.⁵

Matthew 16:2–3; Luke 12:54–56; “ye cannot tell the signs of the times” (JST) Jesus basically asked his questioners, “If you are observant enough to forecast the weather, why not be aware of what’s going on around you?”⁶ Jews immersed themselves in studying their Laws. Jesus asserts that this should have prepared them to recognize their Messiah, but they were blinded by false traditions and misunderstood expectations.

Matthew 16:4; Matthew 12:39; Mark 8:12 JST; Luke 11:29 “sign of Jonah” Jesus’ audience included verbal sign seekers. The Lord had already offered many signs of his divine nature, but the unbelievers continued to ask for more. He repeated the answer he gave earlier in Matthew 12:39, offering the “sign of Jonah”:

MATT 12:39

An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but **the sign of the prophet Jonas:**

MATT 16:4

A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but **the sign of the prophet Jonas.**

MATT 8:12 JST

There shall be no sign be given unto this generation, save **the sign of the prophet Jonah;** for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly, so likewise shall the Son of Man be buried in the bowels of the earth.⁷

LUKE 11:29

This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but **the sign of Jonas the prophet**

This “sign of Jonah” was fulfilled after Jesus’ crucifixion. While his body lay in the tomb for three days and nights, his spirit went to the Spirit World to organize missionary work (D&C 138:30–36). I wonder if Jonah knew that his miserable experience had a far higher purpose than merely teaching him a lesson. Jesus’ typological interpretation of Jonah’s experience is mentioned 700 years after it happened. The Prophet Hosea taught that God used the ministry of the prophets as symbols to testify of Him (Hosea 12:10).

Other scripture explain that *heavenly signs* will follow those that believe: “I will show miracles, signs, and wonders, unto all those who believe on my name” (D&C 35:8; also see D&C 45:16, 39–40). This includes the signs associated with gifts of the Spirit (healings, faith, discernment, etc.); “[They] are given for the benefit of those

who love me and keep all my commandments, and him that seeketh so to do; that all may be benefited that seek or that ask of me, that ask and not for a sign that they may consume it upon their lusts” (D&C 46:9). 1 Corinthians 14:22 adds that some signs, like the gift of tongues, are for missionary work. Later in this section of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we find how those who believe were given grand heavenly signs on the Mount of Transfiguration.

The Leaven of the Pharisees

Matthew 16:5-12; Mark 8:14-21

“beware of the leaven of the Pharisees” The disciples traveled in a boat to a secluded place.⁸ It appears that they were again in an area without a place to buy food—or at least sanctioned or “clean” food. The law of Moses outlined which foods were “clean” for human use. By the time of the NT, hundreds of oral laws were added to that list (including not being able to eat food prepared or grown on gentile lands).



Photo of pita bread by jeffreyw via Flickr.

Jesus must have been a wordsmith as he used a play on words. (We saw it in John 3:8, when he talked with Nicodemus about the wind and spirit which share the same word, *pneuma*. In Matthew 16:18, plays with the words “Peter” and “rock.”) Jesus used “leaven” to describe an emotional puffing up, not the process of fermentation in bread from a sour dough starter. In the Old Testament (OT), over ten references to leaven discuss the domestic practice of cleaning out all leaven in a home in preparation for the Passover Feast and accompanying “Week of Unleavened Bread” (Exodus 13:7; Deuteronomy 16:3). The ancient children of Israel removed leaven as a symbol of corruption or evil. This was a common image during NT times.

Leavened bread does not last as long as unleavened crackers. Something in the leavening agent made the bread grow mildew or become inedible faster. Symbolically, the leaven of the Pharisees is whatever puffed them up with pride, and made them corrupt. In our dispensation the Lord warned Joseph Smith that when people have positions of power, or periods of fame, they often tend to become corrupt (D&C 121:36–39).

Only Mark 8:15 adds, “the leaven of Herod.” This is an unusual addition, yet most biblical scholars assume it is original. Perhaps it fits into the same meaning as an explanation of Esther 3:8 in the Jewish Targum: “Just as we remove leaven, so may the evil ruler be removed from us and may we be freed from this foolish king.”⁹ Just as

there were corrupt rulers at the time of Esther, at the time of Jesus, the evil and corrupt ruler was the tetrarch Herod. He was used as the example of puffed up corruption. We can imagine Herod would have been on the disciples' minds with the recent news that he just killed John the Baptist.

Matthew 16:7–10; Mark 8:16, 21 “Do ye not yet understand?” Jesus is exasperated to find that even his disciples cannot see the spiritual innuendos in his message. They do not trust that he can provide for them. He recalled both miracles of the feeding groups of 4,000 and 5,000. This is the third time the Gospel of Matthew brings our attention to the miraculous feedings tucked into Messianic Meals. I presume it's cited again to reinforce the prophetic fulfillment of the return of manna/bread. We know it was very important because it is the only miracle that all four gospels include. Matthew's three references makes sure we do not miss the sign!

Matthew 16:10; Mark 8:19–20 “remember the five . . . [and] seven loaves” Some have questioned whether there were actually two miraculous feedings, or if the disciples remembered the stories differently. However, this summary by Jesus gives evidence that two miraculous feedings occurred at different occasions. Furthermore, Mark is careful in his record to write it in a chiastic form, emphasizing the miraculous nature of the event.¹⁰

- 8:1a Large crowd present
- 8:2b–3 Nothing to eat
- 8:4 Disciples question how to feed the multitudes
- 8:5–6a Multiplication of the loaves
- 8:6b Disciples distribute the bread
- 8:7 Multitude fed the loaves
- 8:8 After eating the crowd is satisfied
- 8:9 Quantity of left overs noted
- 8:9 4,000 in crowd

The Gospel of Mark also repeats the numbers five, seven, and twelve for emphasis. Five is the number of the Torah, the five books of Moses, the Law or Pentateuch. In the miracle of feeding 4,000 the Lord started with seven loaves, and in the 5,000, two fishes were added to the five loaves making a total of seven. Symbolically, seven represented complete or even perfect in the sense of being whole. This symbolism stems from the creation is found throughout the Bible.¹¹ The number twelve referenced the twelve left over baskets. It is significant as a number used in the order and organization of God's kingdom—both in the universe with twelve moons, and on earth with the twelve tribes, twelve apostles, and twelve as a key age for priesthood service. The repetition of these numbers appears to have the greatest symbolic importance in the OT, especially in temple rituals.

Matthew 16:11–12 “then they understood” The Gospels of Matthew and Mark share the text until these verses when Matthew deviated from Mark’s record to include Jesus’ explanation of the leaven.¹² Jesus warned them not to follow the false “teachings” (RSV, NIV, ASV, etc.) or “doctrine” (KJV) of the Pharisees or any other puffed-up and corruptible intellect or leader. One of the major objections that Jesus has against the Pharisees is that they were so caught up in the details of their traditions (Oral Laws) that they could not appreciate the higher law or even the original Law of Moses.



The Primacy of Saint Peter by James Tissot.

Peter Testifies

Matthew 16:13–20; Mark 8:27–30; Luke 9:18–21

Matthew 16:13; Mark 8:27 “Caesarea Philippi” Matthew’s and Mark’s setting changes to 20 miles north of the Sea of Galilee to a beautiful fertile area at the foot of Mount Herman (the tallest mountain, and most massive formation in the country). No one other than the disciples are mentioned. The JST Luke tells us that Jesus “went alone with his disciples to pray,” and then asked their private group. By Jesus asking this question, it first adds a whole different dimension to the second:

MATT 16:13

Whom do men say that I the
Son of man am?

MARK 8:27

Whom do men say that I am?

LUKE 9:18

Whom say the people that I am?

Jesus initially called himself “Son of man” only in Matthew 16:13, (but a few verses later that switches, when Mark 8:31 and Luke 9:22 use it, but Matthew does not). Jesus used this title more than any other to refer to himself in the Gospels. As discussed last week, “Son of man” refers to a sacred name for God the Father that Enoch shared in Moses 6:57, “in the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is his name, and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man.” The title is not understood the same way by other Christians, who see it as a confession of Jesus’ mortality and future death.

“SON OF MAN”

Matthew = 31

Mark = 15

Luke = 26

John = 12

Matthew 16:15; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20 “But whom say ye that I am?” This is far more powerful as the second question. It causes more personal reflection. It is the same question we are asked each Sunday during the sacrament, and at each temple recommend interview. We Christians can answer Jesus’ question with every word, thought, and deed. I like to answer it as part of my private prayers—witnessing my faith and seeking for more.

Matthew 16:16 Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20 “Thou art the Christ” I can just imagine Peter jumping to answer Jesus with a burning testimony—You are the Promised Messiah—the Son of God! (Although, Jesus’ apostles would have probably been speaking in Aramaic—the colloquial language brought back from Babylon—*Msheekha*, or in Hebrew—the ancient language of Abraham—*Messiah*. The Greek translation Christ, was not used as a title for Jesus until years after His resurrection.) We see Peter’s same enthusiasm as the first to jump out of the boat to try to walk on the water and the first to run into the empty tomb. His example encourages all disciples to likewise defend and testify of our Lord in any language. It meant enough to him that in his first epistle, he encourages disciples to “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15, NIV), Keeping your witness burning takes daily flaming of the fire by the Spirit.

Matthew 16:17 “revealed it unto thee” Only Matthew continues with the Lord’s directions to Peter. The theme here is revelation and it is carried on through the next few verses. The phrase “flesh and blood” is found frequently in Rabbinic writings of the time. It can mean, “human agency,” or represent mortality as in the contrast, “a king of flesh and blood” in contrast with the heavenly King.¹³



Matthew 16:18 “I will build my church” Jesus calls Simon, “Cephas/Peter,” which was not used as a name at this time. It was as if Jesus said, “I’m going to call you ‘little rock.’” Note the footnote to 18a, Christ is the Rock or Stone of Israel. He was also a builder (Mark 6:3)—which in that area probably meant that Joseph and Jesus were stone masons (not carpenters as KJV translates).

There are different levels of meanings to this verse. First, that Christ’s church is built upon revelation. Second, the powers of evil cannot hold the new community and the Kingdom of God. Third, the plan of Redemption will destroy Satan’s hold on people eternally.

Matthew 16:19 “I will give unto thee the keys” The chief apostle is the agent to hold the keys and exercise the power of God. These verses combine the definitions of the priesthood: 1) the power of God, and 2) those that hold keys as God’s servants. It also brings the knowledge and authority for salvation through the ordinances. We believe that the binding Jesus refers to here is the sealing power that he will give one week later as described in Matthew 17:3.

Jesus Foretells His Death

Matthew 16:21–23; Mark 8:31–33; Luke 9:22

Matthew 16:21; Mark 18:31; Luke 9:22 “From that time forth . . .” As Jesus’ Galilean mission comes to an end, He focuses His teaching to prepare His apostles for the trauma that will occur. The Gospel of Matthew includes four specific prophecies of Jesus’ passion. 1) go to Jerusalem, 2) suffer many things, 3) be killed, 4) be raised on the third day (Mark and Luke repeat the last three). Jesus already knew of his future passion—suffering and death—as well as his resurrection, but his disciples did not understand.

The suffering aspect of a Messiah was not expected by the Jews, nor Jesus' disciples. Even the apostle Peter who had just testified that Jesus is their promised Messiah, denounced the very thought of Jesus' traitorous death. The Jews did not understand that Messiahship included the four "suffering Servant" passages in Isaiah 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–7; and 52:13–53:12. In the Jewish collection of Messianic *Psalms of Solomon*, written sometime in the 1st or 2nd century BC, we see the word "king" mentioned 24 times, but never the word "suffering." We find attributes that their Messiah will have, such as "Anointed of the Lord . . . goodness . . . mercy . . . judgement . . . peace . . . reign . . . thy love toward the seed of Abraham," but nothings about His rejection, pain and torturous death.¹⁴ This is why even Peter, the chief apostle, refuses to accept this new piece of information. It went against everything they expected.

Matthew 16:22–23; Mark 8:32–33 "He rebuked Peter saying . . . thou savourest not the things that be of God" Peter is not ready to hear the Lord's prophecies that contradict the common understanding on what the Messiah will do. He bravely speaks out as if to defend the Lord. But Peter is wrong. We too, are misinformed and wrong when we do not accept God's plan for our lives.

- *Do we ever unwittingly rebuke the Lord?*
- *Do we do the same in our thoughts?*
- *Do we think like a man or like God?*
- *Are we pliable after the Lord's rebuke?*

Note that Luke does not include Peter's overzealousness and *rarely* portrays Jesus or his apostles in a weakened human light. Occasionally, when he does, he softens his statements compared to the other Gospels.

Cost of Discipleship

Matthew 16:24–28; Mark 8:34–9:1; Luke 9: 23–27; John 12:25

Matthew 16:24; Mark 34; Luke 9:23 "If any man will come after me . . . deny himself . . . take up his cross daily" Jesus admonishes his disciples, both in ancient times and today, to follow him by placing his direction above their personal perspective. Disciples must become less motivated by selfish interests, and more directed by God. Sometimes that includes drinking the cup that God has for each to drink. Often that is staying on the *strait* path (meaning difficult, only route through a narrow opening¹⁵), without becoming distracted. He also asks us to make the sacrifices that God requires.

To take up one's "cross" had a specific meaning in the Roman Empire. A "cross" referred specifically to the wooden beams used in crucifixion. The word "cross" is found 27 times in the NT, all of them refer to "an upright stake, a cross, the Roman instrument of crucifixion."¹⁶ By the 19th century, it also was defined in English as "any severe affliction or trial." The JST builds on this 19th century definition as it adds: "And now for a man to take

up his cross, is to deny himself all ungodliness, and every worldly lust, and keep my commandments” (Matthew 16:25). The process of carrying what God gives us, can transform us to become holy or sanctified.

Matthew 16:25–26; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24 “Whosoever will save his life, must be willing to lose it for my sake” (JST, Luke 9:24). The Prophet Joseph Smith felt inspired to augment each of the Synoptic Gospels in this section.

MATT 16:25b–26

Break not my commandments for to save your lives; For whosoever will save his life in this world shall lose it in the world to come. And whosoever will lose his life in this world, for my sake shall find it in the world to come. Therefore, forsake the world, and save your souls; For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul?

MARK 8:35–36

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; *or whosoever will save his life, shall be willing to lay it down for my sake; and if he is not willing to lay it down for my sake, he shall lose it.* But whosoever shall be willing to lose his life for my sake and the gospel, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

LUKE 9:24–25

For whosoever will save his life, *must be willing to lose it for my sake: and whosoever will be willing to lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.* For what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and yet he receive him not whom God hath ordained, and he lose his own soul, and he himself be a castaway.

It is all about turning our will over to God. He gave us agency, so that we could choose to follow, without compulsion or force. How do you forsake the world in your daily choices?

President McKay spoke on these verses: “May we realize as never before that mastery of one’s personal inclinations is the heart of the Christian religion and of all religions. By nature, the individual is selfish and inclined to follow his immediate impulses. It requires religion or something higher than an individual or even a society of individuals, to overcome the selfish impulses of the natural man, which will lead him to a more successful, fuller life. Self-mastery comes through self-denial of little things. Christ in these singular words said: ‘whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it’” (Matthew 16:25).

Matthew 16:27–28 “The Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father” Jesus prophesied of His Second Coming. He will come in His glory to act as King and Judge of all the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. The timing of this was very confusing and difficult for the early Christians to appreciate. In part, because they expected it in their lifetimes. Jesus did not even know at that time when it would come, but said that some in the

group would still be alive when he comes in glory (Matthew 24:36). This perhaps is why John the Beloved asked for this gift later (John 21:22). We believe that the apostle John is still building God’s kingdom on earth (D&C 7:1).

The Transfiguration

Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-10, Luke 9:28-36



Transfiguration by Raphael, ca. 1518-1520. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

The transfiguration becomes one of the most important events in Jesus’ mission between his baptism and Gethsemane. It set in motion the establishment of Jesus’ church.¹⁷ When humans are transfigured, they are changed temporarily in a way that allows them to behold God’s glory (Moses 1:10–11; D&C 76:11–12, 113–119; 110:1–4). It is described in D&C 67:11, as being “quickened by the Spirit of God” (If the change is long-lasting rather than temporary, it is called *translated*, as in Moses 7:18–23, 27). The Synoptic Gospels describe Jesus’ transfiguration as appearing with his glorified body in the presence of angels and apostles Peter, James, and his brother John. The Prophet Joseph explained that the three apostles, were also transfigured in order to remain in Jesus’ glorified presence.¹⁸ Peter referred back to the transfiguration in 2 Peter 1:16–18. We also learn more about this event in D&C 63:21 (which we will discuss).

Matthew 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28 “after six days” One week before in Matthew 16:19, Jesus promised Peter, James and John, that they would receive “keys” to bind on earth what can be bound in heaven. This experience fulfilled this prophecy. The first two Gospels, Matthew and Mark record it happened “after 6 days.” However, the Gospel of Luke records, “about eight days.” Perhaps they all refer to about a week away. Possibly it was used for symbolic meaning (especially because they do not count their days as regularly as the Gospel of John does). In the OT and NT, the number seven represents complete, whole, perfect, or finished—stemming from the seventh period/day of Creation. The experience of transfiguration was also a finishing touch for the three apostles who received priesthood keys (and their endowment according to Joseph Fielding Smith¹⁹).



Jesus is Transfigured before Three Disciples by William Hole, 1905.

MATT 17:1

And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart

MARK 9:2 JST

And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, and James, and John, *who asked him many questions concerning his saying*; and Jesus leadeth them up into a high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them.

LUKE 9:28

And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.

“taketh Peter, James, and John his brother” In preparation for their special missions, the three leading apostles Peter, James, and John,²⁰ experienced a transfiguration to see Jesus and the two angels in their glorified state (which pattern we see in 3 Nephi 28:15, 17; D&C 138:45; Moses 1:14). The Prophet Joseph Smith spoke of this experience, “When he [Jesus] was transfigured on the mount, what could be more sure to them?”²¹

“high mountain apart” Although we do not know where in Galilee the Transfiguration occurred, the highest mountain in the greater region is Mount Hermon. Jesus was just at the foothills of Mount Hermon in Caesarea Philippi just a few verses before, so I assume it happened there (Matthew 16:13; Mark 8:27). Wherever it happened, symbolically, “mountains are sanctuaries designed and fashioned by Jehovah (Ex. 15:17). They are the temples of nature, where the prophets receive theophany experiences, where God descends from heaven to reveal His will unto His people. Mount Sinai, Mount Moriah, the Mount of Transfiguration, the mountains associated with Nephi, the brother of Jared, Ezekiel, and others.”²²

Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:3; Luke 9:29 “his face did shine as the sun” Each Gospel describes Jesus’ countenance beaming and his clothing glistening and “dazzling” (NIV).

MATT 17:2

And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.

MARK 9:3 JST

And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so *white* as no fuller on earth *could whiten* them.

LUKE 9:29

And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was *changed*, and his raiment *became* white and *glittering*.

Matthew 17:3; Mark 9:3; Luke 30 “**there appeared unto them Moses and Elias**” In the NT, “Elias” is the Greek spelling for name for Elijah.²³ Joseph Smith taught, “The Savior, Moses, and Elias, gave the keys to Peter, James, and John, on the mount, when they were transfigured” or “into the cloud.”²⁴ The word Elias is also a title for one who prepares the way—like John the Baptist, and the name of another scriptural person according to the Bible Dictionary.²⁵

This visitation of Moses and Elijah is significant because of all the OT prophets, these two were taken into heaven without death. They also came to the Prophet Joseph and Sidney Rigdon in the Kirtland Temple (D&C 110:11–16). Moses held the keys the of the gathering Israel, and Elijah held the sealing powers.

Luke 9:31–32 “**were heavy with sleep**” Luke alone adds two verses about the apostles being asleep for part of the vision, and then awakening to see the glorified beings. Luke also suggests that Moses and Elias talked to Jesus about his upcoming death “and resurrection” (JST) in Jerusalem. I ask myself how could they have fallen asleep at such a time. Yes, they were fatigued from their climb up the mountain, but more likely, I presume God had them sleep so as to not hear those parts of the vision (For other examples of the Lord using a deep sleep see Genesis 20:21; and Mosiah 24:19).



Transfiguration of Jesus by Carl Bloch, 1872. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Matthew 17:4; Mark 9:5–6; Luke 9:33 “**let us make three tabernacles**” Mark’s and Luke’s accounts sound like it was frightening. Yet, even without comprehending how important it was, Peter realized this was now sacred ground and wanted to honor the place with a new or pure tabernacle/temple. Their holy tabernacle was sanctified by the pillar of fire and cloud. The temple in Jerusalem was repeatedly defiled, but here they could start again in this holy space.

Matthew 17:5–6; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:34–35 “**they feared as they entered into the cloud**” The experience that occurred in the cloud was overwhelming. The apostles’ reaction to the voice of God is the same seen throughout scripture—fear and falling to the earth. This is another great verse for understanding the separate nature of the

Father and Son within the Godhead. Peter, James, and John are now eyewitnesses of the Father's testimony of Jesus as His Son (just as John the Baptist was in the Jordan River). We see the same pattern in the restoration too—when Heavenly Father came to earth to introduce or testify of His Son (JS-H 1:17).

Matthew 17:7 “Jesus came and touched them . . . be not afraid” The Lord calmed the apostles' fears and set an example for us of reaching out to comfort and touch those in need.

Matthew 17:8–9; Mark 9:9; Luke 9:36 “tell no man until the Son of man be risen” At the close of the transfiguration, Jesus asks His three apostles to keep their witnesses silent until after Christ's resurrection. Mark also mentions that they discussed within themselves what the “rising from the dead” meant. According to D&C 63:21, we do not have the full account of what occurred during Jesus' transfiguration. One of those details was that the apostles saw the earth in its glorified state: “When the earth shall be transfigured, even according to the pattern which was shown unto mine apostles upon the mount” (D&C 63:21).

The Coming of Elijah

Matthew 17:10–13; Mark 9:11–13

Matthew 17:11–12; Mark 9:12–13 “Elias truly shall first come” This verse can be read as a future prophecy: Elias SHALL “restore” or “prepare” all things (JST). Yet in the context of the next verse, the Lord explained that this “Elias” refers to the Prophet John the Baptist. The JST helps with this understanding by changing the verb from “is” to “has” and adds another clarifying phrase to further emphasize its fulfillment: “Elias *has* come already, *concerning whom it is written, Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me*” (Matthew 17:12, JST). Jesus used different definitions of “Elias” for two different people. Care is needed every time we come across “Elias.” The next verse adds another level of complicating figures with the same name.

Matthew 17:13 “another who should come and restore” (JST) While the KJV describes only one person who will “come, and restore all things” (Matthew 17:11), now in Matthew 17:13, the JST augments this to represent two people: 1) to prepare, and 2) one to restore (JST changes are in *italics*):

But I say unto you, Who is Elias? Behold, this is Elias, whom I send to prepare the way before me. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist, and also of another who should come and restore all things, as it is written by the prophets.”

This may refer to Jesus Himself as He is the one who restores all things. The JST includes John the Baptist teaching, “He it is *of whom I bear record. He is that prophet, even Elias*, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose” (JST John 1:27).

Below and Opposite: *Jesus Casts out a Devil from a Boy* by William Hole, 1905.



In other places, we read more of this restorer Elias: “this is Elias which was to come to gather together the tribes of Israel and *restore all things*” (D&C 77:9). An Elias who is a restorer, is also identified as the Prophet Joseph Smith in D&C 132:40, “I am the Lord thy God, and I gave unto thee, my servant Joseph, an appointment and restore all things” (also see 132:44).

Anytime we discuss Elias, it can be confusing. We also find a *Prophet Elias* coming on the second day of Passover, Sunday, April 3, 1836, to the Kirtland Temple along with the transfigured beings, Moses and Elijah. All these Eliases are included in the LDS Bible Dictionary.

Jesus Heals Epileptic / “Lunatic”

Matthew 17:14–21; Mark 9:14–29;

Luke 9:37–43

Matthew 17:14; Mark 9:14–15; Luke 9:37 “. . . the next day, when they were come down . . .”

Once off the mountain, Jesus found the rest of his disciples and a crowd gathered. The disciples were not able to heal an epileptic boy (or as Mark 9:25 says, a “foul spirit”).

Matthew 17:15; Mark 9:16–18a; Luke 9:38–39

“**Lord, have mercy on my son,**” this phrase speaks of the father’s heart’s desire. It is touching to note that the father does not ask the Lord to help him, but seeks help for his boy. Mark 9:16 opens the possibility for the afflicted boy to be the son of a scribe/lawyer. Luke 9:38 adds that it is “mine only child.”

Matthew 17:16b–17; Mark 9:18b–22; Luke 9:40–42 “I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him” Jesus assumed the burden of the dispute and healing when he arrived. All three Synoptic Gospels include Jesus’ verbal criticism of their faithlessness. His attack may have been directed to the lack of faith in the “perverse generation,” not the apostles. Both sides of a healing need faith—the faith to be healed, and the faith to heal (D&C 46). The criticism of the multitude may have affected the spirit of the situation as well.

Mark 9:24 “. . . with tears, Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief” The main message of this scene is that all need greater faith and reliance on God. This is a miracle of compassion. Of the 36 miracles recorded that Jesus performed, 27 were healings. Many required an expression of faith before the healing, some not.

Matthew 17:18; Mark 9:25–27; Luke 9:42. “I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him” Most of Jesus’ healings are also immediate, but many times, we need to learn through the process and the Lord, as our Great Teacher or Gardener, allowed us to grow as He healed. It takes faith to see the Lord taking us by “the hand and lift[ing us] up” (Mark 9:27).

Matthew 17:19–20; Mark 9:28; Luke 9:42b–43a “His disciples asked him privately, Why could not we . . .” Again Matthew 17:19 and Mark 9:28, record the conversation between Jesus and his disciples in private. The Lord answered with the same idea he introduced in a parable earlier (see Matthew 13). Jesus equated faith to a mustard seed—it has great



potential. I trust this example gave the disciples greater hope—like a beginning violinist who goes to the symphony and is motivated to practice harder. Seeing the potential should not be discouraging, but with applied faith it can be encouraging. I think Jesus was using exaggerated symbols to emphasize his point. Even though we only have a little faith, with more trust in our Savior, our faith will be strengthened to perform great things.

Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29 “this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” Prayer and fasting are synergistic—in healing, overcoming sin and temptation, and drawing closer to our Savior and God and their Spirit. As we liken this to ourselves, Elder James E. Talmage suggested, “Have you some besetting weakness, some sinful indulgence that you have vainly tried to overcome? Like the malignant demon that Christ rebuked in the boy, your sin may be of a kind that goeth out only through prayer and fasting.”²⁶ Fasting is not as much about the physical effects that come from lack of food, but more about our focus and reliance on God’s mercy.

Jesus’ Foretells of Death Again

Matthew 17:22–23; Mark 9:30–32; Luke 9:43b–45

Matthew 17:22–23; Mark 9:30–31; Luke 9:43b–43 “Let these saying sink down into your ears [hearts, JST]” The group stayed in Galilee, but privately (according to JST Mark 9:30). Jesus realized that the disciples do not understand yet that he *must* die, so he have them another clear prophecy of his suffering or *passion*.²⁷ The disciples misunderstood (or at least did not fully understand) the Lord’s direction. His prophecy can be seen as a warning to them to be cautious about their expectations, to prepare them, and to help them have faith to carry them through until his resurrection (We likewise should be careful when *interpreting* our promptings from the Spirit. We don’t want to incorrectly judge what God does. There is a difference between going forward in faith and thinking we know *why* we must go forward as instructed.).

As mentioned above, ancient Jewish literature is filled with anticipation for their Promised Messiah—but it does not include suffering pain or death. Hence, even with Jesus’ multiple warnings, the disciples did not understand that for Jesus to redeem his people, he also needed to become the slaughtered Lamb of God, the Suffering Servant, and the First Fruits of them that slept.²⁸

Jesus Paid Taxes

Matthew 17:24–27

Matthew’s Gospel is the only one to record this discussion about taxes and the miraculous way Jesus pays for them. It seems appropriate that the author would not want to forget it if the historical assumption is correct that he is the Apostle Matthew, the publican or *tax collector*.

Matthew 17:24 “. . . your master pay tribute?” The group made their way back to their “home base” of Capernaum on the north shores of the Sea of Galilee where Peter and his fishing partners lived.

Taxes. Roman citizens were not required to pay Roman taxes, but the people of the places they conquered were required to pay taxes—lots of them. As Capernaum was on a major Roman road, as well as having a large port, it was a natural place where tax collectors could collect tribute from travelers and merchants.²⁹ In addition to the Roman taxes, Jews also paid an annual temple tax. Many commentaries speculate that the requested “tribute/didrachmon” money in Matthew 17:24, was not for a Roman tax, but rather the annual temple tax. Jews all over the Roman world were required to pay this. “In the rabbinic period the tax was payable by all who had attained twenty years, but slaves and women were explicitly excluded.”³⁰

The didrachma was the equivalent to the half shekel coin³¹ that was the tribute or temple tax to cover the temple building, sacrifices, and priesthood needs. It was required each year for every male twenty years and older. The collectors may have wondered if Jesus were going to pay or not, because priests and rabbis claimed exemption.

Peter is singled out again in the story, as if Jesus hopes to teach him more during this short time before his death. President. David O. McKay, spoke on this experience,

Between the Transfiguration and the last eventful week of the Savior’s life on earth, there are only a few recorded instances in scripture with which Peter is personally mentioned. It is significant, however, that nearly every one of these, bears either directly or indirectly upon the molding of Peter’s character as an Apostolic leader. Peter knows that Jesus is the Christ that should come, but has he strength to defend him in word and deed? Does he comprehend the divine principles of the Gospel sufficiently to manifest them in his daily life and conversation and in all his associations with his fellowmen?³²

Matthew 17:26 “**Then are the children free**” Jesus’ explanation about the king’s son makes more sense if the tribute were for the Temple Tax, not the monthly Roman Tribute. Since the time of Moses’ tabernacle and forty-



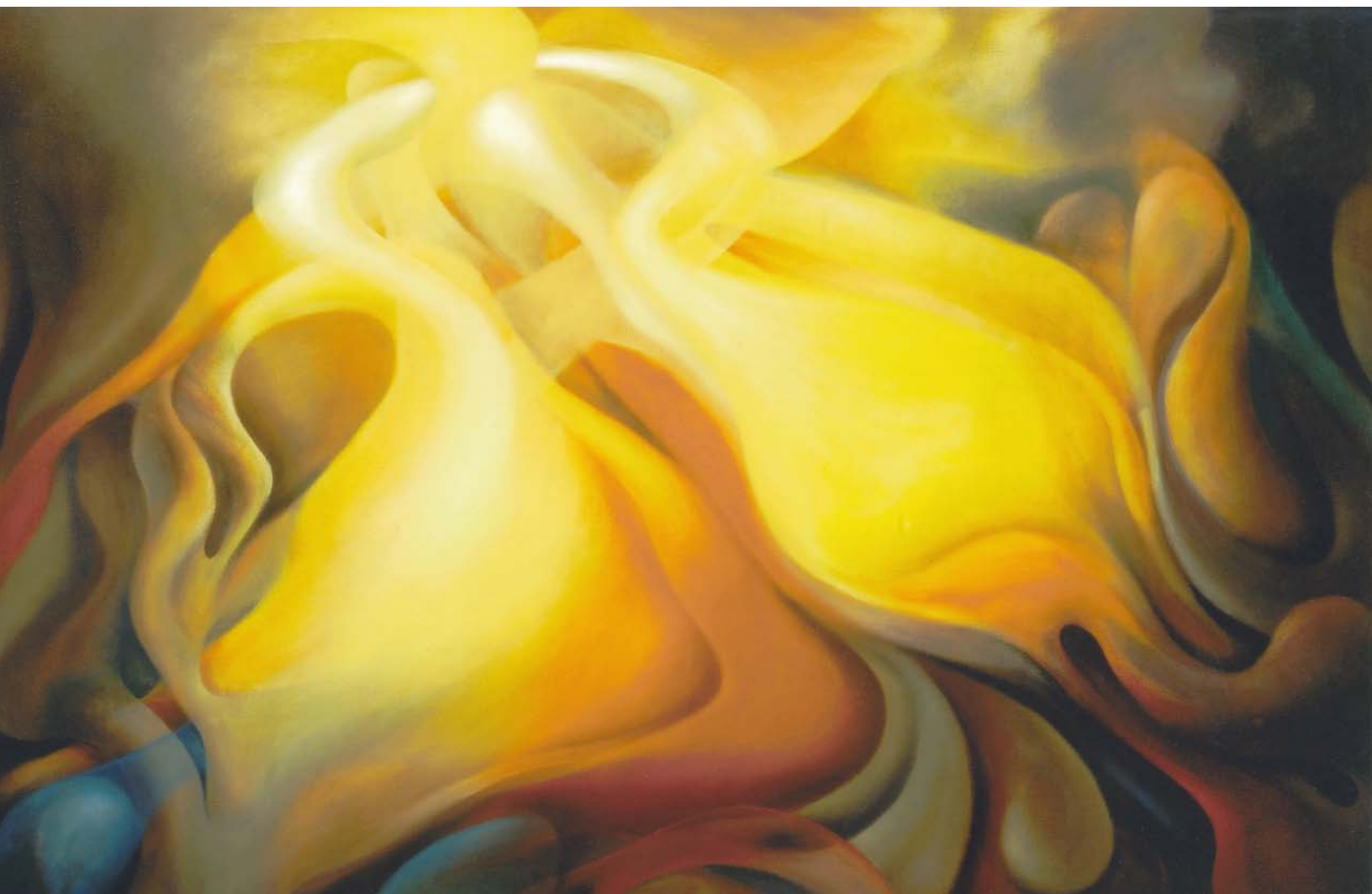
Peter and fish. Scenes from the life of Peter in the Brancacci chapel in Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence, Italy. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

year exodus through the wilderness, the children of Israel were asked to pay “atonement money” (Exodus 30:16). Jesus knew this was inconsistent for him to pay for what he alone will give. Perhaps Peter understood that the Messiah should not be expected to pay for the House of God, as the Son of God, it was *his* house. But as royal princes were not required to pay taxes in the Roman world, so too in the Jewish world, the temple tax was to cover the priests’ costs—and Jesus is the Great High Priest. He alone should be exempt from the “atonement tax” considering his role in the ultimate Atonement. From all sides, it was ironic that Jesus was asked to pay this.

Matthew 17:27 “. . . when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money . . .” The money was enough to pay for both Peter and Jesus’ temple tax. Why did Jesus use this means to miraculously supply the money? I think the fact that it dealt with Peter and fish, suggesting that he tailor made this miracle. Certainly, Peter could have “simply gone fishing and sold a few for the same price. We find no miracle of Jesus [for] his personal gain.”³³ Instead Jesus taught Peter about the temple as the House of God and what that really meant. He taught Peter about his resources, that Jesus did not need money, but if he wanted it, he could get it. He taught about his omniscience, his role as the Creator, and his kingship. What else do you think it teaches?

Header Image: The Transfiguration of Christ by Peter Paul Rubens. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Below: The Transfiguration of Jesus by Armando Alemdar Ara, 2004. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



ENDNOTES

1. Luke 3:1, gives the one clear historical date in the Gospels: “In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar.” Other than that grounding reference, we have little chronological details in the Synoptic Gospels. They only reference one Passover. The Gospel of John, on the other hand, is organized chronologically, following Jesus’ many trips from Galilee to Jerusalem, including three Passovers. From my earlier *Come Follow Me* handout of John 1, here is a chart of showing the shared information between the four Gospels.
2. Feasts of Jews found in John’s Gospel: **Passover**—John 2:13; 6:4; 12:1; **Other feast**—John 5:1; **Feast of the Tabernacles**—John 7:2; and **Feast of Dedication** (Hanukah)—John 10:22.
3. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII. 297–298.
4. Paul J. Achtemeier, *Harper Collins’ Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1996), 842
5. David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5.892. When the temple was destroyed, few of their sect and writings survived. One Sadducean author’s writings were preserved in the Apocrypha as: Ecclesiasticus or Sirach 14:16–19. They did not believe in life after death, instead they believed that “one is survived by one’s good reputation and by one’s children.” Judith R. Baskin and Kenneth Seeskin, *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture* (New York City, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 45.
6. The phrase in Matthew 16:3, “O ye hypocrites” is not included in the oldest Greek manuscripts of Matthew or other modern English translations. But it is included in the parallel account in Luke 12:56.
7. The sign includes three days and nights. Three days is understandable with the way Jews counted even part of a day in the total. But three nights in the tomb as well is problematic if we use “Good Friday” as the day of His crucifixion and burial. In order for the Lord to spend three nights in the tomb, Jesus had to die and be placed in a tomb on Thursday, not the traditional “Good Friday.” The scriptures refer to getting Jesus off the cross before the Sabbath, but that may have been a Holy Day, as well as Friday night to Saturday night. Certainly, the Passover feast fell into that category. On the years that Passover falls on a Thursday, the Jews celebrate two Sabbaths back to back. However, if you count your nights Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights as he was risen when the women came before sunrise on Sunday morning.
8. Luke 12:11 includes a similar phrase, but in different setting.
9. Joel Marcus, *The Anchor Yale Bible: Mark 1–8, vol. 27* (New Haven, CT: Yale and Doubleday, 2000), 507.
10. *Ibid.*, 492.
11. For example, Noah’s account uses seven (Genesis 7:10; 8:10, 12), Every seventh day was sanctified (Exodus 20:8–11). Seven is used regularly in the temple ritual (i.e., “And the priest shall ... sprinkle of the blood seven times before the LORD” Leviticus 4:6, 16; 16:14, 19; etc.). Also see Genesis 29; 41; Leviticus 25:8; Deuteronomy 15:1; 16:9; 31:10; 1 Kings 6:38; and 2 Kings 8:1.
12. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, ed., *Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 859. The majority of biblical textual scholars assume that Mark is the oldest Gospel of the four.
13. W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible: Matthew* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 195.

14. The *Psalms of Solomon* has been made available on line by Wesley University. <http://wesley.nnu.edu/sermons-essays-books/noncanonical-literature/noncanonical-literature-ot-pseudepigrapha/the-psalms-of-solomon/>
15. I have investigated the use of different spellings for “strait” and “straight” in modern revelation. It appears that the scribes and editors were not careful about their usage, even though the two words have very different meanings.
16. Strong’s Concordance, *stauros*.
17. Kent Jackson, and Robert Millet, eds., *Studies in Scriptures vol. 5: The Gospels* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1986), 305.
18. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 158.
19. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary: The Gospels* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1965), 1.400.
20. Peter, James and John are referred to as “the pillars” and are given repeatedly given special opportunities by the Lord (i.e at the raising of Jairus’ daughter, at the Matthew of Transfiguration, and in Gethsemane).
21. Joseph Smith, *TPJS*, 303. The Prophet Joseph answer to his question was to receive the personal revelation that one is sealed up unto eternal life.
22. Joseph Fielding McConkie, Donald W. Parry, *Guide to Scriptural Symbols* (SLC, UT: Deseret Bk, 1990) 84.
23. In addition to the name for Elijah, there are other reference to Elias in other scripture. Elias is also a title and name for another person
24. Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:387.
25. See Bible Dictionary, Topical Guide, and the JST of Mark 9:4, “Elias with Moses, or in other words, John the Baptist and Moses.” Most commentaries that include this as fact, suggest there were three angelic beings present. It is were so, this must have been such a joyous reunion for Jesus and John the Baptist !
26. James Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 395
27. Jesus’ PASSION is used for His sufferings from the Last Supper to His Resurrection—specifically, in Gethsemane, through the accusation and trials, scourging, and on the cross.
28. John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Isaiah 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–7; 52:13–53:12; 1 Corinthians 15:20.
29. As mentioned in Come Follow Me for Matthew 8–9, Rome tax collectors included income tax, ground, and poll-tax (or head-money).
30. Albright, *Matthew*, 212. Also, “Gentiles and Samaritans were not allowed to contribute.”
31. Josephus, *Antiquities*, III. 194.
32. David O. McKay, *Ancient Apostles* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1921), 55. “With the probable exception of the tribute money incident, which emphasized for Peter the divine Sonship of his Master, all the lessons following bear directly upon strength of character and principles of conduct.”
33. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 385.



EASTER

JESUS' TRIUMPHAL ENTRY TO RESURRECTION

This Easter week, we step out of the New Testament (NT) order sequence to study the main events recorded in the last week of Jesus' life in connection with our Easter celebration. The message of Easter is critical to the message of the Book of Mormon. There we find an enhanced understanding of the Atonement, sacrament, and resurrection (I will touch on these at the end of this commentary). First, we will walk through events from each day during the last week of Jesus' life, as described in the Gospels (and in D&C 138).

1. Sunday: Jesus' Triumphal Entry
2. Monday: Jesus' Cleansing the Temple, according to the Synoptics (John has it at the beginning)
3. Tuesday: Jesus' Teaching in the Temple
4. Wednesday: Jesus' Olivet Sermon on the Second Coming
5. Thursday: Preparing for Passover, Jesus' Last Supper, and Gethsemane
6. Friday: Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion, and burial before Passover begins
7. Saturday: While Jesus' body in the tomb, He organizes missionary work in the Spirit World
8. Sunday: Jesus' Resurrection

SUNDAY

Jesus' Arrival in Jerusalem The Triumphal Entry

Zechariah 9:9–13; Matthew 21:1–11; Mark 11:1–11; Luke 19:28–40; John 12:12–19

Setting

Jesus' long journey from Galilee to Jerusalem was nearly over.¹ Just five days before Passover, on Sunday morning, He traveled the familiar road from Bethany up the back side of the Mount of Olives to the crest at Bethphage (Matthew 21:1; Mark 11:1; Luke 19:29; **John 12:1 and 12**).² As He stood at the top of the Mount of Olives, He had an amazing view of what lay before him in the week ahead—physically and spiritually.

Directly in front of Him, to the west, He saw Mount Moriah, topped by Herod's massive temple and courtyards. It was Herod's goal to create the most beautiful building in the world. He expanded the temple lot to cover 35 acres and the Holy Sanctuary to soar 150 feet (46 meters) high. As Jesus gazed at Herod's temple that Sunday morning, it would have still been under construction.³ He had watched its progress since childhood when He came to Jerusalem for the annual Passover and other pilgrimage feasts (Luke 2:41). Now, the whole landscape of Jerusalem came into view.

To the left of the Temple Mount, Jesus could see the despised valley of Hinnom (2 Chronicles 33:6; Jeremiah 7:31). At the time of the Lord, the south side of the mountain was a burial ground filled with tombs.⁴ To His right, Jesus saw a portion of the busy Roman road, known as Calvary/Golgotha/"place of the skull", which was lined with crucifixion poles. Near the crucifixion sight was a beautiful garden where His followers would soon bury His body.

At the base of the mount where He stood, Jesus could also see the beautiful olive orchards that grew near the winter flowing Kidron River. If it were dry that spring, the creek bed would make a path along the lowest point between the Mount of Olives and Mount Moriah. After Jesus' last supper, He and His apostles would cross the Kidron and spend the night amongst the olive trees in Gethsemane. That night, as the apostles slept on spring grasses, Jesus would "descend below all things" and suffer the pains and sicknesses of the world (D&C 88:6)

Jesus would come back to stand again on the Mount of Olives as a resurrected being, and after His forty-day ministry would leave from the same spot (Acts 1:3–12). And, at a future date, He will return as King of Kings to open the millennium (Matthew 24:3–31). But at that moment, on that Sunday, from His vantage point on top of the Mount of Olives, He saw a glimpse of His upcoming week—and the eternal history of the universe.

Christ's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem by William Hole, 1905.



The Triumphal Entry Text

(all biblical translation is from Berean Study Bible)

MATT 21:1-11

1 And when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey having been tied, and a colt with her. Having united them, bring them to Me, 3 and if anyone says anything to you, you will say that the Lord has need of them, and he will send them immediately.” 4 And this came to pass, that it might be fulfilled that having been spoken by the prophet, saying, 5 “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King comes to you, gentle and mounted on a donkey, even upon a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’” 6 And the disciples having gone and having done as Jesus commanded them, 7 brought the donkey and the colt and put their cloaks upon them, and He sat on them. 8 And the very great crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others were cutting down branches from the trees and were spreading them on the road. 9 And the crowds going before Him and those following were crying out, saying: “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is the One coming in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest!” 10 And of Him having entered into Jerusalem all the city was stirred, saying, “Who is this?” 11 And the crowds were saying, “This is the prophet, Jesus, the One from Nazareth of Galilee.”

MARK 11:1-11

1 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent out two of His disciples 2 and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as soon as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone asks, ‘Why are you doing this?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it and will return it shortly.’” 4 So they went and found the colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. They untied it, 5 and some who were standing there asked, “Why are you untying the colt?” 6 The disciples answered as Jesus had instructed them, and the people gave them permission. 7 Then they led the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, and He sat on it. 8 Many in the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut from the fields. 9 The ones who went ahead 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 Then Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, He went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

LUKE 19:28–40

28 After Jesus had said this, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. **29** As He approached Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, He sent out two of His disciples, **30** saying “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. **31** If anyone asks, ‘Why you are untying it?’ tell him ‘The Lord needs it.’” **32** So those who were sent went out and found it just as Jesus had told them. **33** As they were untying the colt, its owners asked, “Why are you untying the colt?” **34** “The Lord needs it,” they answered. **35** Then they led the colt to Jesus, threw their cloaks over it, and put Jesus on it. **36** As He rode along, the people spread their cloaks on the road. **37** And as He approached the descent from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of disciples began to praise God joyfully in a loud voice for all the miracles they had seen: **38** “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” **39** But some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples!” **40** “I tell you,” He answered, “if they remain silent, the very stones will cry out.”

JOHN 12:12–19

12 The next day the great crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. **13** They took palm branches and went out to meet Him, shouting: “Hosanna!” “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Blessed is the King of Israel!” **14** Finding a young donkey, Jesus sat on it, as it is written: **15** “Do not be afraid, O daughter of Zion. See, your King is coming, seated on the colt of a donkey.” **16** At first His disciples did not understand these things, but after Jesus was glorified they remembered what had been done to Him, and they realized that these very things had also been written about Him. **17** Meanwhile, many people continued to testify that they had been with Jesus when He called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead. **18** That is also why the crowd went out to meet Him, because they heard that He had performed this sign. **19** Then the Pharisees said to one another, “You can see that this is doing you no good. Look how the whole world has gone after Him.



Entry Into Jerusalem by Pedro Orrente. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Triumphal Entry

Matthew 21:2–7; Mark 11:2–7; Luke 19:29–35; John 12:14 “Jesus . . . sent two of his disciples and got a young ass” (JST, John 12:14) As the Lord’s group prepared to enter Jerusalem, the prophecies found in Zechariah chapters 9 to 14 were about to be fulfilled. Zechariah described the “day of the Lord,” when the Messianic King would come to Jerusalem riding on a donkey, having a spirit of grace and prayer, to cleanse Jerusalem, and be the source of Living Water (Zech. 9:9; 12:10; 13:1; 14:8). “Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zech. 9:9, NIV). Jesus like Solomon, would ride on a donkey (Matthew 24:3–36; 1 Kings 1:33). Accordingly, Jesus fulfilled this prophecy as He sent two disciples to get the young colt to ride into the city.⁵ It is good to note that Jesus did not ride on a horse. In the Roman world, horses were used as war animals. He knew that He was not coming to conquer Jerusalem at this time.

Matthew 21:18; Mark 11:8; Luke 19:36; John 12:12–13 “many spread their garments in the way and others cut down branches” The crowds that gathered from different directions (John 12), joined Jesus’ descent from the Mount of Olives by either walking through the olive groves near Gethsemane, or crossing the bridge built to connect the two mountains. They ended at the Court of the Gentiles on the Temple Mount.

The news that Jesus was coming spread quickly and many people gathered to join those traveling with Him into the city (John described crowds from different areas converging to greet Him, John 12:9; 12, 17–18, 20). They picked branches of the new spring growth along the hillsides to wave in celebration of Jesus’ arrival for Passover. John 12:13 records they waved palm fronds as well.⁶ They draped their cloaks on the young donkey and on Jesus’ path in an honorary fashion. And yet, little did they know that this arrival was essential to their eternal salvation.

Jesus’ triumphal entry echoed the traditions associated with the Jewish feast of the Tabernacles. At that feast, a procession of priests carried water to the temple altar (Leviticus 23:34–43). They were accompanied by a procession of people waving branches of willow, myrtle or palm leaves in their right hands and singing Psalm 118:25—the very psalm repeated at Jesus’ triumphal entry in the next verse.

Matthew 21:9–10; Mark 11:9–10; Luke 19:37–39; John 12:13b “Hosanna” The crowds praised the Lord, by quoting (or singing) Psalm 118:26, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the LORD.” They also called “Hosanna/Save,” which was asking for something more. Originally “hosanna” was a call for help, but, over time, it became a call of rejoicing. I assume that the heavenly hosts also joined in the throng praising the Lord that morning (applying 2 Kings 6:16).

John 12:19 “. . . the world is gone after him” Jesus’ arrival created quite a commotion in Jerusalem. The news of His signs and miracles, especially His most recent and shocking, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, had spread far and wide. The crowd had great expectations of Jesus’ abilities and all wanted to see for themselves. The commotion that Jesus received raised enough concern amongst the Jewish leaders as to hasten their plans to kill Him (Matthew 12:14; Mark 11:18; Luke 19:47; and John 12:10).

The day after Jesus’ acclaimed entrance into Jerusalem coincided with the day the priests selected their Passover lambs (Exodus 12:3, four days before they were to be slaughtered). At the end of the week, Jesus would become *the* Passover Lamb.

MONDAY

Jesus’ First Day in Jerusalem
Cleansing the Temple

Matthew 21:12–16; Mark 11:15–18; Luke 12:45–48; John 2:13–25

All four Gospels include Jesus cleansing the temple. As the Synoptic Gospels put everything that happened in Jesus’ Jerusalem ministry into the last week of His life, they include Jesus cleansing the temple here too. However, John places the timing of the cleansing at the beginning of the Lord’s ministry (John 2:13–17). We find consensus everywhere in the scriptures that it happened *only once*.⁷ With the amount of biblical information we now have, it is more likely that the temple cleansing happened once at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as John describes. In part, because, it would have been too dangerous at this point in Jesus’ life to do something so radical to disturb the peace.

With the Jewish leaders actively seeking to kill Him, it is likely the temple police would have taken Him. Furthermore, all the Gospels say Jesus taught at the Temple the next day. I doubt the police would have let Him back on the temple grounds after causing such a raucous the day before. The timing is less significant though. The point is—it happened.

MATT 12:12-17

Then Jesus entered the *temple courts* and drove out all who were buying and *selling there*. **He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those selling doves.** 13 And He declared to them, “*It is written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer.’ But you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’*” 14 The blind and the lame came to Him at the temple, and He healed them. 15 But the chief priests and scribes were indignant when they saw the wonders He performed and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” 16 “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked. “Yes,” Jesus answered, “have you never read: ‘From the mouths of children and infants You have ordained praise?’” 17 Then He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where He spent the night.

MARK 11:15-19

When they arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus entered the *temple courts* and began to drive out those who were buying and *selling there*. **He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those selling doves.** 16 And He would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. 17 Then He began to teach **them** and declare, “*Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’*” 18 When the chief priests and scribes heard this, they looked for a way to **kill Him**. For they were afraid of Him, because the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching. 19 And when evening came, Jesus and His disciples went out of the city.



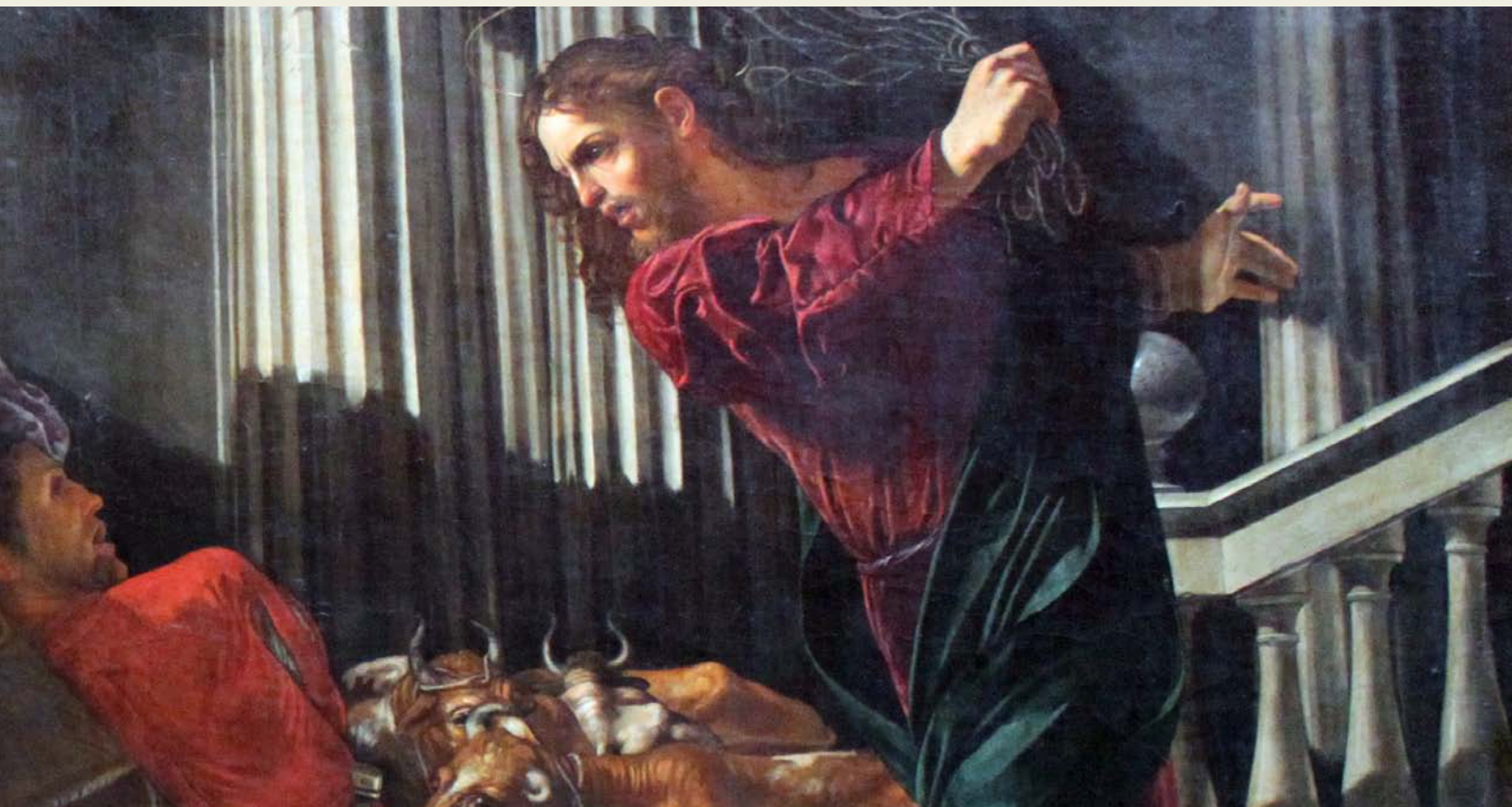
LUKE 19:45-47

Then Jesus entered *the temple courts* and began to drive out those who were *selling there*. 46 He declared to them, “*It is written: ‘My house will be a house of prayer.’ But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’*” 47 Jesus was *teaching* at the temple every day, but the chief priests, scribes, and leaders of the people were intent on *killing Him*. 48 Yet they could not find a way to do so, because all the people hung on His words.

JOHN 2:13-21

13When the Jewish Passover was near, Jesus went up to *Jerusalem*. 14 In the *temple courts* He found men *selling* cattle, sheep, and doves, and *money changers* seated at their tables. 15 So He made a whip out of cords and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle. He poured out the coins of the money changers and over-turned their tables. 16 To *those selling doves* He said, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn My Father’s house into a marketplace!” 17 His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for Your house will consume Me.”

Christ driving the money-changers from the Temple by Cecco del Caravaggio. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Setting of the Cleansing of the Temple

The Temple Courtyard of the Gentiles made up the majority of the 35 acres of the Temple Mount where all were allowed to visit (similar to Salt Lake City’s Temple Square). Israelite celebrants could purchase animals necessary for their sacrifices and change their money for the temple coin, which was a Tyrian half-shekel. All financial transactions in the temple had to be in the “Tyrian” currency—including the annual temple tax, sin offerings, vows, purification, etc.



The Cleansing of the Temple by Giuseppe Passeri. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Matthew 21:12; Mark 11:15–16; Luke 19:45; John 2:15–16 “He drove them all out” The Gospel of John explains that Jesus made a scourge or whip out of cords. Jesus must have been extremely strong and powerfully determined to clear the crowd of irreligious people and their furniture, containers and money covering acres of area. We assume Jesus’ strength came in part from his profession as a builder. The KJV says Joseph and Jesus were “carpenters” (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). The Greek word is “builder,” and often meaning a stone mason. We are not told if Jesus’ disciples helped or if He single-handedly purged the profanity that defiled His Father’s House.

Several scriptural prophecies or signs of the Messianic time are associated with a temple cleansing, including: Jeremiah 7:10–12; Zechariah 14:20–21; Isaiah 56:7; Daniel 8:12–14; and Malachi 3:1–2. Each scripture is associated with God cleansing His temple or sacred spaces.

The fact that Jesus was not stopped, but was allowed to cleanse the whole area, suggests the chief priests and multitude knew the prophecies, or understood combining merchandising with the temple was out of line. Allowing Jesus to cleanse the temple lot required some level of submission to Him by the Jewish and Roman leadership. We know the temple police were quick to stop a far less disruptive offense a few years later by Paul (Acts 21:30). This suggests they knew the greedy nature of money changing should not be used in conjunction with the temple. When materialism is mingled with God’s work in the Book of Mormon, it is called priestcraft. God attacked priestcraft in Alma 1:12, 16, etc.

Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46; John 2:17 “den of robbers . . . house of prayer” All four Gospels correlate prophetic warnings relating to Jesus’ cleansing of the temple. The Synoptic Gospels all cite Jeremiah 7:11 about robbers infiltrating the temple, as well as the charge from Isaiah 56:7, “mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.” John 2:17 remembers Psalms 69:9, “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.” The temple was the very center of Jewish worship. But Jews were in an apostate condition, and the once sacred space had lost its meaning.

John 2:18–22 “What sign can You show us to prove Your authority to do these things?” (BSB) We have no record that Jewish authorities condemned Jesus for destroying an entire business associated with the temple. Instead, they questioned if this was a *sign* of the Messiah? Jesus answered them by equating His body to the temple, but they missed the meaning and lost the chance to hear His witness. This same question is included in a conversation at the temple by the Synoptic Gospels on Jesus’ second day in Jerusalem.

TUESDAY

Jesus’ Second Day in Jerusalem
Teaching at the Temple (Matthew 21–23)

Return from Bethany and Learn the Power of Faith

Matt 21:17; Mark 11:19; Luke 21:37

Matthew 21:17; Mark 11:19; *Luke 21:37 *“at night he went out and abode . . .”**** The Gospel of Mark says Jesus left the city, Luke states that Jesus spent the night on the Mount of Olives, but Matthew’s account remembers Jesus went to Bethany for the night. Bethany was 1½ miles outside of Jerusalem to the east on the back side of the Mount of Olives. In Bethany, He could have lodged with dear friends, Martha, Mary and Lazarus.

Matthew 21:18; *Mark 11:20–21 *“In the morning . . . they saw the fig tree”**** Two Gospels record the cursed fig tree with slight differences. Mark spreads the cursing and withering incident over two days, Matthew all at once.

The withered tree may symbolize the Jewish nation, or any hypocrisy. The fig tree also represents a sign of the last days (see Jeremiah 8:13; Isaiah 34:4; and JS-Matthew 1:38). Its usage as an eschatological sign continues into this dispensation as D&C 35:16 reads, “And they shall learn the parable of the fig-tree, for even now already summer is nigh.”⁸

Matthew 21:21–22; Mark 11:22–26 “ask in prayer, in faith” Jesus encouraged His disciples, saying that they can do more than curse a fig tree with faith, they can move mountains (and many of those mountains are emotional and spiritual). The apostles learned faith is more powerful than natural laws. Jesus taught a similar message to

the Nephites. To that audience He added a qualifier: “Whatever thing ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is good, in faith believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be done unto you” (Moroni 7:26). It must be “good” from the Lord’s perspective. There are many scriptures with the same promise.⁹ God will give if we ask what is best and listen in faith.

Jesus’ Authority Challenged

Matt 21:23; Mark 11:27; Luke 20:1

Matthew 21:23; Mark 11:27–28; Luke 21:38; 20:1–2; “. . . who gave thee this authority?” On the morning of the second day in Jerusalem, Jesus and His disciples walked up to the temple lot again. Hostile questioners greeted Him. The chief priests and elders devised a scheme to discredit Him. They asked Jesus a two-fold question:

1. What authority do you have?
2. Who gave it to you?

They are specifically asking who gave Him authority to cleanse the temple, possibly perform healings, and teach new doctrines. *Authoritative* teaching was firmly established among the Jews. All teaching was traditional, so it



Parable of the Two Sons by Andrey Miranov, 2012. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

must be approved by, and handed down from, an authoritative teacher to a disciple. The ultimate appeal in cases of discussion was always to some great teacher or Sanhedrin decree. To become a rabbi, elder, or judge, a man needed an ordination. Jewish hierarchy included offices of *authority*, complete with “letters of orders.”¹⁰

Matthew 21:24–26; Mark 11:29–32; Luke 20:2–7 “**I will ask you one thing . . .**” The tables were completely turned on the chief priests and elders. Instead of answering their questions, Jesus questioned them. Jesus asked them about John the Baptist’s authority and then, according to Matthew, answered their question with three parables. His examiners will learn in the future He is the ultimate Judge with authority from His Father. He will be our Judge too.

Matthew 21:27; Mark 11:33; Luke 20:8 “**neither I tell you . . .**” Jesus would not answer their question because, just like now, God rarely answers questioners with doubting and prideful hearts. As the great teacher, He knew learners need faith and softened hearts. God continues to teach those who are ready with inspiration of the Spirit. But if we mortals are not meek, we must learn to distinguish right from wrong by our own experiences (Moroni 7:16).

Parable of The Two Sons

(Matthew 21:28–32)

Matthew 21:28–30 “**to work today in my vineyard**” This parable is usually understood by acknowledging that lip service alone is insufficient, we must do what God asks. In fact, lip service is probably worse than not committing yourself at all. We often see this as Jesus looking for action, as He has said before: “come follow me,” or “sell all that thou hast.”

There is another way to read this parable, dealing more specifically with the question asked. John W. Welch has taught the Greek text can be read as the pre-mortal life when Jesus received authority from God. The alternative translation of Matthew 21:29–30 can be read:

- The first son says, “Not my will,” or “Not as I will, and reconciled himself,” rather than the KJV, “I will not.”
- In the second son’s response, the word “go” is not in the actual Greek text—it is just simply: “*I/ego*,” as in, “my way” (not “I go” as in the KJV, Matthew 21:30).
- From Moses 4:1–2, we learn that pre-mortally, the Father asked Jehovah and Lucifer to help him, but only one son submitted to his Father’s will. This understanding answers the question of Jesus’ authority.

Matthew 21:32 “**ye believed him not**” Jesus returned to His question about their acceptance of John the Baptist and his heaven-sent authority. The JST adds that John the Baptist prepared the way of righteousness, “*and bore record of me.*” Jesus challenged them by suggesting that when they rejected John the Baptist and his authority,

they also rejected their Messiah. By so doing, they rejected the message and authority of salvation. The Book of Mormon taught the same message about rejecting the prophet —the “words” of the prophets represent authority to speak for God (1 Nephi 3:18; 7:14; Jacob 6:8; etc.). 2 Nephi 25:18–19, also prophesied that the Jews would reject their Messiah.

Parable of The Wicked Husbandmen

*Matthew 21:33–46; Mark 12:1–12; Luke 20:9–19*¹¹

Matthew 21:33; Mark 12:1; Luke 20:9 “A man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge about it” (JST Mark). Jesus began with a familiar story from Isaiah 5:2–7 about a good farmer who carefully planted a vineyard (it also sounds like Jacob 5:3). We see evidence that Zenos’ allegory of the olive tree was known in the Jewish world.¹² Isaiah 5:2–7 and Jacob 5 helps us understand the symbolism of “digged” and “hedged it round about,” as a demonstration of divine nurturing. The vineyard of the Lord, becomes the House of Israel.

Matthew 21:34–39; Mark 12:2–8; Luke 20:10–15; “He sent His servants” God’s servants include His prophets. The husbandmen or workhands abuse the owner’s servants. Their cruel and exaggerated measures sound extreme, but Jesus filled His parables with shocking details and hyperbole. It kept his audience engaged, which opened new ways to learn. In this parable, Jesus answered the question about His authority by introducing the “heir.” In the parable, the murdering of the heir, foreshadowed Jesus’ arrest in Gethsemane and death in Golgotha.

Matthew 21:41; Mark 12:9; Luke 20:16 “destroy those wicked men” When the Jewish leaders condemned the wicked husbandmen, they passed judgment on themselves.

Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17 “Did you never read in the scriptures . . .” Jesus quoted a very well-known passage from Psalm 118. It was part of the “Hallel,” which Jews regularly recite in their ceremonies.¹³ Jews had a tradition that a stone first rejected by the builders later becomes the chief cornerstone. The “Head of the Corner” meant the stone used at the building corner to bear the weight or stress of two walls. It functioned like a capstone. It was a crucial stone to the whole structure. Other Old Testament (OT) scriptures also describe important stones, typologically referring to Jesus (who was most likely a stone mason): Daniel 2:34–35, 44–45; and Isaiah 8:14–15.

Matthew 21:44; Luke 20:18, “ground to powder” This description is the definition of the word “contrite.” We must become broken hearted and contrite to follow in Christ’s footsteps.

Matthew 21:46 “I am the stone:” (JST) The JST addition gives a long dialogue between Jesus and his disciples explaining the parable.

Parable of the Marriage of the King's Son

Matthew 22:1-14

The third parable, answering the question about Jesus' authority, describes a king's wedding feast that no one attends. The banquet represents the joys of God's kingdom. But the parable describes some listeners as rejecting God's kingdom. When all are invited, some do not understand they must "dress" or go through the required rite and decorum to be with the king. Some appear to accept Jesus in part, but are not willing to completely follow His teachings, and thus become like Him. The king's dress or robes are described in scripture as the robes of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10; 2 Nephi 9:14; D&C 29:12; 109:76; etc.). The parable warns those who reject Jesus' invitation to come unto Him, and those who come, but do not come His way.

WEDNESDAY

Jesus' Third day in Jerusalem
Olivet Sermon: Judgement & Second Coming
Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21

Jesus and His disciples left the temple and again walked from Mount Moriah to the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24:3, Mark 13:3). To Jesus' disciples, the revelation in the Olivet Sermon must have been a total shock. They anticipated Jesus fulfilling the prophecies of both His first and Second Coming. His audience was either the Twelve or the Twelve plus a few other disciples (including the women who traveled with the group from Galilee).

The Olivet Sermon is re-arranged in Joseph Smith-Matthew (as found in the Pearl of Great Price), which moves around the verses to separate the destruction that occurred in Jerusalem between AD 68–70, from the future destruction that is prophesied for Jesus' Second Coming. Much of this sermon is repeated in D&C 45:16–45 (approximately 13 verses). The Second Coming or Millennium was a favorite topic in early nineteenth century America. The Saints were part of this culture, and their questions led to many revelations on the subject, including: D&C sections 1, 29, 38, 43, 101, 116, and 133. (For a nice layout with all the changes in a parallel fashion see *The New Testament with JST*, compiled by Steven and Julie Hite.¹⁴)

The JST changes to Matthew 24, increase its length by 50%. There is only one verse (Matthew 24:33) that had no corrections made). The Gospel of Mark also includes many JST changes. Matthew's JST reordering of the verses are diagrammed below:

PAST (Jerusalem's Destruction in AD 70)

FUTURE (Jesus' Second Coming)

JST OR JS—MATTHEW	KJV MATTHEW 24	JST OR JS—MATTHEW	KJV MATTHEW 24
1	23:39	21b–22	23–24
2–6	1–5	23, 28	6
7–11	9–13	24–27	25–28
12–18	15–21	29	7
19	8	30	12
20–21a	22	31–32	14–15
		33	29
		34–35	34–35
		36–39	30–33
		40–54	36–51
		55	36–51

Matthew 24:1–2; Mark 13:1–2; Luke 21:5–6 “Master, show us concerning the buildings of the temple . . .” (JST). A discussion began with the disciples trying to understand what Jesus meant when He said, “not one stone” would be left on the temple. It would have seemed impossible as some of the stones were over 500 tons! Jesus warned they will all be thrown down, and then moved up the Mount of Olives to sit down overlooking the temple courtyards and sanctuary.

Matthew 24:3–5; Mark 13:4–5 “. . . sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?” They asked for more information about Jesus’ Second Coming. Again, the JST adds much to both accounts. They were warned to not be deceived by the many false prophets and leaders who will come and try to convince people to follow their plans.

Matthew 24:9–13; Mark 13:13; Luke 21:17 “. . . they deliver you up . . . and shall kill you” Jesus’ warned them that some will suffer martyrdom. Cathedrals often depict the Twelve carrying the sign of their martyrdom (i.e. Paul with a sword, Peter with a cross, etc.). Stephen, a member of the “Seven” (Acts 7:58–59), was known as the first Christian martyr, although I think John the Baptist should have that title.

Matthew 24:14 “**This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world**” We read this verse as coming in the future, and our call to spread God’s word. Yet the early Christians expected the end in their lives and felt instructed by Jesus to watch until then (Matthew 28:19–20; Luke 21:32; Acts 2:16). Some felt the apostles would not die until the gospel was witnessed to the world. Paul spoke of the saints falling away in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3; Hebrews 9:26–28; Acts 20:29, as did Peter in 2 Peter 3:3–9. Following their martyrdom, we read of the anti-Christ in 1 John 2:18.

Matthew 24:24; Mark 13:22 “**there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets . . .**” It was not the Second Coming that was imminent, but the apostasy. The apostles restrained the false prophets, but iniquity was already at work when the first Twelve were alive. In fact, the apostasy was already under way by the time of Paul’s ministry. It was neither passive nor gradual. Jesus foretold this. The JST changes this verse to say it started during Jesus’ life: “*and he it is who now worketh, and Christ suffereth him to work, until the time is fulfilled that he shall be taken out of the way.*”

Matthew 24:29–30; Mark 13:24; Luke 21:25; John 26 “**the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light**” Jesus gave His disciples several signs of the last days (as well as Isaiah 13:9; John 11; Revelation 6:12, 18), but we have been given even more as recorded in D&C 29:14; 88:87; etc.

THURSDAY

Jesus’ Fourth day in Jerusalem:
Preparing for Passover, Last Supper, Gethsemane

Matthew 26

Preparing for the Passover

Matthew 26:17–20; Mark 14:12–17; Luke 12:7–14; John 13:1

Passover is arguably the most important feast for the Israelites. The preparations start a month in advance and the feast of unleavened bread lasts a week. Passover commemorates God’s redemption from slavery in Egypt. The last night in Egypt, the Lord sent a scourge and killed all the first-born children in every home whose doorway was not covered with blood from their Passover lambs. The feast night remembers back to many symbols from the story in Exodus 12—unleavened bread, a roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and wine. It prefigured the great and last sacrifice of Jesus as the Lamb of God who redeems the world from sin (1 Corinthians 5:7). This feast looked forward symbolically to Jesus as the unblemished lamb whose blood will cover and save.

John placed the last supper the night before the traditional feast (John 13:1).¹⁵ This seems appropriate as Jesus was crucified when the lambs are being slaughtered on the temple alter (Mark 15:25). You can see below that John, in his usual careful dating, is unique to record the feast occurring the night before the Passover.¹⁶

Timing of the Passover

Aland Translation

MATT 26:17-18

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus saying, "Where will you have us Prepare for you to eat the passover?" 18. He said, "Go."

MARK 14:12-13

And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the passover?" 13 And he sent two of his disciples, and said to them "Go."

LUKE 22:7-14

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying "Go and prepare the passover for us, that we may eat it."

JOHN 13:1

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having Loved his own

Preparing the Passover meal was an involved process. Kent Brown assumes that the women who had traveled with Jesus from Galilee and were with him at the cross and tomb also helped prepare Jesus' last supper.¹⁷ The meal shares many symbols of the Passover Seder. Especially as Jesus introduces the Sacrament.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Last Supper

Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20

The Lord introduced the symbols of the sacrament during His meal according to the Synoptic Gospels (John's Gospel introduces the symbols earlier in Jesus' Bread of Life sermon in John 6). The meal included breaking the unleavened bread. At some point the Jews began hiding a portion. One custom claims that it represented the hidden Messiah.¹⁸ But Jesus did not hide the bread. He held it up and said, "This is my body" (Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19). Jesus chose to use the cup after the meal as the symbol for His blood (Luke 22:20). The cup at the end of the meal is called the "cup of redemption." Jesus' blood became the source of our redemption. The symbols from the Passover point us to what is about to happen.

Washing the Disciples Feet

John 13:1-20

With dusty roads, social etiquette included supplying the means to wash people's feet upon entering a house. Often the host assigned a servant or child to do this menial task. (Disciples could do many of the tasks of a servant for their master, but washing their feet was forbidden as it was demeaning.¹⁹) On this special night, Jesus took on the role of a slave child and washed His apostles' feet. He turned the social ladder upside down, and

An angel comforting Jesus before his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane by Carl Block, 1873. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Peter could not bear to see His beloved master acting as His slave (John 13:8). Throughout Jesus' ministry He tried to teach masters how to serve. "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matthew 23:11; Luke 12:43; etc.). Jesus corrected Peter, and Peter submitted. Thus, washing feet became an ordinance in the Restored Church.²⁰

Gethsemane

Matthew 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:39–46; John 18:1

Jesus spent the night before His death, "as he was wont, to the Mount of Olives" (Luke 22:39), across the Kidron brook, in an olive orchard or "garden" (John 18:1), named Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36). "Gethsemane" came from two Hebrew roots: *gath*, meaning "press," and *shemen*, meaning "oil." As extreme pressure is required to extract oil from an olive, so too, the Son of God was crushed under the weight of the sins of the world, which caused Him to bleed from every pore. "These tiny drops of golden liquid can be seen as symbolizing the At-one-ment and its power to heal."²¹ As His apostles slept, He suffered alone, and drank the bitter cup enabling mercy and justice to eternally meet.

FRIDAY

Jesus' Fifth Day in Jerusalem
Trial, Crucifixion and Burial

Matthew 27:1–6; Mark 14–15; Luke 22–23; John 18–19

Arrest

Matthew 26:48, Mark 14:43–45; Luke 22:47–48; John 18:2–9 "The one who I kiss . . . take him" Jesus' betrayal is especially painful as it is carried out by one of His chosen apostles, Judas Iscariot. With Satan's coaxing, Judas devised a plan to arrest the Lord by using a counterfeit allegiance. Satan has used counterfeits to usurp Jehovah's/ Jesus' position since the time in the Garden of Eden.²² In the middle of the night, Judas led the chief priests and elders to an olive orchard where Jesus often went.

In that culture, a disciple waited for his master teacher or rabbi to greet him first. If the disciple greeted the rabbi first, it wrongly implied equality, so they avoided it.²³ When Judas feigned friendship, he actually insulted the Lord by treacherously greeting Him first, and using the name "master," followed by a kiss (Matthew 26:49; Mark 14:45).

The only time Jesus is called "master/rabbi," in Matthew, is when Judas uses the title that night. Ironically, Judas has run away from his Good Master, and sold himself as a slave to Satan, his new master. Judas' hypocrisy is contrasted with Jesus' sincere response, "friend you are here" (Matthew 26:50, AB). Even with the pain of exquisite suffering throughout the night and the treachery of Judas' rejection, Jesus maintained charity for his enemy.

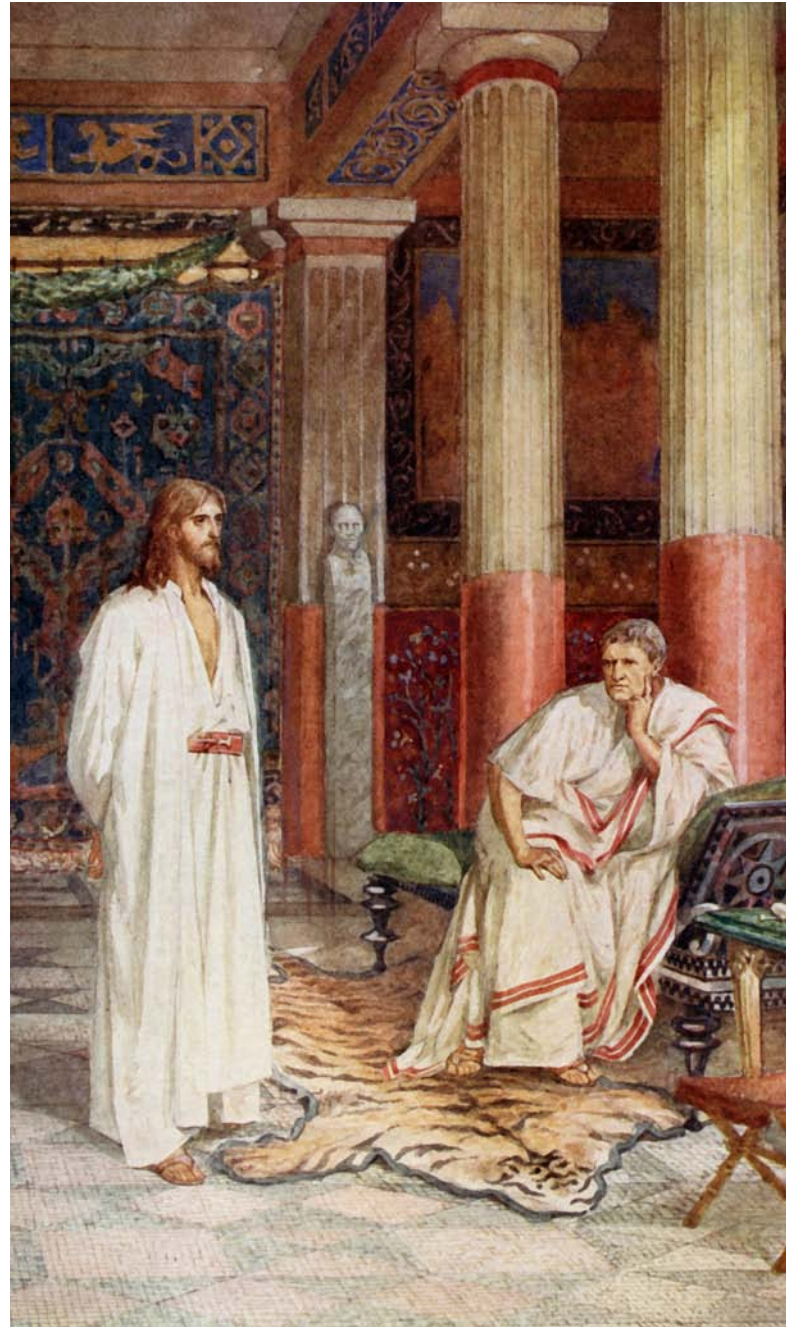
Matthew 26:51–53; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:49–51; John 18:10–11 “cut off his ear” Just a few hours before Jesus’ arrest, in Luke 22:36 and John 38, the Lord encouraged his eleven apostles to take a sword with them as they leave the upper room. They responded, “Look, Lord, here are two swords,” and Jesus replied, “That is enough” (BSB). I presume this is, in part, why Peter defended Jesus by attacking Malchus, the servant of the high priest, with his sword (John 18:10). As the Lord healed the bleeding wound, He taught, “All that take the sword shall perish with the sword.” (Matthew 26:53; Mark 14:47 JST). Jesus added an aside, that He could ask for 24,000 angels if He wanted. I believe the healed man became a Christian, otherwise, how would the author know his name? (John 18:10).

Trial

Matthew 26:57; Mark 14:53–15:15; Luke 22:54–23:22; John 18:13–40; “I find in him no fault” Following the arrest Jesus was taken to the high priest’s palace for a mock trial before Annas (who had served as a previous high priest), Caiaphas the current high priest, the Sanhedrin (or Jewish ruling council), then to Pilate, Herod, and Pilate again. During all these illegal proceedings, while false witnesses testified against Jesus for blasphemy and insurrection, Jesus meekly submitted to the harassment as a lamb before the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7; Acts 8:32). Tragically ironic, Jesus was crucified for blasphemy in His claiming to be the Son of man who will sit beside God (Mark 14:62–64).

Soldiers Scourged Jesus

Matthew 27:27–30; Mark 15:16; John 19:1–3 “Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him” Scourging or flogging was an ancient practice for discipline. In the law of Moses, it was limited to “not ... more than forty



Pilate Privately Examines Jesus by William Hole, 1905.

lashes” (Deuteronomy 25:3). The Romans used leather cords of different lengths with bones, rocks, and metal tied along the leather to cut into the skin and muscle. The victim was tied to a pole, then one or two soldiers whipped the bare back, buttocks and legs of their victim. It was often used to discipline slaves. In fact, “the trademark of slaves, was a back scarred from whippings.”²⁴ Jesus took the role of a slave throughout his ministry: at the last supper while washing feet, and now He bore the sign of a slave on His back.²⁵



The First Nail by James Tissot.

Crucifixion

Matthew 27:31–56; Mark 15:20–41 Luke 23:26–49; John 19:16–37

Luke 23:33 (NIV) “When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him” Jesus carried His own cross beam through the city, but in His weakened state, He collapsed. A foreigner from Cyrene, Simon, was forced to carry the heavy cross beam for Jesus. I believe Simon and his family also became Christians, as Mark 15:21 describes them as “friends”.

Once outside the city, they came to a section of the main road where the crucifixion poles stood permanently in the ground. They called it “Place of the Skull” or Calvary (in Greek), or Golgotha, (in Hebrew). We are told it was 9:00 in the morning (Mark 15:25). Three hours later at noon, the sun is darkened and a blackness joined by a storm covered the sky until Jesus died at 3:00 pm, the traditional hour of prayer at the temple (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33–34; Luke 23:44).

The soldiers again stripped Jesus. They tore his outer garment into four equal parts so they could share in the booty, but they realized that Jesus' under tunic was very well made and woven as one piece (the two separate garments is clearer in the Greek). We know that "*Joanna . . . and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance,*" traveled with Jesus, so I presume the nice tunic was a gift from one of the women (Luke 8:3). They were the same women who stood beside Jesus as He was crucified.

After Jesus's hands were nailed to the cross beam and his feet to the main beam, He was lifted up to be tortured to death. As He hung in excruciating pain, Jesus saw the need of Mary, His mother, and comforted her by asking the only apostle there, and possibly his first cousin, John the beloved, to take care of her.²⁶

Each Gospel author recorded Jesus' experience on the cross showing different angles of the experience. Jesus' final words demonstrate the spectrum of their perspectives. Starting with the very human cry from Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34, "My God, why has thou forsaken me?" to Luke 23:46, a more divine focus, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," and John 19:30, the most controlled, "It is finished."

Opening the Veil

Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45 "the veil of the temple was rent" The temple veil tore, symbolically opening the way into the presence of God. It opened the Holy of Holies to all. Rather than just one high priest being allowed to enter once a year, all may now come through Jesus, the Great High Priest, to the throne of God. Since the time of Adam and Eve's fall, the door was closed. But Jesus made it possible for humanity to eat of the tree of life and return to the presence of God free of sin if they repent and embrace His gospel.

A Soldier Pierced Jesus' Side

John 19:31 "a spear pierced his side" Jesus' body received one more opening as a soldier confirmed that Jesus has died without needing his legs broken to speed up the suffocation process. The opening in Jesus' side parallels the opening of Adam's side for Eve, and in turn, for all humanity to arrive on earth. Jesus as the last Adam (as the only other man created by God, 1 Corinthians 15:45), will open the way for the descendants of Adam and Eve to have Eternal life.

Jesus' Burial

Matthew 27:57; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:50; John 19:38

Matthew 27:57–59; Mark 15:42–46; Luke 23:50–53; John 19:39 "went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus" Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus have both been secret disciples of Jesus while still maintaining their membership in the Jewish leadership of Jerusalem, putting them in a position to ask Pilate for permission to take the body of Jesus. While Joseph arranged for his servants to move the body to his own tomb, Nicodemus bought oils, linens, and spices to wrap the body.

Matthew 27:60–61; Mark 15:46b–47; Luke 23:53b–56; John 19:40–41 “**In the place where he was crucified there was a garden**” Joseph’s property was not far from Calvary, and they are able to carry the body from the main road to his garden where he had recently prepared a new tomb for himself. As the men transport the wounded body, the women watch so they know where to find Jesus after the double Sabbath (Passover and Saturday), or three days later.

Matthew 27:62–66 “**After three days I will rise again**” Remembering Jesus’ claims that he would rise again, the next day, Passover or the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the chief priest and Pharisees asked Pilate for a “watch” of Roman guards to ensure no one could steal Jesus’ body and claim He had resurrected. Pilate agreed to send soldiers to make the “sure . . . seal” (Matthew 27:65, 66).

SATURDAY

After Jesus’ Body is placed in the Tomb,
He Organizes Preaching in the Spirit World

D&C 138

1 Peter 3:18–20; 4:6, “[Jesus] went and preached unto the spirits in prison” Our understanding of Easter and what happened during the three days and nights following Jesus’ entombment, was revealed on October 3, 1918. That fall, President Joseph F. Smith was nearly 80 years old, WWI was drawing to a close, and the influenza epidemic struck the USA. He was filled with sorrow at the passing of loved ones and spent much time pondering about death and the state of his departed friends and family. During his mediation over 1 Peter’s verses about Jesus’ preaching among the dead, President Smith received a vision of Jesus’ work among the spirits immediately following His death.

In his vision President Smith saw the excited state of the righteous spirits who had already departed their earth life and were now living in the spirit world. The righteous knew of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice and eagerly anticipated His arrival to the spirit world (D&C 138:15). Jesus was the first to be resurrected, or “the first fruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20), thus all the posterity of Adam had remained as spirits without their bodies—which was a bondage to them. The prophet’s understanding was opened and he saw the valiant gathered to meet the Lord in heaven:

And the saints rejoiced in their redemption, and bowed the knee and acknowledged the Son of God as their Redeemer and Deliverer from death and the chains of hell. . . . I perceived that the Lord went not in person among the wicked and the disobedient who had rejected the truth, to teach them; But behold, from among the righteous, he organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power

and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men; and thus was the gospel preached to the dead.

President Joseph F. Smith reported his vision the next day in General Conference. Before the month was out, it was canonized as the next section of revelations collected in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 138).



Burial of Christ by Charl Bloch. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Jesus' death was joyously anticipated far more by those millions who were waiting for, and in need of His redeeming sacrifice in order that they too may be resurrected. Adam, Eve, their faithful daughters and sons including Able and Seth, and all the great prophets and their wives and righteous family members were gathered to greet the Lord as He finished His second estate (D&C 138:38J–40). When Jesus arrived in the world of spirits, these valiant spirit men and women were organized into missionary forces to teach the wicked the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Plan of Salvation, and the way to repent.

SUNDAY

Easter Morning—Jesus' Resurrection

Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 23:56-24:12; John 20:1-18

Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1- 3; Luke 24:1; John 20:1 “The first day of the week” would be Sunday. From this point on, Sunday becomes the Christian Sabbath. It is a day to remember the resurrection as the most memorable day in the history of the world. The resurrection is the reason why Christians worship on Sunday rather than the Jewish day of rest, Saturday (adopted from the story of the creation). Several women had been at the cross and now returned that morning. I have organized the names from the four Gospel texts into a table.

Woman Mentioned at Jesus' Cross and Tomb

MATT 27:56

Mary Magdalene

Mary, mother of James
and Joses

Mother of Zebedee's
Children

MARK 15:40; 16:1

Mary Magdalene

Mary, mother of James
and Joses

Salome

LUKE 24:10

Mary Magdalene

Mary, mother of James

Joanna wife of Chuza

Other women

JOHN 19:25

Mary Magdalene

Mary, wife of Cleopas

Jesus' mother

Jesus' mother's sister

All the women mentioned had been traveling with Jesus and the apostles on multiple missions (Luke 8:2-3). As upright Jewesses, they rested on the Sabbath and did not return to the tomb. For three nights and two full days the women have stayed at indoors. But now it is the early on the third day, as Jewish days begin at night).²⁷ The sabbath laws restricted walking, carrying, and anointing, but they allowed one to prepare ointments for the dead at home. After waiting, obediently keeping the laws of the Sabbath, the women courageously made their way through the dark city streets. They'd have to walk near Golgotha again, with its horrific memories of Jesus' crucifixion from just three days ago. Though it was still dark, I presume they may have smelled the remains of the feasts or perhaps the blood from sacrificial animals and the human crucifixions. When they finally arrived

Jesus Reveals Himself to Mary Magdalenes by William Hole, 1905.



at Joseph of Arimathea's garden, they ask themselves, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" (Mark 16:3, NIV). Fortunately, God had prepared the way for them to be the first witnesses of the empty tomb.

(Each Gospel account differs in which details they include in their retelling of Easter morning. For this study guide, I will focus on the Matthew's account here, we will study the others Gospels in late June when we return to Resurrection morning.)

Matthew 28:2 "... earthquake . . . angels . . . rolled back the stone" God used "earthquakes" as a means to speak to mankind many times in scripture (i.e. Elijah, Alma the Younger, Saul/Paul, destructions, etc.). The miracle of God's intervention is in the timing. Earthquakes are known in this area, but the timing corresponded with the angelic arrival and rolling away the stone to open the tomb. This is the first time in Matthew's Gospel, since the nativity narrative, that "the angel of the Lord" is mentioned. It is one of the many parallels between Jesus' birth and death accounts in Matthew and Luke (as they are the only two who give us an account of Jesus' nativity).²⁸

Matthew 28:3–4 "their countenance was like lightning" (JST) Most angelic visitations are described with dazzling, shining clothes and faces (Joseph Smith's History in the Pearl of Great Price included).

The description of the Roman guards as "[becoming] as dead men" can also translated as being "paralyzed with fright (Anchor Bible).

Matthew 28:5–6 "fear not" is the standard greeting by angels as seen 63 times in the KJV Bible (and variations of the Greek word is found 95 times in the NT alone). It is often used by angels or prophets. The women had two witnesses testifying to them: The angels and the physical evidence. The angels used the same phrase, "come, see," just as when Jesus invited His first disciples to follow Him.

Matthew 28:7–8 "go quickly and tell" The angels asked the women to become the first witnesses of the empty tomb and the news of the resurrected Christ. Remember women were not allowed to be a witness in a Jewish court of law. Under the rabbinic oral traditions (which the Pharisees followed), they were even discouraged from speaking to men in general.²⁹ This ability for women to witness, speak to men, and work with the leaders was a new dimension of Christianity that emancipated women and changed the definition of a witness. The angelic command was followed by the women. Even though they were fearful (and not ultimately believed), they ran to find the disciples to share the news. (Note that Mark 16:8 does not remember that the women spoke at all.)

Jesus' Visitation to the Women

(Matthew 28:9–15)

Matthew 28:9 “Jesus met them” The women were obedient and thereby blessed by a visitation from Jesus. Matthew alone mentions this visitation of the resurrected Lord to all the women. We see this was a separate visitation than the one to Mary Magdalene outside the tomb, because she cannot embrace the Lord, but the group of women are allowed to hold his feet in worship. (Note that Matthew was also the only one to mention that women and children joined the feeding of the miraculous 5,000 and 4,000).

Matthew 28:10, Jesus’ visit was to calm the women’s fears and give them the courage and information they needed to give the apostles. Why would the Lord do this? What would it have felt like for the Jewish apostles to receive their orders from women? How much humility was needed to receive this message?

This was the last eyewitness event in Matthew that occurred on Easter. Although, John 20:11 and John 18 record the risen Lord appearing to Mary Magdalene when she returned to the garden. Luke 24:13 and John 35 tell of Jesus appearing to two unnamed disciples on the road to Emmaus, and the Lord appearing to Peter alone (Luke 24:34). Three other Gospels record the Lord’s visit to His apostles later that night (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36–48; John 20:19–23).

The Guard Told the Chief Priests (Matthew 28:11–15)

Matthew 28:11 “the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything” (NIV) The “watch,” or guards placed to protect the tomb from robbers, were probably Roman soldiers. The Gospels show even the enemies of Jesus (the “chief priests”) were witnesses of His resurrection through the witness of the Roman soldiers.

Matthew 28:12–15 “they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers” (ESV) The bribe offered to silence the soldiers is hard to believe. In Rome, if a guard slept or allowed the protected object to be lost (i.e. the body of Jesus), it was a capital offense—earning a penalty of death.³⁰ The chief priests promised to stand up for the guard if Pilate heard about it. It is odd to have the Roman soldiers preferring Jewish protection, but that is how Matthew recorded it. The other Gospels have no record of this.

Easter Connections in the Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon adds a beautiful dimension to our understanding of Easter. It is filled with clarifying teachings on the Atonement and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Starting off with the books of Nephi, Jacob, Mosiah, and Alma, we find great teachings that augment our understanding of the Savior’s “great and last sacrifice” (Alma 34:10–14).³¹

While the events of Jesus’ last week are not related in the Book of Mormon, the doctrines underlying the experiences of His suffering in Gethsemane and on the cross are clarified in simple plainness in the Book of Mormon.

When I have compared and contrasted the doctrine of the atonement in the biblical canon with the Book of Mormon (a volume one third the size), I have found more than double the amount of information. In addition to the quantity, the teachings in the Book of Mormon provide a beautiful quality that brings new dimensions to our understanding of the Atonement.

The Book of Mormon also enhances our understanding of Easter by providing a new witness from another corner of the earth. Those Israelites living in the New World experienced even more violent signs and natural disasters at the death of the Messiah. Those horrific natural disasters occurred for three full days (versus the three hours of darkness described in the NT) from the time of the Lord's crucifixion until His Resurrection:

There arose a great storm, such a one as never had been known in all the land. And there was also a great and terrible tempest; and there was terrible thunder, insomuch that it did shake the whole earth as if it was about to divide asunder (3 Nephi 8:5–6).



Descriptions continue on for another twenty verses.

The Book of Mormon also expands our understanding of the importance of the sacrament as an ordinance introduced at Lord's Last Supper by reading about its important daily role in Jesus' first two days with the Nephites at the Temple in Bountiful (3 Nephi 18:1–6; 20:3–8). Then we learn summarily that He "did show himself unto them oft, and did break bread oft, and bless it, and give it unto them" (3 Nephi 26:13).

The Easter stories are beautiful in the biblical accounts, but with the addition of the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, our understanding of the ramifications of Easter become all the more exquisite and thrilling.

Header Image: Image by kie-ker via Pixabay.

Left: Other Sheep by Matt Warren. Winner of the 2016 Book of Mormon Central Art Contest.

ENDNOTES

1. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to Luke* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 1242. Luke includes a long journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. This section begins the fifth section in Luke's Gospel (starting in Luke 19:28). It is mainly devoted to Jesus' ministry at the temple in Jerusalem, and follows Matthew's account or older source material closely.
2. John's Gospel gives the clearest date to adjust the timing the week. In John 12:1, it states that Jesus arrives in Bethany "six days before passover." It appears He spent the night there and left the next morning for Jerusalem, which places the Last Supper on Wednesday night and the Passover beginning on Thursday night.
3. Josephus, *Wars*, 6.1.3. Herod leveled off the top of Mount Moriah to build a 35-acre platform for his architectural masterpiece. He began in 20 BC, and was finished near AD 63. It stood for only a few years before Titus destroyed it in August of 70 AD.
4. Lloyd R. Bailey, "Gehenna: The Topography of Hell," *Biblical Archeologist*, 49 (1986): 189. Rabbi David Kimhi in 1200 AD, perpetuated the assumptions that during the late Second Temple era, the garbage dumped into the Hinnom Valley was continually burning, and referred to as Gehenna or hell. Bailey finds no archeological evidence of burning a in that area during in the Roman era.
5. It appears that somewhere in the creation of Matthew's text, a writer misunderstood Zechariah's prophesy to include two donkeys. Matthew 21:2, has two donkeys, while the other Gospels, and the JST of Matthew, have just one.
6. Palm trees grew closer to the two seas (i.e. near Jericho or the Mediterranean), but were imported as needed for feasts.
7. The timing of the cleansing of the Temple was discussed the Come Follow Me commentary for John 2. In short, the Gospel of John more trustworthy chronologically. It is organized with at Jesus traveling to Jerusalem for at least three Passovers ,as well as other trips.
8. I love the story from LDS Reference Library about Edersheim trying to figure out this story. He went to Israel and "looked for a fig tree. Finding one, he reached into the branches, and drew out his hand, and found he had a few leaves from the previous autumn, and some round grey substances. They looked like lozenges. Edersheim sought out several pedestrians until he found one that could speak German. He was told that the little grey objects were edible. That travelers used them to postpone hunger until they could reach an inn. 'Unless you find those on the tree branches in the spring,' he was told, 'the tree will not bear fruit in the summer.'"
9. Enos 1:15; D&C 4:7; 8:1; 11:14; 14:8; 18:18; 20:14; etc.
10. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 381.
11. The JST adds substantial portions to Matthew 21:33 and 46. The text transitions from one parable to another in the JST by defending John the Baptist again and explaining that the audience is receiving parables because of their unbelief.
12. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, ed. *Allegory of the Olive Tree* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1994), 290John304.
13. Hallel consisted of Psalms 113John118. It is chanted at Passover, Feast of the Tabernacles, Hanukah, in synagogue worship, and at many other times and places.

14. Steven and Julie Hite, compiled, *The New Testament with Joseph Smith Translation* (Orem, UT: Veritas Group, 1994), 173John378.
15. James Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret, reprint 1982), 617John618. In the endnotes to chapter 33, Talmage suggests that due to the large crowds in Jerusalem, Jews had two days to celebrate the Passover, “two nights were devoted yearly to the paschal observance.” I have not found this anywhere else in first hand sources dating to the Second Temple era
16. The Synoptic Gospels include preparing for the feast and the feast. The week of Unleavened bread begins at sundown with the feast of the Passover. All four Gospels have Jesus in Jerusalem four days before the feast. This means the last Supper would have been on a Wednesday night. We will discuss this in more detail in June when we look at these chapters in more detail.
17. Kent Brown, *The Testimony of Luke: A New Rendition* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017).
18. Whether the tradition of breaking the bread and hiding it as the afikoman, was practiced at the time of Jesus is debated. Many of the traditions recorded from the Second Temple era may have started at a later date.
19. Judith R. Baskin and Kenneth Seeskin, *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 313.
20. Dean C. Jessee, comp. and ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1984), 181. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:432. Ehat Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 140.
21. Spencer J. Condie, *In Perfect Balance* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1993), 46.
22. Satan uses counterfeits to interrupt the Lord’s timing starting with tempting Adam and Eve to take the fruit from his hand rather than from God’s hand and on God’s timing.
23. W.F. Albright, *The Anchor Bible: Matthew* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 3329.
24. Beryl Rawson, *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (England: Oxford University Press, 1991), 161.
25. The Greek word for “slave / *doulos*” and “servant / *doulos*” overlaps. So even though the KJV uses servant, the word can also mean slave (i.e. Matthew 23:11; Mark 9:35; Luke 1:38; etc.).
26. All four Gospels document that devoted women stayed beside Jesus at Golgotha, and then came to tomb (see Table 1, or Matthew 27:55John56, 61; 28:1; Mark 15:40John41; 16:1; Luke 23:55John56; 24:1John10; John 19:25; 20:1). Jesus’ siblings did not believe that He was the Messiah at this point. As we do not hear of Joseph alive during Jesus’ ministry, we assume that Mary is a widow. In that era, poor widows needed a relative to provide for them (as women were not permitted to work except in a few limited areas). Perhaps, Mary’s closest *believing* male relative, was John, the Beloved disciple. One can assume that John is Jesus’ first cousin by lining up all the women at the tomb by name and finding “Mary’s sister” lines up with the wife of Zebedee (James and John’s father). Otherwise, Jesus’ aunt may fit into the place of “other women,” both seem possible. See Table 1.
27. In the creation, it was dark before light, so Jews begin their day at night. It appears that year, as periodically happens, the Jews had two “holy days,” or sabbaths, back to back. This allows Jesus’ prophecy to be fulfilled completely: “three days and three nights.” If the passover began on Thursday night and extended until Friday sundown, then their weekly Sabbath lasted from Friday sundown until Saturday sundown. They women came while it was still dark on the morning

of the third day, Sunday.

28. Lynne Hilton Wilson, "Jesus' Atonement Foretold through His Birth." *To Save the Lost: An Easter Celebration* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, Religious Studies Center, 2009).
29. *Mishnah, Avoth* 1:5; "Talk not much with womankind . . . they said this of a man's own wife: how much more of his fellow's wife!" In 1963 Philip Blackman translated the same passage, "engage not in much gossip with womankind." A century before Jesus' birth, Ben Sira recorded, "A silent wife is a gift from the Lord; her restraint is more than money can buy" (*Ecclesiasticus*, 26:14John15). More extreme, a renowned Rabbi Joshua claimed that any girl or woman found speaking to a man in the street was guilty of breaking the law of chastity unless there was evidence to the contrary (*Mishnah, Ketuboth* 1:8). For more, see Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: GP, 2015), chapter 2.
30. Kent Jackson, and Robert Millet, eds., *Studies in Scriptures vol. 5: The Gospels* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1986), 454.
31. 2 Nephi 9:7, 25John26; Jacob 4:11John12; Mosiah 3:15John19; 4:6John7; 13:28; Alma 7; 21:9; 30:17; 34:9John14; 42:15, 23; etc.



MATTHEW 18; LUKE 10

JESUS EMPOWERS CHILDREN, THE LOST, SOCIAL OUTCASTS, AND WOMEN

INTRO

Many of the Lord's teachings and behaviors were radical in his culture. As Christians, we are so familiar with them that we may not realize how outrageous they were in his day. This week's scriptural sections demonstrate Jesus making sweeping departures from the perceived norms regarding children, shepherds, forgiveness, Samaritans, neighbors, women, learning, service, and even ownership.

Not only did Jesus think "outside of the box," he also taught with very innovative methods that pioneered a new life for those who followed him. Interestingly, the teachings in the Book of Mormon seem less trapped by the traditions that developed after the Jewish Babylonian captivity (~597–538 BC), and more in keeping with Jesus' teachings (i.e. the worth and place of children in the kingdom of heaven, see Moroni 8:10–23).

Children's Humility is Jesus' Standard for Greatness

Matthew 18:1-34; Mark 9:33b-50; Luke 9:46-50)

Matthew 18:1, Mark 9:33; Luke 9:46 “Who is the greatest . . .?” Jesus and the Twelve returned to Capernaum and entered into “the house” (Mark 9:33). We are not told whose house this was, but possibly Simon Peter’s mother-in-law’s home (Mark 1:30).¹ The Gospels of Mark and Luke record that the Twelve were embarrassed to tell Jesus that they had been debating who was the greatest among them. But he perceived their thoughts. There was an enormous gulf or disparity between the Lord’s thoughts and the disciples’ thoughts.

Mark 9:34 “If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all” Jesus’ kingdom turned the social ladder of hierarchy upside down; humble servants are to be the most honored, not the smartest or richest or those the closest related to royalty. Jesus explained that in the Kingdom of Heaven, the highest ranking goes to those who will serve the most. His consistent message honored the lowly humble servants—including children and women—in various settings across each of the four Gospels.

Suffer the Little Children to Come to Me by Juliaan De Vriendt. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



- “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matthew 23:11)
- “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister” (Mark 10:45)
- “...but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.” (Luke 22:26)
- “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour” (John 12:26)

The fact that the early Christians recorded these sayings, and included them in the Gospels, shows that they also wanted to emphasize and incorporate Jesus’ message of encouraging servitude.

In contrast to Jesus’ desire for all to love and serve, his ancient world had a hierarchy with the wealthy, educated, and masters on top and an inferior class of servants and slaves on the bottom. In the rabbinic literature of the day, women, children, and slaves are often lumped together in this class of servants.² But Jesus attacked this misconception by teaching the true value of a child.

Matthew 18:2; Mark 9:35; Luke 9:48 “Jesus called a little child . . .”³ Jesus made abrupt changes to how children were treated. He acknowledged and welcomed them in public, encouraged them to come to him, and honored them as the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. To appreciate what a drastic change this was in their society, it helps to contrast Jesus’ liberation with the Judeo culture of the time.⁴

Children in the Ancient Jewish Culture

Children were welcomed as a blessing from God, fulfilling the commandment, “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:22). Half of the children born alive died by age ten. Juxtaposed with these two realities, children were seen as a public nuisance, and thus, should be unseen and unheard.⁵ Girls especially were kept indoors “for modesty sake.”⁶

Fathers dictated how their children were educated, where they went, what they ate, what they vowed, and collected all payments they earned or found. Many were harshly disciplined: “Stripes and correction are at all times wisdom . . . loving fathers . . . [do] not spare the rod,” and “break him in and beat him sound while his is still a child.”⁷ Guardians kept strict control through age twelve, but by age “thirteen and one day,” they were considered adults.⁸

Children shared work with slaves (in fact, one of the Greek words for young child, paidon, can also mean servant or slave). Both washed their father or master’s face and feet, dressed and fed him, waited on him and took orders from him.



Girls were not educated beyond learning domestic skills at home, except for rare exceptions. By age five or six, Jewish boys could begin their formal education. However, “90–95 percent of the population of ancient Palestine would have been rural peasants,” hence, both boys and girls were often needed to help contribute on the family farms.⁹ Even very little ones helped in vegetable gardens, gathering firewood, and with chores.¹⁰

Matthew 18:3–4 “. . . be converted and become as little children” Little ones seem to have an innate gift to believe, which is at the root of conversion. When Jesus asked his disciples to humble themselves like children, he implied the need to become more trusting, teachable, transparent, innocent, loving, forgiving, not prejudiced, etc. These positive traits are childlike not childish.

Matthew 18:5; Mark 9:37; Luke 9:48 “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me” (ESV) This is thought provoking—and it extends to all who interact with children with love from babysitters and teachers, to parents and grandparents.

God’s Care of Children

Matthew 18:6; Mark 9:42 “. . . offend one of these little ones which believe on me” Jesus vehemently denounced anyone who hurt children. The word for “offend/stumble” in Greek is *skandaloizo/scandalize* and also means to put a stumbling block or impediment in the way. In addition to hurting someone physically, the definition includes, “entrap, i.e., trip up . . . entice to sin, apostasy.”¹¹ In addition to abuse, Jesus also referred to those who cause a child to lose their innate faith or to distrust God. In this context, being a parent or caregiver who works with children is like being on a full-time mission with a golden contact. The Lord still asks that those who work with children never discourage the faith of these young investigators. Intentionally teaching children falsehoods and extinguishing their faith is a serious sin.

Matthew 18:7–9; Mark 9:42–50; Luke 17:1–2 “Woe . . . cut it off” Jesus felt so strongly about not abusing children in any way that he used language that would have been extremely offensive to the Jews. Dismembering one’s body, or any form of harming the body, was very offensive to the Jews. Killing oneself was perhaps the worst thing one could do. Jesus used these strong words as an alarm to let them know how serious it is to offend little children.

Matthew 18:10 “their angels . . . behold the face of my Father” Jesus explained that angels are given charge over children. Jews believed that God gave “His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways” (Psalm 91:10; also see Daniel 6:22). Although we do not know if God sends each infant to their second estate with angelic protection, we do know that the light of Christ is given to all who are born on the earth (D&C 84:44–48; Moroni 7:12). Modern prophets have discussed the idea of guardian angels including,

- Heber J Grant: “[Children] the Lord loves you. His angels are always near to help you. Your guardian angels stand by you to see that no harm shall touch you, no evil thought disturb you.”¹²
- Joseph Fielding Smith: “We have often heard of guardian angels attending us and many patriarchs have spoken of such protection. There are times no doubt when some unseen power directs us and leads us from harm. However, the true guardian angel given to every man who comes into the world is the Light of Truth or Spirit of Christ.”¹³
- Pres. Harold B. Lee: “Those in the spirit world may be guardian angels to those in mortality. Who are guardian angels? Well, it would appear that someone who is quickened by some influence, not yet celestialized, is permitted to come back as a messenger for the purpose of working with and trying to aid those who are left behind. . . . It isn’t your [departed] father and mother who will be far away from you, children; it will be you who keep them far away.”¹⁴

Parable of the Lost Sheep

Matthew 18:10–14; Luke 15:3–7

Matthew 18:11 “. . . cometh to save that which was lost” The JST adds a helpful transition between children and lost sheep: “*and to call sinners to repentance; but these little ones have no need of repentance, and I will save them.*”¹⁵

Matthew 18:12; Luke 15:4 “a man has . . . sheep” Jesus described this shepherd as a brave, mountain-climbing, self-sacrificing man. Yet in the Jewish world at the time, shepherds were considered socially unclean. They were not allowed to stand as legal witnesses in court. This tradition developed because some shepherds let their flocks graze on others’ property. Jesus, however, used this pastoral imagery to describe himself because he was despised by many. As the “good shepherd,” he knows his sheep by name (John 10:14). A thousand years earlier, King David also described the Lord as an attentive shepherd: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want (Psalm 23:1).



The Gospels include 37 verses about sheep (mostly in John 10:2–27). John W. and Jeannie Welch describe sheep as helpless. It is interesting to consider the parallels between fallen man and sheep:

Of all the animals in God’s kingdom, sheep rank among the most vulnerable. They are largely defenseless, lacking claws or most other means of warding off an attack from predators. They cannot even run quickly for very long. And not only can a lamb become lost, but because it lacks any homing instinct, it is quite helpless in finding its way back to the flock or the pasture. And once lost, it will frequently simply sit down and wait, not even bleating in distress. The best protection for sheep is to stay together in a group. Even then, the slightest noise can send them into a panic or cause a whole herd to stampede, sometimes to their death. The presence of their shepherd exerts an immediate calming effect on the sheep.¹⁶

Matthew 18:13–14; Luke 15:6–7 “likewise, joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth” Jesus used the parable of “the lost sheep,” to describe the importance of finding and leading sinners back to God’s fold. God finds joy and celebrates with every individual carefully brought back.

Reproving Another

Matthew 18:15–18; Luke 17:3

Matthew 18:15 “between thee and him alone” Jesus taught that the best way to approach a disagreement is to privately discuss the offense (also see Matthew 5:25–26). Rabbis taught that even if full restoration were made, you would not obtain forgiveness until you ask for it from the person you have wronged. This is consistent with Jesus’ teaching.

Matthew 18:16 “**But if his will not hear thee . . .**” If the offender refuses reconciliation, the Mosaic law called for two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). Christians, too, are familiar with the Lord using two or three witnesses to establish his truths (Matthew 18:16; John 8:17; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19).

Matthew 18:18 “**bind on earth shall be bound in heaven**” This verse does not seem to belong. Right in the middle of a discussion on forgiveness, we find a word-for-word repeat of Matthew 16:19. Was it a mistake?

The Gospel of Matthew often repeats phrases as dividing points or organizational markers in his Gospel. If it were intentional, why do you think Matthew has it here again?

In Matthew’s context of Jesus speaking to the Twelve about their service, perhaps it has to do with the returning sheep being sealed. Does this have anything to do with the keys that were given on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17? Were the keys given to the other twelve apostles at this time? Were the twelve receiving instructions on sealing ordinances?

There Am I

Matthew 18:19–20

Matthew 18:19 “**that they may not ask amiss**” (JST) Returning to the theme of two witnesses, the Lord promises the Twelve that if two of them ask for what is right (the stipulation added by the JST), the Lord will answer them. Interestingly, in the restoration context of binding and loosing, sealings are done in the presence of two witnesses.

Matthew 18:20 “**Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I**” The Lord expanded his direction from two or three of the Twelve to include all of his disciples who came to worship in his name. When we gather in unity and truth, our Savior (or the gift of his Spirit) can be in our midst. I love this promise! Especially in light of the parable of the lost sheep and forgiveness. The two or three gathered seems to parallel with the two or three witnesses needed for reconciliation. Even a few who act in harmony with God’s will are blessed with his Spirit.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie saw this verse as referring to those who have the Gift of the Holy Ghost:

All of those who have made covenant in the waters of baptism to serve the Lord and who have, as a consequence, been promised the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Such great blessings as are here promised are not given automatically or promiscuously; they are reserved for those who through faith and obedience are conforming their lives to the divine standard. . .

Forgive

Matthew 18:21-22

Matthew 18:21 “How oft shall . . . I forgive?” The Jewish rule said that someone only needed to offer unconditional forgiveness three times.¹⁷ This came from a reading of Amos 1:3, “for three transgressions . . . and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof.” In the D&C, as the Lord gave instructions to the Missouri saints during their persecution, He encouraged them to turn the other cheek with forgiveness four times. These examples make Peter’s offer to forgive seven times a very generous one.

Matthew 18:22 “seventy times seven” This number is both symbolic and real. It is a whole, complete, perfect level of forgiveness. Literally, $70 \times 7 = 490$, which was a number familiar at the time as “ten jubilees (or seventy weeks of years).”¹⁸ I think it is significant that Jesus used this number as it is used in Daniel 9:2, in association with the Messiah’s arrival. Now that Christ is on the earth, he implemented the higher law of forgiveness that his Atonement can offer. We are eternally indebted to our Redeemer and can certainly learn to be patient and forgiving with others as we follow our Savior’s example to forgive. It is a very different principle here than Peter understood: “forgiveness from Jesus is qualitative not quantitative.”¹⁹ Jesus illustrated this important lesson with another story that Matthew alone recorded.

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant by Jan Sanders van Hemessen, ca. 1556. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Parable of The Unforgiving Servant

Matthew 18:23-35

Matthew 18:23–35 “a certain king . . . take[s] account of his servants” Jesus’ parable again seems to use exaggerated numbers, but they provide significant meaning. The first man owed the king ten thousand talents. That is equivalent to billions and billions of dollars today—in a day where *no one* had that kind of money. That is like saying one person was in debt for the gross net worth of all the companies of Silicon Valley combined (i.e. Google, Apple, Facebook, etc.). The price does seem to be significant as it relates to the Jewish nation. In the historical setting of Herod’s Temple, Josephus recorded that the entire temple treasury was worth 10,000 talents. Jesus contrasted that price—as large as one can imagine—in comparison to 100 pence, or 100 days labor at minimum wage. A BYU Studies article suggested another view:

Thus, the unforgiving servant may in fact represent the king or the temple high priest into whose hands God had entrusted the keeping of that huge amount of sacred wealth. No one else in Judea could conceivably have held that kind of money. Thus, the political upshot of the parable may well be this: despite the great debts and offenses of the rulers of the temple against God, they can be readily forgiven by God, so long as they beg his forgiveness and worship him. When asked, however, to be generous to a commoner in need of a small amount, the rich rulers of the temple will be unmoved, and as a consequence, they will be held personally accountable for the loss of the entire temple treasury.²⁰

Jesus used the temple as a reference to value, but the main message embeds the relationship between God’s forgiveness and our need to forgive others. I like Elder Robert E. Wells interpretation about this parable.

We’re often critical of others but easy on ourselves. We often see clearly the faults of others but find it difficult to see our own. We say we’re frank and honest when we speak critically of someone else, but feel offended, claiming that they are unfair, not tolerant or understanding, when others do the same about us. If we fail in anything, we produce half a dozen valid reasons why, which in others would be feeble excuses. The important lesson we learn in the parable of the unforgiving servant is that unless and until we have shown forgiveness to our fellowman, we can’t receive forgiveness of God.²¹

I presume that this parable would mean more to Peter soon, when he will desperately need the Savior’s forgiveness. Jesus gave another parable that speaks to humanity’s need for a Savior and Redeemer. It outlines the plan of salvation. It is found only in the Gospel of Luke

THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Luke 10:25–37

I have seen many old gothic cathedrals, which use stain glass windows to tell biblical stories. Some depict Old Testament (OT) stories in conjunction with New Testament (NT) stories. Accounts from Jesus' life often parallel or fulfill OT stories. For example, Noah's flood is often positioned next to Jesus' baptism, or Moses' manna with Jesus feeding of the 5,000. In a few cathedrals, I have seen the parable of the good Samaritan paired with the story of Adam and Eve. After researching this, John W. Welch found that many early Christian fathers and theologians throughout the middle ages interpreted the parable of the Good Samaritan as an allegory symbolizing Christ himself saving fallen humanity from their sins. They saw it as a type and shadow of Christ's redemption of humanity from the fall.²²

In this parable, Jesus again used images that would have startled his listeners. Historically, inns were filthy and unhealthy. Jews saw Samaritans as their enemy, unclean, evil, and selfish. At the time of the NT, the journey from Jerusalem to Jericho was very dangerous. There were limestone caves that pot-marked the hillside and robbers lived there. No one with any sense would travel the road alone because of the robbers waiting to attack. Jericho was a famous resort town—even Herod the Great built a palace there (and stayed there while dying). The highway between the “resort” town and the big city was well known.

When we consider these details and read the parable as instructions on being a good neighbor, it becomes the source of much kindness, acts of service, and not judging. This is good, but if that is all we see, then we miss the symbols of God's plan of salvation that are tucked into its message. The prophet Joseph Smith taught how to find hidden meanings in parables or scriptures: “I have [a] key by which I understand the scripture. I inquire, what was the question which drew out the answers?”²³

With this parable we often only see the last question, “who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29), but this was asked only to “justify” the lawyer. The question he asked first is also answered in the parable, but it takes a deeper level of understanding, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25). Answering this question ties back to the allegory that the early church fathers saw with Adam and Eve.

Allegorical view of the Text

Luke 10:30 “A certain man, came down” In the allegorical view, the “man” is either Adam from the garden of Eden, or all humanity. The word “man” in Hebrew and Aramaic is “*adam*.” The emphasis is on “coming down”

The Good Samaritan by James Tissot.



from the holy city “Jerusalem,” or heaven. Jerusalem is always “higher” spiritually than any place in the world to a Jew, so it appropriately can represent the Holy City, heaven, or the residence of God. That person leaves the presence of God with promises conferred from that holy setting. In the allegory the man goes from God’s city or a premortal realm in heaven to life on earth. The man also comes voluntarily and alone.

“Jericho” The city of Jericho along with Babylon, Egypt, and Sodom and Gomorrah are used symbolically for worldliness. In opposition to the heavenly city, Jericho represents “the world.” It is the lowest city on the planet, 825 feet below sea level. In the allegorical view, it represents the fall, or coming to a fallen world for mortal life.

“Fell among thieves” The man “fell/*peripipto*,” meaning, “to fall in with” or “to fall into misfortunes,” not “to fall down/*pipto*.” The early Christians saw the thieves as “opposing forces or evil spirits of false teachers.”²⁴ In the allegory, the thieves are a deliberate pernicious group with a concerted intent, not random attackers, but devils with a plan. Similarly, all mortals on earth are faced with the opposition, temptation and false teachings of the devil.

“stripped him of his raiment” Early church fathers (including Origen, Chrysostom and Augustine), saw the man’s loss of his raiment as the loss of his “robe of immortality” or a “robe of obedience.” The thieves did not rob him of any money, but of his garment. What state do humans have in heaven that they lose coming to earth? When this raiment or robe is taken away, the man is wounded. Perhaps it is spiritual death and he is left without his spiritual awareness or memory on earth.

“wounded him . . . leaving him half dead” The wounds can be wounds to the spirit of humanity, but they do not kill him, he is only half dead. Something happened when leaving his heavenly home that hurt him so that on earth, he is missing his spiritual knowledge and now must walk by faith. However, the thieves can torment him only within certain bounds, not kill him (1 Corinthians 10:13). In the analogy of the plan of salvation, think of our first and second deaths (spiritual death and physical death) is this imagery of “half-dead” (Alma 12:31–32). We are born into a fallen world. Furthermore, the sin that we engage with as fallen mortals does leave us “spiritually dead.”

Luke 10:31–32 “A certain priest . . . [and] Levite” The early church fathers saw the priest as representative of the Law of Moses, and the Levite, the other sacred Jewish text, “The Prophets.” (Levites were lower-class temple workers—they helped as the butchers, janitors, policemen, and if they were lucky, musicians, at the temple.) In the allegorical view, neither the Law of Moses nor their other scriptures had power to save. Their law and their text were ultimately impotent.

“passed by on the other side” They came closer to the wounded man, but both men kept their distance to retain ritual purity in order to work in the temple. In the allegorical view, they don’t convert to the Gospel, but remain

on their Mosaic course, unable to heal or help with eternal salvation because they do not accept the higher law.

Luke 10:33 “a certain Samaritan . . . had compassion” The Samaritan was seen by most of the early church Fathers to represent Christ. In John 8:48, antagonistic Jews referred derogatorily to Jesus as a Samaritan. Even though Isaiah’s chapters on the “suffering servant” describe the Lord as an outcast, the Jews were not expecting their Messiah to share those traits (Isaiah 49, 52, 53).²⁵ In this parable, Jesus chose this image for himself, speaking to how his colleagues thought of him. He equated himself with some of the Jews worst enemies for the past thousand years. Yet *this Samaritan* (Jesus) has compassion.

Luke 10:34 “bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine” The Samaritan came up to the injured and bound up his wounds. He represents a divinely compassionate God. Clement saw God’s healing skills as faith, hope, and charity as the “ligatures . . . or salvation which cannot be undone.” John W. Welche pointed out, as Abraham bound Isaac, our souls are bound to the Lord. We are bound to the Lord through covenants. The Lord begins to replace the lost garments by rebuilding spiritual protection through wine and oil. These represent the wine of Jesus’ atoning blood spilt in Gethsemane and on the cross. The oil, is healing as the “Anointed one/Messiah” administers it. The ordinances incorporating wine and oil become part of the healing process the Savior employs. Another translation reads, the wine and oil “gush” into the wound to disinfect and cleanse it.²⁶

“Set him on his own beast” Carrying the wounded on his own beast is the image of Jesus as our Redeemer carrying humanity on and in his body. From the pains that caused his bleeding from every pour, to the wounds in his hands and sides, his body carried the debt of sin for each of us (Mosiah 3:7; D&C 19:18; 1 Peter 2:21–24).

“brought him to an inn” The inn has long been interpreted as the church. Jesus carries us to salvation through his ministers and missionaries who work at the inn/the church. The Samaritan takes care of the wounded victim himself for the first night and day.

Luke 10:35 “on the morrow,” or after Christ’s resurrection, He leaves the work of careful healing hands to His established church. The innkeeper may represent church workers, apostles, and others assigned to minister in the church.

“Two pence” Several allegorical interpretations work here: The Father and Son, two instructions on charity, two days wages, symbolizing adequate provisions, temple tax suggesting fulfilled ritual obligations, and even after the time established by the Lord when he will come—after 2 more days Christ arose on the morning of the Resurrection.

“when I come again, I will repay thee” The workers at the inn will be rewarded for their service to wounded

Jesus Rests at Bethany in the House of His Friends by William Hole, 1905.



humanity. Jesus promises that whatever you spend, will be returned. They will be amply reimbursed for their sacrifices for the church and fallen humanity at either the Second Coming or when they meet the Lord on the judgement day.²⁷

Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan beautifully illustrates the plan of salvation. The early Christians' allegorical interpretation fits nicely with the restored understanding of Adam and Eve's fall and journey on earth to return to heaven. This interpretation answers the lawyer's first question, "what is needed to inherit eternal life," by showing the need to receive Jesus as our redeemer and exemplar in carrying out his work of healing and building the church.

Loving God: Martha and Mary

Luke 10:38-42

Luke placed these two stories next to each other as supportive theological messages (and without mentioning it, both near Jerusalem). Kent Brown sees Luke using the preceding parable on the Good Samaritan to show how to love one's neighbor and this story to show how to love God.²⁸ Luke also used both stories to break down other societal norms. Jesus' restoration found good in Samaritans and in educating women.

Luke 10:38 "Martha received him into her house" Martha's name means, "mistress" (the feminine of "master") and she lived up to her title by welcoming the whole group traveling with Jesus to her home (the JST adds disciples too, "they entered"). Luke did not identify the village, but the Gospel of John records that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived in Bethany, a village just 2.5 miles east of Jerusalem. By connecting this information, we find a hint in Luke that Jesus had traveled down to Judea to stay with his friends.

The JST also adds that it was Martha's home. This was an unusual situation at the time, as women usually did not own property. It suggests that perhaps she is a widow and her husband left the house to her, or perhaps he was "Simon the Leper" (Matthew 26:6; Mark 14:3). Simon the Leper also had a home in Bethany where Jesus came to eat. Perhaps it is the same home, but due to Simon's illness, he is removed from the public (perhaps to a leper's colony) and Martha was left in charge of their home.²⁹

Luke 10:40 "Martha was cumbered about much serving" With the large group gathering for the dinner party in Jesus' honor, Martha was distraught. Luke portrayed Martha as an upright Jewess trying to prepare her home and a meal for her many honored guests. Her workload led her to become frustrated with her sister's lack of help. Even if she had servants or children to help (which she probably had even though it says, "serve alone"³⁰), as the hostess, Martha's workload would have felt overwhelming. The Greek word for "cumbered" is "diverted" and means "kept distracted."³¹ This detail brings the story into our lives, as we too experience stress that can alter our perspective.

“my sister hath left me to serve alone” It is as if Martha was saying: “Jesus don’t you see how burdened I am?” From the perspective of most Jews of the day, Mary—not Martha—was out of line. She sat at Jesus’ feet to learn from him which broke two laws: Women were not to speak to men and they were not to learn the Law. Some rabbis believed that a woman speaking to a man was so egregious that it was sufficient cause for a divorce.³² Also, it was obvious that Mary neglected her domestic responsibilities before the dinner. Yet Jesus did not agree. This became a perfect setting for Jesus to knock down another false cultural practice.

Luke 10:41 “. . . thou art careful and troubled about many things” Jesus noticed that Martha was frustrated and even “anxious” about her sister’s lack of help (ESV). His response to Martha sounds like a reminder of priorities to the modern reader, but to that ancient society, his response would have been completely shocking. In Greek it communicates that she is anxious and distracted *of mind*. The problem was not serving, but *the timing and divided priorities*.

Luke 10:42 “But one thing is needful” When we look at life from an eternal perspective, the mortal fluff falls away and we are left with the need to “come unto Christ and be perfected in Him” (Moroni 10:32). Even daily bread and a shelter is superfluous compared to our relationship with our Heavenly Parents and the Savior. ³³ In this way Jesus emancipates those burdened by cares of the world, to seek for the better and best.

“Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” Jesus’ last remark is especially touching in the context of the era. Jewish women owned nothing—everything they owned belonged to their fathers or guardians before marriage, and husbands after. That included their clothing, food, and children. Even their lives could be sold into slavery if their father or husband thought it necessary. Jesus’ statement shows that women can own what they learn. Mary’s experience will develop more faith and knowledge and gave Mary (and by association, Martha) a richer life, for she will own her knowledge beyond this life: “Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection” (D&C 130:18). What Mary (and each of us) learned and experienced will be hers (ours) for an eternity.

Jesus’ revolutionary endorsement of interacting with women, and encouraging their learning was radically innovative. Jesus was not speaking against the need for service nor to avoid household duties. Rather, his message was that learning of Him should be our priority. He also demonstrated that women may join in the world of the spirit and mind. Luke also wanted to share this message with the early church, and added it to his Gospel.

ENDNOTES

1. Capernaum, a city of 1,000 or less at the time, became Jesus' home base after he was rejected in Nazareth (Matthew 4:13). Perhaps he moved there to be away from Herod Antipas who imprisoned and later murdered John the Baptist in his frontier fortress, Machaerus (on the Jordan side of the Sea of Galilee). Mark 1:30 includes that Peter's mother in law had a home in Capernaum. Luke 8:3 says that many female disciples assisted Jesus' ministry monetarily and working alongside the apostles. Three are mentioned by name across the Gospels—Mary Magdala, Jonna and Susanna. Perhaps Susanna, hosted “the home” for Jesus in Capernaum, as I do not think the others held a permanent address in Capernaum. I assume Joanna lived near Herod Antipas' palace as her husband, Chuza, was Herod's steward; and Mary Magdalene was from Magdala (but she may have moved to Capernaum when Jesus did). The scriptures do not tell us where in Capernaum, or to whom “the home” belonged.
2. Josephus, *Against Apion*. 2.25. Jacob Neusner, *The Economics of the Mishnah* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 27. “One should train for the job all those who are employed on the estate, whether slaves or children or women.” David Sedley, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, XXV (Oxford, England: Oxford University, winter 2003), 213. Philo, *A Volume of Questions and Solutions to Questions which arise in Genesis*, I.29.
3. According to tradition, the little child called to Jesus was 3-year-old St. Ignatius (Catholics claim he followed Peter as Bishop of Antioch until his martyrdom in Rome under Trajan)
4. Ben Sira, *Ecclesiasticus*, 23:7–15; 42:10–11.
5. Philo of Alexandria, Pieter Willem van der Horst, trans., *Philo's Flaccus: The First Pogrom* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2003), 70. The quote includes: “[Women] were always kept in seclusion and did not even appear at the house-door, and their unmarried daughters, who were confined to the women's quarter, women who *for modesty's sake shunned the eyes of men*, even their closest relatives.”
6. Ben Sira, *Ecclesiasticus*, 22:6; 30:1, 2, 12; “He who disciplines his son will find profit in him.”
7. Avraham Steinberg, ed., *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics* (Jerusalem, Israel: Feldheim, 2003), 682.
8. Reta H. Finger, *Of Widows and Meals: Communal Meals in the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 100. Also see, Daniel Sperber, *Roman Palestine 200–400, the Land: Crisis and Change in Agrarian Society as Reflected in Rabbinic Sources* (Tel Aviv, Israel: Bar-Ilan University, 1978).
9. Richard N. Holzapfel, Eric D. Huntsman, Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 2006), 117.
10. Strong, *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, 81; Greek dictionary for “offend/skandalizo.”
11. Heber J. Grant wrote an official first presidency statement to children included
12. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:54.
13. Harold B. Lee, *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, edited by Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1996), 58-59.
14. Hite, *New Testament with JST*, 102.
15. John W. and Jeannie S. Welch, *The Parables of Jesus: revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork: UT, Covenant Com-

- munications, 2019), 97.
16. W.F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Anchor Bible: Matthew* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 223. This is quoting a later work, the Babylonian Talmud, compiled after the time of Jesus, but claiming ideas from the Second Temple.
 17. Welch, *Parables*, 114.
 18. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, 3rd ed.* (McLean, VA: MacDonald, nd. Reprint of 1838), 125.
 19. “Herodian Times and Historical Backgrounds,” *BYU Studies*, vol. 36 (1996-97), Number 3.
 20. Robert E. Wells, *The Mount and the Master*, 165.
 21. John W. Welch, “The Good Samaritan,” *BYU Studies*, vol 38; number 2 (Provo, UT: 1999), 50–106. Some of the early church fathers include: Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, Isidore, and Eliguius.
 22. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: reprint, 1964), 5:261. This statement is from Joseph Smith’s Journal, kept by Willard Richards, Jan. 29, 1843.
 23. Welch, “The Good Samaritan,” 76.
 24. Dating from the first and/or second centuries BC, the eighteen Psalms of Solomon, collect several ideas pointing toward the hope of their promised Messiah. No references to Isaiah’s suffering servant passages or any other sign of a messiah who will be rejected are found. It was not an image that the Jews were expecting.
 25. Welch, “The Good Samaritan,” 82.
 26. Ibid., 86. See Table 1 on <https://byustudies.byu.edu/content/good-samaritan-type-and-shadow-plan-salvation>
 27. Kent Brown, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Luke* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2014), 544.
 28. Another overlapping evidence that Simon the Leper was part of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus’ family or home connections is based on the fact that at the supper in Bethany recorded in Matthew 26:6; Mark 14:3, a woman anoints Jesus’ head with pure nard, while John 12:3 speaks of a dinner at Bethany with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus when Mary uses pure nard to anoint Jesus.
 29. Wilson, *Emancipation*, chapter 8. The average middle-class household in the Greco-Roman at the time had 8 servants or slaves. The Jewish world probably had less.
 30. Brown, *Luke*, 542.
 31. *Mishnah, Ketuboth* 1:8.
 32. Jesus’ example honors women in their education and respects them as equal partners. The same view is seen by modern apostles like, Elder Richard G. Scott: “In some cultures, tradition places a man in a role to dominate, control, and regulate all family affairs. That is not the way of the Lord. In some places the wife is almost owned by her husband, as if she were another of his personal possessions. That is a cruel, mistaken vision of marriage encouraged by Lucifer that every priesthood holder must reject. It is founded on the false premise that a man is somehow superior to a woman. Nothing could be farther from the truth” (*Ensign*, Nov 2008; “Honor the Priesthood and use it well,” 46).



JOHN 7–10

FEASTS OF THE TABERNACLES & DEDICATION
JOHN'S 5TH AND 6TH DISCOURSES AND 6TH MIRACLES

INTRODUCTION

John's Gospel (John) is known as the Spiritual Gospel. Jesus' discourses can stretch us to an eternal perspective and a spiritual view of life. In these four chapters, John includes discussions of many opposites: the triumph of light over darkness, living water and spiritual thirst, eternal freedom over slavery to sin, spiritual inheritance over earthly lineage, physical blindness, and spiritual blindness, 99 and 1, and good and bad shepherds.

Book of Mormon Insights

We find many of these same themes found in the Book of Mormon. To augment our NT study, here is a small sampling of references that consistently come from God to his "other sheep" (3 Nephi 15:21).

1. **Jesus as Life and Light of The World:** Mosiah 16:9; Alma 38:9; 3 Nephi 9:18; 11:11; Ether 4:12
2. **Jesus healing the Blind as a sign of the Messiah:** Mosiah 3:5; 3 Nephi 17:7–9; 26:15; 4 Nephi 1:5
3. **Jesus as the Good Shepherd:** Alma 5:38–39; 41, 57, 60; Helaman 7:18

SETTING: FEAST OF THE TABERNACLES

The setting for the next three chapters (John 7–9) is in Jerusalem at one of the three major pilgrimage feasts: The Feast of the Tabernacles / *Sukkot* / “Ingatherings” (Ex 23:16–17), or Feast of Booths (Lev. 23:40–44). That means it is in the early fall, about six months after the second Passover (John 6:4). Jesus built his discourse around the setting. To appreciate the interplay between the feast and his sermon, here are a few details about the Feast of the Tabernacles.

- The feast fell in the early fall, on Chislev 14–21, Jews from around the Roman Empire came to Jerusalem to worship at their temple for seven days, with an eight-day for a holy convocation of rest.
- They remembered the Israelites 40 years wandering in the wilderness, by creating little huts or booths out of branches and palm fronds. For the week of the feast, they lived in these makeshift tents as their ancestors had as they traveled from Egypt to their Promised Land. (In the Book of Mormon, it appears that King Benjamin’s sermon also fell this on this holy week. For evidence note that the Nephites lived in tents facing the temple, rehearsed the law, had a coronation, and made covenants.¹)
- They celebrated the harvest and prayed for early rains. The priests enacted this as a ritual. Each day they formed a procession carrying golden pitchers and paraded up and down Mount Moriah to the pool of Siloam. They sang Isaiah 12:3, “With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation,” as they filled golden pitchers with water and then carried them up the mount to the temple where they poured out the water on the temple altar as a libation. In the procession they sang the “Hillel Psalms” (Psalms 113–118) which ends, “O Lord, Save now, I beseech thee, send now prosperity.”
- The Court of Women was lit with massive 85-foot-high menorahs in each of the four corners. They were, figuratively, trees of light and life.
- Nathan dedicated Solomon’s Temple on this day, so the celebration often includes a temple motif.
- Priests offered 70 Bullocks in addition to the other sacrifices that were required for the week.
- The Jews renewed their covenants and read the law.

[Etrog, silver etrog box and lulav, used on the Jewish holiday of Sukkot. Photo by Gilabrand via Wikimedia Commons.](#)



Feast of Tabernacles 1st Scene

Jesus goes from Galilee to Jerusalem

John 7:1–13

John 7:1–2 “Jesus . . . would not walk in Jewry”

As the Jews in Jerusalem want to kill Jesus for breaking the Sabbath, He has stayed in Galilee for several months. He sent his disciples ahead to Jerusalem, and He follows later.

John 7:3–5 “neither did his brethren believe in him”

By the context, we interpret the word “brother / *adelphos*” as Jesus’ half-brothers (but the Greek word is also used for kin, countrymen, or disciples). During Jesus’ ministry, it appears that his siblings did not have much faith or interest in following their big brother. Mark 6:3 and Matthew 13:55 lists four other sons born to Mary and Joseph, James, Joses, Juda, and Simon, as well as “daughters.” However, post Jesus’ resurrection the family became more active in the ministry.

It sounds as if up to this time, most of Jesus’ miracles had been done in Galilee, so Jesus’ half-siblings encourage, “show thyself to the world” (7:4). Yet, their request, to go show the crowds your miracles sounds similar to Satan’s temptations. Do you recognize it as another form of the devil wanting Jesus to display his power at the Temple for all to see? The author John does not want us to fall into that trap, so he notes that their request for miracles in 7:3 did not lead to faith in 7:5.

After the resurrection, we see Jesus’ family more actively involved in the growth of Christianity. His brother James became the Bishop, evangelist, or leader in Jerusalem, and possibly even later an apostle.² Tradition holds that he also became the author of the book of James. In AD 62, James’ was such a strong leader for Christianity that the Sanhedrin had him stoned. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Ananus, “assembled the Sanhe-



Map of first-century Palestine. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

drin of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others... he delivered them to be stoned.”³

John 7:6–8 “My time is not yet come . . . go ye up unto this feast” Jesus, not interested in human praise in the slightest, answers them in a way that prophecies of his future glorification or return to his Father. His time of death and resurrection is not yet. When John uses, “go ye up” (7:8), he emphasizes the double meaning of “go up on the cross” which will become “the inevitable result of showing his glory in Jerusalem.”⁴ John regularly uses wordplay and records Jesus’ frequent use of words with double meanings (i.e. living water, born again, drink my blood, etc.).

John 7:10 “He also went up . . . secretly” (John 7:10–13, HCSB) Jesus’ instructions for others to go up to the feast, does not contradict his later decision to go to Jerusalem.

John 7:11–13, “Jews sought him . . . much murmuring” John points out the division between the Jews. *Murmuring* literally means: “guarded debate.” Privately, many debated if He were a good man or a deceiver. At this point, the discussions were not in public “for fear of the Jews” (7:13). I think these verses apply to our generation too. There is lots of diversity about who Jesus of Nazareth was, even among Christians.

Feast of Tabernacles 2nd Scene

Jesus Teaches at the Temple in the Midst of the Feast

John 7:14–39

John 7:14 “the midst of the feast” Jesus arrived on day three of four of the feast week. Herod’s expansion to the temple covered approximately 33 acres. This provided lots of places for gathering and teaching. The Court of the Gentiles was the largest place, but Jews often met in the “Court of the Women” for discussions and teaching because it was the largest place to gather for Jews only. (Ironically, the women and children were not to join in, but secluded to a raised gallery along three edges of the court.)

John 7:15 “How has this man become learned, having never been educated?” This is the day of great tutors from the Greek Socrates and Aristotle, to the Jewish Rabbis Hillel and Gamaliel. Master teachers were quoted as by students or disciples as the source of knowledge. Rabbinic literature is filled with “Rabbi So and So says . . .”⁵

John 7:16 “My doctrine is . . . his that sent me” Jesus defends his teaching by explaining that He learned and passes on messages from God, his Father. He speaks his Father’s words. John has used the word “sent” over thirty times, so far in his Gospel, but in here, and in the next three chapters, it takes on special meaning as wordplay which becomes an important theme in this section. In Greek, “one sent with authority,” is the word, *apostéllō*.

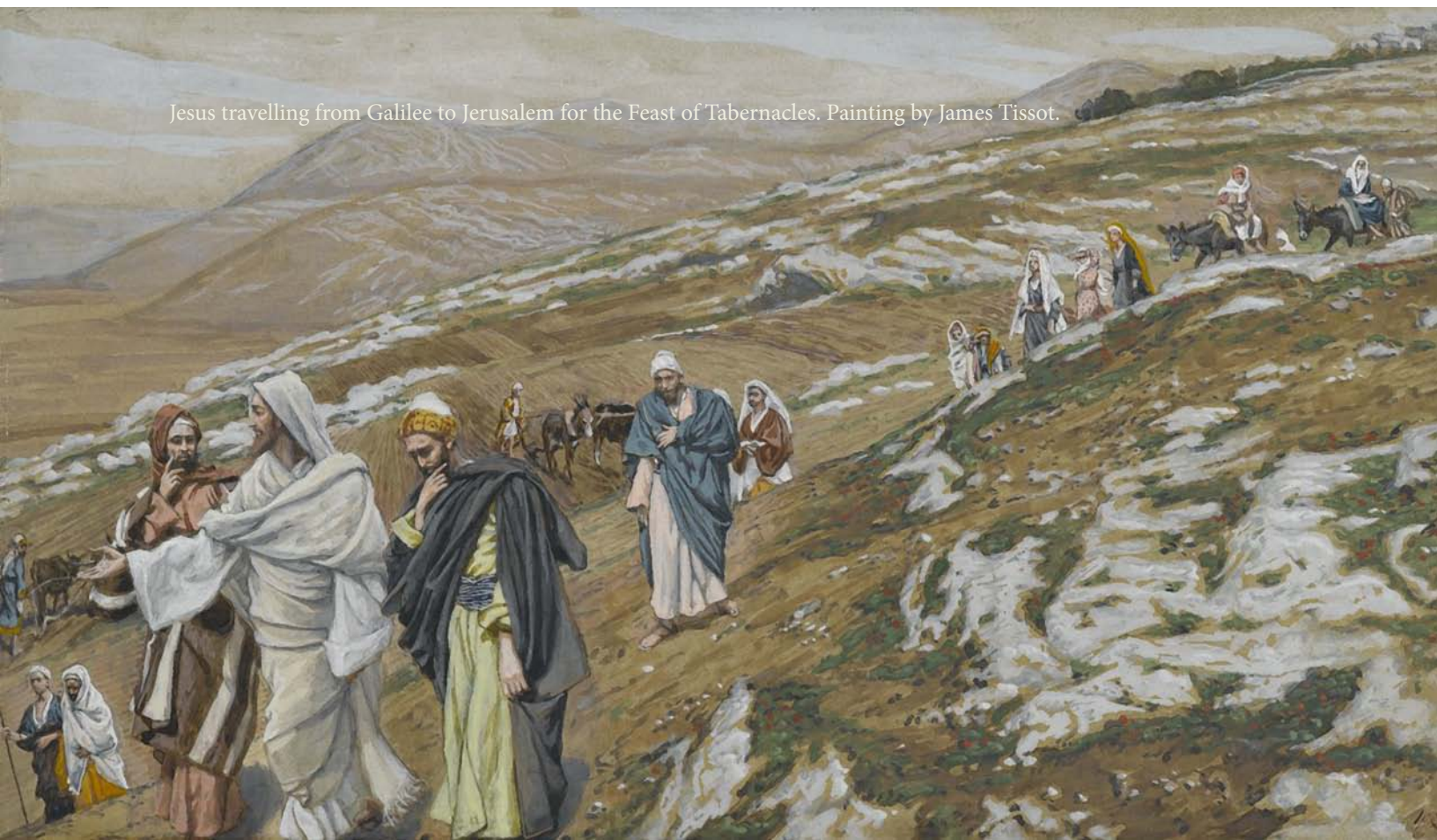
John 7:17–18 “ . . . do his will, he will know of the doctrine” Another favorite guideline to learn truth: live Christ’s teachings and see if they bring you to God. Jesus challenges his listeners to learn by experience. Jesus is not trying to glorify Himself, but only God.

John 7:19–21 “none of you keepeth the law” Jesus remembers what happened the last time when He was in Jerusalem, the Jewish leaders tried to kill Him for healing a man on the Sabbath. Jesus challenges them, and they deny their motives. They try to save face and deny it.

John 7:22–24 “Judge not according to your traditions . . . judge righteous judgment” (JST) there are very few JST changes in this chapter, but this one is significant. We often judge according to our culture, perspective, or in other words, traditions. Jesus justifies his healing on the Sabbath on humanitarian grounds. If circumcision is appropriate on the Sabbath why not healing? In response, the Jews brush him off as one possessed with a devil who is corrupting the Sabbath and teaching false doctrine. The problem was, in the Jewish oral laws, healing made the body work, hence, “one may not perform an act of healing on the Sabbath.”⁶ For example, you couldn’t set a dislocated shoulder, take out a splinter, or even put cold water on an injury. Traditions like these are the ones that Jesus repeatedly attacked.

John 7:25–31 “Do the rulers know that this is the very Christ?” The word “Christ,” is Greek for Messiah, but in English, it is “Anointed One.” Initially, in the earliest disciples used the phrase, “Jesus the Christ,” which later

Jesus travelling from Galilee to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. Painting by James Tissot.



in the epistles and introductory material we find, “Jesus Christ.” His audience is divided as He does not fit their conception of the Promised Messiah.

John 7:32 “sent officers to take Him” The “*officers*” were the Levite temple police that kept order within the Temple courtyard.

John 7:33 “I go unto him that sent me” The police are sent by their leaders of authority, but Jesus explains that he too has One that sent him, and he will go and report. John includes these word plays for his audience, knowing that Jesus’ audience missed them.

John 7:34 “seek . . . not find” Those who seek for Jesus without the proper motives, or to do harm, will not find Him. But those who meekly seek with a repentant and broken heart will find Him. As Deuteronomy 4:29 taught, “thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.”

Jesus’ message on seeking and finding opens the way for a discourse on how to find and accept Jesus.

John 7:35 “will he . . . teach the gentiles?” John includes irony regularly—here it is the angry Jewish leadership proposition that Jesus teach the Gentiles, which is exactly what his church will do.

Feast of Tabernacles 3rd Scene

On the Last day of the Feast

John 7:37–52

John 7:37 “If any man thirst, let him come unto me” After seven days of watching the priests’ daily ceremony walking up and down Mount Moriah to refill their pitchers of water as a petition for early rains, the pilgrims in Jerusalem now heard Jesus proclaim Himself as the real source of water. He enlightens them on how to receive eternal refreshment. But they do not recognize who it was that stood in their midst.⁷ Jesus looks at both the Israelite history and Isaiah’s summary of it: “they thirsted not when he led them through the deserts: he caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them: he clave the rock also, and the waters gushed out” (Isaiah 48:21; also see 12:3).

Note how Jesus associates the water of life with the tree of life—Jesus is the source of living water, the true vine, and heavenly bread. It was He, as Jehovah, who empowered the prophet to receive water from the rock.

John 7:38–39 “He that believeth on me . . . shall flow rivers of living water” Water was the most important resource in ancient Israel. Clean water was essential to sustain life, yet it was a limited commodity. Unlike a cistern that stored rainwater, “living water” had to flow and was pure enough to drink. Jesus speaks of flowing

water as a symbol for how He, and later the Holy Spirit, will offer life. Jesus refers to Psalms 78:15–16 and 104:41 and equates that water to Himself. Without drinking or internalizing his teachings, spiritual death is inevitable.

The symbol of water gives a strong or powerful image, like “mighty rushing waters” (Isaiah 17:12–13). In the context of living water, even the great flood and Noah’s ark become symbols of our future Redeemer. Noah, and thus all humanity and land-dwelling animals, were saved by water and wood—just as Christ saves through baptism and acceptance of his sacrifice on the cross.

It is through the Holy Spirit that we “hear” God’s voice. The Spirit also is the cleansing agent by which the atonement is efficacious in our lives. Jesus suffered for us, and his Atonement covers our sins if we repent, but the Spirit is the agent that carries out the atoning gift and cleanses our souls (see Moroni 6:4).⁸ The JST took out the last phrases from vs. 39 and added: “*The Holy Ghost was promised unto them who believe, after that Jesus was glorified.*” This seems to say that Jesus’ Spirit may have been felt so that Jesus’ words have internal force only through the Spirit.

DIVISION AMONG THE JEWS

John 40–52

John 7:40 “the Prophet” This reference goes back to Moses’ prophecy from Deuteronomy 18:18, “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, *that* whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require *it* of him.” This “prophet” refers to the promised Messiah. The Jews did not see Jesus as a new Moses, though. Yet the Jews great law giver, Moses, was just a type of the Law Giver to come, the source of the water from the rock, and Eternal Life. Hosea 12:10 teaches that the lives of the prophets were to typify of the coming Messiah. We see this clear back to Adam. Jesus was also a new Adam, the next “son of God” (1 Corinthians 15:47).

John 7:41–42 “Shall Christ cometh out of Galilee?” John’s ironical touch, suggests he knew Jesus was born in Bethlehem, although, most of Jesus’ listeners assumed that He was born in Nazareth. John has already emphasized: “can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46; see also Mark 1:9). Throughout the Gospels it is assumed Jesus’ literal father was Joseph, “Whence hath this man this wisdom...is not this the carpenter’s son?” (Matt 13:53–58). It appears that the birth accounts at the beginning of Luke and Matthew were actually written last as there are no references to that information throughout the Gospels and they can stand alone.⁹

The underlying assumption of the crowd in Jerusalem is that Jesus was human. At the same time, most first-century Jews found a scriptural relationship between Bethlehem and the Messiah. Not just Herod’s chief priests and scribes who knew of this scriptural reference to the Messiah’s birthplace, most Jews did. John’s silence empha-

Jesus and the Woman Taken in Adultery by William Hole, 1905.



sizes his that suggests he knew of the birth tradition in Bethlehem.

John 7:45–46 “**why have you not brought him? . . . Never man spake like this**” Even though no signs are given, and the Jewish leaders do not believe, Jesus’ words convinced the Temple police.

John 7:47–53 “**Nicodemus saith . . . Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him . . .?**” The Jewish leaders claim that no one who is educated has been convinced. Then the previously timid Nicodemus provides a witness that some educated hear and believe. “Nicodemus is the living proof that in claiming knowledge they are ignorant, but his plea for justice is met with contempt.”¹⁰

Feast of Tabernacles 4th Scene

Woman (probably raped, but) Called An Adulteress

John 7:53–8:11

John 8:1–2 “**Jesus went to the Mount of Olives**” (NIV) All four Gospels record that when Jesus was in Jerusalem, he often spent his day times teaching at the temple (i.e. Luke 22:37), and his night times outside the city wall in the olive orchards that were planted on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. From the temple mount or Mount Moriah, he would have walked come down to sloped hillside to the seasonal brook, Kedron, and then over the base of the Mount of Olives that raises up on the other side. The disciples knew this as a favorite spot, called “*Gethsemane*,” the olive press (Luke 22:39).

John 8:3–4 “**this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act**” the best Greek manuscripts of John do not include this story. Some have it in Luke where the Greek matches better.¹¹ In any case, the story is another “no win” situation for Jesus. If he authorizes death by stoning, he violates Roman law, if mercy, he violates the Mosaic Law.¹² It appears that the whole thing is a fraud set up to ensnare Jesus. If the woman were “caught in the act,” where is *the guilty man*? The Pharisees use the poor defenseless woman as a pawn, possibly she was a raped victim. Women had only a few rights at that time, they couldn’t testify or act as a legal witness—even to defend themselves.¹³

John 8:5 “**Moses . . . commanded us . . .**” Repeatedly the Law of Moses requires the stoning of anyone who breaks the law of chastity: Leviticus 20:10, 22:15; Ezekiel 15:38–40; etc. The question that the scribes pose, requires Jesus to violate a law in either answer. The battle between the Jews and Romans played a significant role in the Jews anticipation and acceptance of their Promised Messiah. Some biblical scholars wonder if the Sanhedrin already tried her and they want to see if Jesus can prophetically duplicate their verdict?¹⁴

John 8:6 “**This they said . . . to accuse him**” Jesus refuses to play their game and appears to ignore them. He bends down and draws in the dirt. Interestingly, in Roman legal practice, the judge first wrote the sentence and

then read it aloud.¹⁵ Scholars debate what did Jesus write? An old Christian tradition, traced to Jerome, suggests that Jesus wrote the sins of the accusers in the dirt. Another connects the finger/handwriting of judgments with Daniel 5:24. Another suggested that He wrote Exodus 23:16, “You shall not join hands with a wicked man.” Possibly the writing dealt with judgment. All is mere speculation—the author was silent. John did not think that was important enough to record. John focused on the relationship between the woman and Jesus.

John 8:7–9 “He that is without sin . . . cast a stone” Jesus’ answer put the burden back on his questioners. It is also a good example to us on handling unrighteous judgment—leave it alone. I think it is admirable that the accusers were honest enough with themselves to allow their consciences to convict them. Or perhaps they may have left because Jesus did not respond as hoped. The point is that *we are all* sinners.



[Christ and the Adulteress by Tintoretto, ca. 1546. Image via Wikimedia Commons.](#)

John 8:10–11 “go and sin no more . . . And the woman glorified God from that hour, and believed on his name” (JST) The scene closes in great drama: The sinless Jesus and the sinful women stand alone.¹⁶ I also add that in the ancient world women were horrifically abused by modern standards, and Jesus wanted to free her from whatever caused the situation. We usually use this story to tell how Jesus, as the serene judge, balances justice and mercy. Or else that Jesus does not condone the sin, but forgives the sinner. To these good ideas, the conclusion from the JST suggests that she was soft hearted and became a converted witness of Jesus. We all can learn from his great challenge: “sin no more.”

Feast of Tabernacles 5th Scene

6th Discourse: Light of the World

John 8:12–20

John 8:12 “I am the light . . . never walk in darkness” (NIV) Jesus’ announces Himself as the creator. In the beginning God created light, thus making Jesus’ claim literally and figuratively true. The imagery of this claim flows from the Feast of the Tabernacles. For a week all have seen the great golden lamp stands that stood 85’ high in the four corners of the temple courtyard. They represent the pillar of light that shown at night for the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness. Their blazing light seems to have prompted this sermon, as a way for Jesus to announce his Messianic fulfillment of this festival. As the creator, He is the source of all light, including the pillar of light given in the wilderness.

As the “light of the world,” Christ exposed the depths of moral and spiritual darkness. Jesus called his disciples to do the same (Matthew 5:14). Yet, we can only do that when *we reflect his Light*. Jesus taught the Nephites: “Hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. Behold I am the light which ye shall hold up” (3 Nephi 18:24).

“Light” also brings to mind the Urim and Thummim (meaning “lights and perfections”), which also symbolizes Jesus who enlightens with truths. Jesus also fulfills Isaiah 60:1–3, “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.” We can find many scriptures that describe the Creator’s relationship with light.¹⁷

John 8:13–16 “My record is true . . . Ye judge after the flesh . . . my judgement is true” John 5 and 7:51–53 also addressed the theme of witnesses in judgment. The Jews from the Second Temple era held the *law of witnesses* as absolutely essential. The Jewish Holy Writ, the “Law and the Prophets,” also witnesses of Jesus, the disciples witness, yet the Pharisees do not hear these other voices. Jesus tells them that by rejecting his witness, they do not know how to judge.

John 8:17–18 “I . . . bear witness . . . and the father that sent me beareth witness of me” Jesus acknowledges that two witnesses are required by the Law, so he explains that he and his Father testify of the same truths. This makes Jesus’ argument irrefutable. It also reflects John’s theme of unity between the Father and Son.



The Pillar of Fire, by Paul Hardy, 1896. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

John 8:19 “Where is thy Father?” The Jews assumed Jesus’ father was fellow a mortal. Ironically, the “hearers are asking for the Father, while the image of the Father is standing before their eyes.”¹⁸ They thought they knew Jesus. But I fear, that many generations have stood in their same shoes.

John 8:20 “. . . in the treasury” Within the temple the first level of sacred space was the “court of the women.” It was a large open courtyard where men gathered to discuss, teach, and learn. Along three of the outside walls of that courtyard were covered colonnades. Underneath the portico were thirteen chests for charitable contributions. This is likely the place referred to as “the treasury” where Jesus taught.¹⁹ At times the contributions had become corrupted, but they were supposed to go toward the sacrifices. Jesus is the sacrifice and location also speaks of Jesus’ message.



DISCUSSION WITH THE JEWS

John 8:21-29

John 8:21 “You will die in your sin” (ESV) The KJV word, “sins” is actually singular in Greek (and all other English translations I found). What was the sin Jesus meant? John 8:24, repeats this and adds “for if ye believe not that I am he,” suggesting that “the sin” is refusing to believe Jesus. All other sins are merely an outgrowth of that main sin.

John 8:22 “Will he kill himself?” This verse screams with irony as in a few pages, Jesus calls himself the Good Samaritan who will voluntarily lay down his life for his sheep.

John 8:23 “I am not of this world” Jesus also taught this to Nicodemus in John 3:13–15. John often recorded the Lord contrasting opposites. The comparison makes the differences more. In a sense, we too can be not of this world when we do not value worldliness. When we follow Jesus, we seek for a better world. This is a regular theme in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 22:23; Alma 39:14; 60:36; 3 Nephi 6:15).

John 8:24 “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” John records dozens of “I am” statements by Jesus, all of which build to the dialogue at the end of this sermon. He refers to Himself as the God of Israel, Moses’ leader from the burning bush to the top of Sinai.

John 8:25 “Who art thou?” The Jews repeat their question to Jesus, but He has already answered them in several of ways. His Messiahship should have been seen by his miracles, discourses, etc. The problem is they do not exert the faith necessary to hear, see, or feel it, so they keep asking without hearing his answers. To hear the Lord’s answers requires faith and meekness.

John 8:26–28 “I declare to the world what I have heard from him” (ESV) Jesus claimed two witnesses: his own, and his Father. With God as the second, there should not be any question about Jesus’ witness being true. Unfortunately, though, many do not believe either witness yet. Jesus prophesied that they will not believe until he is lifted up for crucifixion and lifted up as he ascended for his resurrection. As God lifts Jesus up, he draws us up to him.

John 8:29 “I do always those things that please Him” At this point, Jesus had never felt his Father leave him. Perhaps this is why that awful moment on the cross was even harder for Him. Just as God never left Jesus because Jesus always did what his father asked, so to for us, to always feel the Spirit, we must likewise “do always those things that please God”

“THE TRUTH WILL MAKE YOU FREE”

John 8:30–36

John 8:30–32 “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples” Some Jews at the temple believed and Jesus immediately instructed them to continue / *meno* (which also translated “abide” in John 8:35). By learning more truth, we will find ultimate freedom. God’s truth set us free. Satan’s lies enslave us. It is Jesus’ atonement and doctrine (which are truth) will free us from sin. Jesus teaches that of the many bondages, sin is the worst. We must seek real freedom and peace, not political counterfeits. This is the most important freedom (John 8:36).

John 8:33 “We be Abraham’s seed” Their nationalistic pride is paradoxical in light of the fact that the Romans rule Jerusalem right then (and previously they were under Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, and Greek rule before that). They did not understand that Jesus did not speak to them of political freedom. Throughout John, the audience is often on a different level of understanding and miss the significance of Jesus’ messages (i.e. Nicodemus, the woman at the well, etc.).

John 8:34–36 “the servant of sin” This is even more powerful when we remember the word “servant” is also “slave” in Greek. One third of the Roman Empire, and one half of Jerusalem, were slaves or servants. Their culture was steeped in social hierarchy. The people understood what it meant to obey a master and be a servant to a mistress. Their social cast was often generational, and they rarely married outside of their class rank.

Jesus becomes the master in his Father’s house as the Son and heir. The foot note quotes Paul, “*you were once slaves of sin.*” 2 Peter 2:19 also adds, “*slaves of corruption*” (also see Hebrews 3:5–6 and Romans 8:2). In God’s kingdom, we can become free through receiving and living the truths taught there. Our master invites us to become “joint heirs” if we leave the servitude of Satan by forsaking our sins and serving Jesus as our master (Romans 8:17).

CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM OR THE DEVIL

John 8:37–57

John 8:37–39 “If ye were Abraham’s children ye would do the works of Abraham” Abraham was the most important person in the genealogy of the Jewish people. They believed that descending from Abraham protected them against God’s wrath. Their view tied salvation to Abraham’s birthright. Jews believed that merely being a descendant of Abraham would save one from eternal torture. JBpst also taught against this false notion. Jesus attacked this as apostasy and restored the truth by teaching that in heaven a real son or daughter is adopted or worthy of inheritance as heir if they act like their father. Jesus tells them if they want to be worthy of being Abraham’s descendants, then must do the works of Abraham. The Jews did not believe Jesus’ message because they did not have Abraham’s heart, only his lineage.

John 8:40–41a By this time in history, the Jews had replaced the *responsibility* of Abraham’s posterity to *bless the earth* with the selfish hope of being *blessed* “into the kingdom of God no matter what their personal lives had become.”²⁰ Jesus fought against this notion also in Luke 16:24; Matt 3:7–10; 8:11–12. He taught that their link to Abraham was not enough. More than a birthright—one needs a heart like Abraham’s in order to be his child. The same holds true with God the Father.

SINNERS ARE NOT OF GOD

John 8:41b “We were not born in fornication” Are the Jews defending their birthright from Abraham or were

there rumors of Jesus' birth being illegitimate? The Jews response suggests they may have understood a little pre-mortal doctrine. (In the modern religious world, an understanding of a premortal state, is unique to our faith.)

John 8:42–43 “If God were your Father, ye would love me” Jesus tries to teach a higher law—one's mortal birth-right is not as important as their spiritual adoption. Jesus challenges the Jews' status as God's people. They have become so obdurate that they can't hear Jesus' message. Jesus also taught that we must choose to be his chosen people by our actions in our dispensation: “Behold, I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I am the life and the light of the world. . . . As many as receive me, to them will I give power to become the sons of God” (D&C 11:28–30).

John 8:44–45 “Ye are of your father the devil” Satan fathers' sin. He became a liar and self-serving before the counsel in Heaven. He lied in the Garden of Eden and deceived our first parents by usurping the Lord's role and counterfeiting the place of God. However, at one point in his first estate, he was a bright light as Lucifer meant “shining one” or “morning star.”

John 8:46 “Who among you can convict me of sin?” (CSB) The placement of this question in contrast with the woman convicted of adultery is interesting. In John 8:7–9, the scribes and Pharisees admit they have all sinned and convict themselves. Jesus has no sin. Isaiah prophesied: “*he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth*” (Isaiah 53:9, also see Hebrews 4:15).

John 8:47 “He that is of God receiveth God's words” (JST) The JST changes *hearing* to *receiving*, thereby emphasizing the need for disciples to actively participate as God's children.

JESUS DECLARES MESSIAHSHIP AND IS REJECTED

John 8:48–59

John 8:48–50 “I have not a devil” Jesus first pointed out that the fault finders were acting as children of the devil (John 8:44), and now they return the blow and call Jesus “a Samaritan” and possessed with a devil. In addition to being enemies of the Jews for centuries, the Samaritans were famous for their magicians and diabolical possession.

We find an interesting juxtaposition here. In John 4, the Samaritans accept Jesus as their Messiah and one greater than Moses. While here, these Jews reject his Divinity and call him a devil and Samaritan. Jesus warns them that such blasphemy will be judged by the Father.

John 8:51 “Keep my saying” Keep is more than hearing alone, Jesus asks disciples to “hear and obey.” Similarly, “never see death” is not referring to mortal death which comes to most mortals, but the promise of Eternal Life (D&C 88:3–7).

Just as Jesus has done in many other conversations, when the audience refuses to understand, or cannot grasp his message, He throws out a curve ball. He adds something totally unexpected or shocking to shake them up to get them thinking in a different direction. The jolt comes when He promises that those who keep his saying, will not die.

John 8:52–56 “Art thou greater than . . . Abraham?” The conversation is beautifully set up for Jesus to testify of his Messiahship. With the startling news that some will not die, the attackers immediately find fault in his logic as their greatest ancestor has died, so Jesus must be speaking nonsense. They cannot understand Jesus without stretching their view to see an eternal perspective. At times we have the same problem of being on a physical plain vs. a spiritual plain, so we don't understand God's direction.

John 8:58–59 “Before Abraham was, I am” This is the most direct and intentionally stated as a divine, “I AM” statement among the many in John's Gospel (~12 probable so far). Moses asked God for His name and was told, “I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you” (Exodus 3:14). The names for God became so sacred that the Jews did not use them. Even when reading their holy writ, they read, “LORD / *Adonay*” rather than pronounce the name of “Jehovah / *Yahweh*.” Jesus' bold statement was extremely offensive to the Jews. He placed Himself above Moses and Abraham, and even equal to God. In their ears, this was blasphemy. They missed that Jesus was *Emanuel*, God with us.

The Gospels record Christ using “I AM” statements to declare His Messianic Divine Nature: John=41 times, and the Synoptic Gospels=17 times. Ironically this statement of “blasphemy” was worthy of being stoned to death. The temple was still being built so we presume stones were lying around among the building material.²¹ We don't know if the Sanhedrim had power to inflict capital punishment is not, but they tried on multiple occasions (i.e. Acts 7:59).

Feast of the Tabernacles 6th Scene

6th Miracle: Jesus Heals Man born Blind

John 9:1–41

John 9 describes a triumph of light over darkness. As a sign that Jesus is the *Light*, He gives sight to the blind. The healing of the blind was a sign of the promised Messiah (Hebrew) / Christ (Greek), as no one in the history of the world had ever healed blindness before Jesus. In the follow up discussion after the miracle Jesus declares that physical blindness is not caused by sin and demonstrates how spiritual blindness is caused by sin.

JESUS HEALS THE BLIND MAN

John 9:1 “Jesus passed by” Jesus is still in Jerusalem at the Feast of the Tabernacles. It is now the Sabbath (John 9:14). Even though some Jews wanted to stone him in the last scene, Jesus is not in hiding, but walks in a public



The Blind Man at the Pool of Siloam by Edmund Blair Leighton. Oil on canvas, 1879. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

place, and is about to demonstrate something that will draw even more attention to him. He also is about to provide evidence for everything he just talked about: He is the Light of the world, he is the righteous judge, he is the Messiah, and he is the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacle. This is one of the boldest examples he offers in Jerusalem that he is the Son of God.

“blind from his birth” John emphasizes that this man has been blind since birth—not from an accident or illness. (Matthew , Mark, Luke include five other accounts of Jesus healing the blind—it was an important sign of the Messiah.) Jews wrongly assumed that God gave one a birth defect, affliction, illness, or premature death because of sin.²² This legend perpetuated false impressions about disabilities.²³ The rabbis debated over whose *fault* birth defects were: the parents or child?²⁴ Jesus attacked this fallacy by healing the man born blind.²⁵

John 9:2–3 “who did sin?” A group of Jesus’ disciples call him Master (or Rabbi in Greek). This is the first reference to disciples since chapter 6 in Galilee. The society was so immersed in the cultural baggage that handicaps



[Healing of the man born blind by Orazio de Ferrari. Image via Wikimedia Commons.](#)

are a result of sin, that even the disciples needed correction. By blaming all handicaps or hardships on sin these Jews forgot or misunderstood the book of Job.

The disciples' question hints of a pre-earthly existence.²⁶ This notion of a pre-earth life may have been maintained or fostered by scriptures like Jeremiah 1:5, "*Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee. . .*" (or Job 38:4, 7 and Psalms 82:6). By assuming the possibility that the blind man may have done something before his birth that resulted in a disability in mortality. Their ques-

tion raised the issue of whether sin initiates from something one did before their mortal birth. Some Rabbis interpreted Exodus 20:5 as saying the sins of the parents could leave a mark on their infants. They went as far as supposing that an infant could sin in utero.²⁷

“Neither hath . . . sinned” Jesus does not denounce a pre-mortal state, but attacks the heresy that all disabilities result from sin. Jesus teaches that the real reason why this man was born blind is so that God can demonstrate His glory in the miracle about to happen. This man had a premortal mission to be a witness of the Messiah's healing. Nowhere in the OT list of miracles (the dead were raised, lame walked, etc.), are the blind healed. That was a miracle reserved to identify the Promised Messiah: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened . . .” (Isaiah 35:5–6; also 42:6–7; Exodus 4:11; Psalm 146:8; Mosiah 3:5–7).

John 9:4 “work the works of Him” Jesus' mission was dedicated to doing His Father's work. The same is true for all disciples. After the first phrase of this verse, there is a change in the JST “*while I am with you; the time cometh when I shall have finished my work, then I go unto the Father.*” When Jesus is present it is “daytime” and when he is put to death, “nighttime.”

John 9:5 “I am the Light of the World” John ties this story back to Jesus' discourses in chapters 7 and 8. Jesus now puts action to His words and will act out the message as another witness of His Divinity. Jesus offers a demonstration of light and darkness with a faith filled man who receives his sight.

John 9:6 “He spat on the ground” John includes exactly where Jesus spit, because spitting on the ground was a form of breaking the Sabbath. (The oral laws, took the 39 forms of forbidden work on the Sabbath and micro-managed them into hundreds of rules. You could spit on a rock, but if you spit on the ground you were guilty of

cultivating).²⁸

“made clay . . . and anointed” The reference to working with dirt or clay, evokes the creation theme. God created Adam from the dust in Eden. Jesus’ miracle also evokes a story from Enoch, “And the Lord spake unto Enoch, and said unto him: Anoint thine eyes with clay, and wash them, and thou shalt see” (Moses 6:35). Early Christians also had their eyes anointed in their initiation rites.²⁹ The name Messiah means “anointed one.” It is as if Jesus shares His anointing with the blind man, and then has him “*wash*” before the blind man then sees.

John 9:7 “wash in the pool” Jesus had the blind man wash off the mud in the pool of Siloam near the temple. It sounds, similar to Elisha’s healing of Naaman in the Jordan River (2 Kings 5:10–13), the Lord sends the blind man on this quest to wash rather than just healing him immediately—almost as a test of faith, or a representation of “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26). The early Church Fathers Tertullian and Augustine saw the washing in pool of Siloam symbolic of baptism and used this story to prepare converts for baptism.³⁰

“. . . pool of Siloam (which is by interpretation, Sent)” Siloam/*sent*, symbolically corresponded to Jesus as the One “*sent*” from God. This favorite theme in John. Up to this point in his Gospel, we find “sent” used 33 times as a divine commission (and three times in common use). It was this pool of Siloam that the procession of Levites went to fill their golden pitchers on the “last and great day of the feast” of Tabernacles (John 7:37) to bring water to pour over the sacrifice, in memory of water from the rock of Rephidim (Ex 17:1–6). Archeologists have identified two major possibilities for the pool of Siloam.³¹ Josephus tell us that in his day the water was “sweet and abundant.”³²

Shortly before this miracle, Jesus made an illusion to the pool of Siloam when He cried, “if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink” (John 7:37). Then Jesus sends the blind man to the same pool wash off the clay from his eyes. The man’s healing comes only when he is washed/baptized by “the one sent.” Symbolically, Jesus sends all disciples to wash and see. God gives new sight and light to those in darkness. However, those who were blind in their sins (i.e. pride and greed) remain in darkness.³³

THREE INTERROGATIONS

1. Neighbors

John 9:8–12

John 9:11 “anoint . . . wash . . . receive sight” As the healed man tells his story to his neighbors, he uses verbs that have double meanings to John’s readers. They speak emblematically of initiatory promises which the early Christians practiced.³⁴

John 9:12 “Where is he?” This question is applicable today for all of us. Sadly, the healed man did not know. I presume that the crowds who came as pilgrims for the feast made it difficult to reunite. It appears that the Jewish inquisition helped him realize the truth of who Jesus was. Because we have the story, I assume the man became a devoted disciple after his healing, but miracles do not replace the need for faith.

2. Pharisees

John 9:13-34



John 9:13-16 “this man was not of God because he keepeth not the Sabbath” The next interrogation unfolds when the neighbors bring the healed man to the Pharisees. The man tells them the same simple truth. The Pharisees were trying to condemn Jesus for something. Jesus had kneaded the clay with his spit to make mud. Similar to Jesus’ Sabbath healing at Bethsaida, this healing was on the Sabbath (John 5:2). In Jewish thought, since the man’s life is not in jeopardy, the healing should have waited for another day.

John's theme of imminent judgment is brought out again. Underlying the Pharisee's belief is the understanding that if God worked miracles through a rabbi, then God approves of the rabbi's teachings. These Pharisees cannot get over their traditional view of the Sabbath even though Isaiah 56:2; 58:13 taught that on the Sabbath was a time to do God's works. Instead, for generations, Isaiah's perspective was overshadowed by their adopted oral laws.

John 9:17 “What do you say? . . . He is a prophet” To help the Pharisees settle the dispute, they ask for the healed man's perspective and he testifies that Jesus is a man of God, a prophet. This lets us know that he does not know much about Jesus yet, but that soon changes.

John 9:18–23 “His parents answered . . . ask him” This scene points to those too fearful to testify. To the early Christian community this was a matter of those who died for the faith and those who weakly denied their beliefs. The parents' witness only the obvious—their son was born blind. They are cowards in the face of the questioning Pharisees and shy away from acknowledging Jesus' great miracle. The parents fear excommunication and their place in society, more than they want to stand up for their son's healer! We learn that the blind man was of legal age. Over twelve and a half was old enough to marry.³⁵

John 9:24–25 “Give God the praise” This phrase was an old oath. Ironically, the blind man does give God the glory by telling the truth about Jesus' healing, but the Jews deny the miracle as a sign or witness of His Messiahship.³⁶

“I know that whereas I was blind, now I see” The healed man's courageous answer to the Pharisees borders on sarcasm. This opens a dialogue that lasts for ten verses and is one of the best in the NT.

John 9:27 “ye did not believe” (JST) This one-word change offers a significant message from “hear” to “believe.” Why were the Pharisees not content with the repeated answer? Are they trying to trap the man as well as Jesus in his words? They ask if Jesus has miraculous power and John answers a resounding, YES! The Law of Moses spoke against magicians, and it appears the Pharisees see Jesus in this category.

John 9:28–29 “We are Moses' disciples” Many rabbis did not believe in *another* “Moses” (or lawgiver). In reality, if they were actually Moses' disciples, they would be followers of Jesus too. The problem is that Moses Law was so contaminated with oral laws by it no longer clearly pointed to the coming of Messiah. Sadly, those who reject Jesus are disciples of the devil (Moroni 7:16–17).

John 9:30 “Ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes.” The healed blind man points out their faulty logic. The man references the well-known sign of the Messiah (John 9:6). If Jesus brought sight—why isn't He recognized as the Messiah? Even though it appears that the Pharisees do not change their hearts



[The Healing of the Man Born Blind. A an etching by Jan Luyken via Wikimedia Commons.](#)

through this conversation, the healed man strengthens his faith by defending Jesus and coming to ultimate truth. Interestingly, the persecution increases his belief. This conversation has similarities with what the Lord taught Nicodemus. Both include an uncertainty about the Divinity of Jesus and both initially do not hear with faith. (Fortunately, Nicodemus developed more faith later and became a key figure at the cross.)

John 9:32–33 “except he be of God” (JST) This change (found in the footnote), insures that God performed this miracle; it is not a magic trick. For scriptures on the Messianic healing of the blind see Psalm 146:8; Isaiah 35:5; 42:7. Look at the progress in the man’s development of his testimony between 9:11 (he identifies healer as “a man they called Jesus”), 9:17 (“a prophet”),

9:33 (“from God”), and 9:37 (“the Son of Man”). Simultaneously the antagonists decrease in their faith and vilify Jesus (:15–17, 29, 34).

John 9:34 “they cast him out” The Pharisees resent the man and those whom they feel are unclean and unlearned. They resort to condemning the man as a sinner and excommunicate him from the synagogue.

3. Jesus

John 9:35–41

John 9:35 “Jesus heard . . . and . . . found him” Interestingly, the healed man does not go find Jesus on his own. The crowds, his new life, whatever his distractions were, he does not. But fortunately for him (and all of us), Jesus seeks him / us out. His first question is one for all disciples, “Do you believe on the Son of God?” (NIV)

John 9:36–38 “Who is he Lord, that I might believe?” This touching level of faith and spontaneous worship, is refreshing after the “blindness” of the Pharisees. Jesus and John chose to emphasize the miracle again by adding “thou hast . . . seen him” (37).

John 9:39 “For judgment I am come into the world” Jesus expounds on His role as judge—after just discussing it a few days earlier in the temple (John 7:24). He claims to be a judge who intimately knows the challenges of the world. Our Judge helps us become aware of our sins which leads us to become more humble, more motivated to change, and more meek. Also, the process of seeing through our pride allows us to more clearly understand what life is all about. Those who are blinded by pride are not able to come unto Christ with full purpose of heart though.

“they that see not might see . . . they that see might be made blind” Jesus introduces another opposite again. He is not speaking on a physical level of hurting anyone’s sight—but rather trying to point out blind spots to those in need of repentance. The irony of spiritual blindness dims the spiritual vision of the proudful well educated even now.

John 9:40–41 “Are we blind also?” Jesus seems to have a steady crowd around Him listening and asking questions. His warning answer is for a much larger crowd though. We all need to meekly accept Divine change and direction even when it goes counter to our cultural norm. The Lord also addresses faith. Those who can but will not see with an eye of faith, like these Pharisees, are worse than blind. In a way, He teaches them that their lack of faith is a choice. These fault finders are worse than the blind, because they chose not to see.

“Your sin remaineth” Sin is in the singular, possibly meaning the sin of not accepting their Savior. By rejecting Jesus, they chose to follow the devil by default. This tragic flaw will breed more sins as they do their master’s bidding.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

John 10:1–18

The setting appears to continue from the same fall feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem for the first part of this chapter (but it may also be a prelude to the feast of dedication that begins in John 10:22). As Jesus continues to preach at the temple, He uses the themes of sheep and shepherds overlapping with many shepherd texts in the OT. For example:

- **Psalms 23:1** “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters
- **Isaiah 40:11** “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”
- **Isaiah 53:6** “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”
- **Isaiah 53:7** “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”
- **Jeremiah 31:10** “He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock”
- **Ezekiel 34:11–12** “I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock . . . so will I seek out my sheep”

ICH BIN
GUTE

DER
HIRT.



Opposite: Tomb showing Christ as the good shepherd at the central cemetery of Kufstein, middle of the 19th century. Image via Wikimedia Commons

This latter citation is part of a larger shepherd text that fills the better part of the whole chapter (Ezek 24:1–23). It was in the Jewish synagogue for a winter weekly cycle of scripture study.³⁷

Jesus builds on Ezekiel and other OT shepherd and sheep texts so that it becomes a NT theme as well (see Matthew 18:12; 25:32; Acts 20:28–29; 1 Peter 5:2–4; Hebrews 13:20; etc.). John 10:1–7 is as close as John’s Gospel ever gets to a parable (the others are more allegories).

The Parable

John 10:1–7

10:1 “a door into the sheepfold” Sheepfolds were built in many ways, but in Palestine, most were either in the yard adjacent to one’s house / tent, or if out in the field an enclosure surrounded by low stone walls and topped with briars. They often were in the yard just outside a house/tent. At night the sheep slept in these enclosures. The shepherd came in the morning and took their sheep to the pasture by calling to them.

“a thief and a robber” In Jesus’ parable, the thief or robber represents anyone who teaches against Jesus, like the Pharisees in John 9:13. As the Law of Moses requires, Jesus differentiates between a “thief” and “robber/bandit/*lestes*.” John Welch explains:

Although there is only a little difference between a thief and a robber in most modern minds, there were considerable differences between the two under ancient Near Eastern law. A thief (*ganab*) was usually a local person who stole from his neighbor. He was dealt with judicially. He was tried and punished civilly, most often by a court composed of his fellow townspeople. A *robber*, on the other hand, was treated as an outsider, as a brigand or highwayman. He was dealt with militarily, and he could be executed summarily.³⁸

This definition also sheds light on 1 Nephi 3, where Laban calls Laman “a robber.” He no longer identified him as an insider.

John 10:2–3 “the one who enters by the gate is the shepherd” (BSB). Jesus introduces Himself as the shepherd (and later as the gate) of the sheepfold. It harkens back to Numbers 27:17–18, where the Lord chooses Joshua (which is the Hebrew name for Jesus) as the “shepherd” of the Children of Israel. “Appoint a man over the congregation . . . who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the lord may not be like sheep without a shepherd. . . Take thee Joshua /Jesus ” (LXX).

Other OT references apply here too (see Micha 2:12–13; Ezekiel 34:9–17 and Isaiah 55:4). Lots of stories tell of sheep knowing their shepherd’s voice. Sheep are very social—they eat with their head together, cry when sepa-

rated, and don't seem to mind different sheepfolds drinking from the same watering trough. If taken or caught by a predator, sheep become submissive. They are generally docile, quiet and patient.

John 10:4–5 “goeth before them and the sheep follow him” A shepherd who is known by his sheep, can walk ahead of them and they will follow. If multiple herds of sheep are gathered together, they can recognize their individual shepherd's call and spontaneously follow the voice they know. But in John 10, the people of Jerusalem do not follow Jesus. This is because they are not His sheep.³⁹

Like sheep, people are helpless without the Savior. If they recognize His Spirit, they gladly follow Him. But if not, they follow another voice, or initially need to be pushed through the gate.

John 10:6 “they understood not” The Lord resorted to speaking in parables in the Synoptic Gospels when the people proved they couldn't comprehend his plain speech. This way only those who understood were/are held accountable.

Jesus Explains the Gate

John 10:7–10

John 10:7 “I am the gate for the sheep” (NIV) Unlike the many OT links to sheep (i.e. Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 23:4–5, etc.), Jesus' explanation of the parable centers in on His main point—which is entering through the gate or door. “*I am the door*,” This also implies “an entrance, way” preparing for “*I AM the Way*” (John 14:6). While the Synoptic Gospels quote the phrase: “The kingdom of God / heaven is like . . .,” John uses a parallel message with his many “I am . . .” statements (John 10:7,9,11,14). Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:27; and Luke 12:32 also use shepherd imagery for the Lord.

John 10:8–9 “. . . came before me who testified not of me are thieves” (JST) The JST clarifies that these verses do not refer to all past prophets. Rather prideful leaders who do not lead the flock to Jesus are thieves. God provides only one way to be saved and to find lasting joy—and that is through the narrow opening where our Savior stands. Jesus' atonement and ordinances becomes the door to heaven and Eternal Life.

John 10:10 “I am come that they might have life . . . more abundantly” The pasture of life is the fullness of life. Jesus open the gate to full mortality and eternal lives. Jesus work and glory is to open that gate for all mortals (Moses 1:39).

Explanation of The Shepherd

John 10:11–21

John 10:11 “The Good” or “beautiful by reason of purity of heart and life, and hence praiseworthy; morally

good, noble.”⁴⁰ This contrasts with the custom of the day where shepherds were often considered as dishonest and outside the Law. Early rabbis excluded shepherds (along with women) from acting as a witness or judge in courts of law. They rationalized, many shepherds grazed their flocks on other people’s lands, so they must be dishonest.⁴¹ Ironically, the scriptures describe shepherds as righteous, humble, devote followers of their God (i.e. Jacob, Joshua, David, etc.).

“the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” When Jesus gives His life, it includes His entire life—His growing years, mission, and atoning sacrifice—were all for us. He gave His life as a sacrifice for us. He feeds His sheep with truth (“I am . . . the truth” John 14:6). The earliest Christians saw the Lord referring to Himself as “the Good Shepherd,” and repeated the symbol in Hebrews 13:20 and 1 Peter 5:4.

John 10:12–13 “an hireling” Unlike a true shepherd, a day worker, works for pay not for love. The outcome makes all the difference—one builds and the other takes. When danger or challenges come the day worker flees, while the Good Shepherd stays beside His sheep because of his love for them.

John 10:14–15 “I lay down my life for the sheep” Jesus adopts Moses and young David’s role as the good shepherd (Exodus 3:1, 1 Samuel 17:34–35). Both of these two great Israelite leaders typified Jesus, and both prophesied that another would follow in their steps. (Look for Davidic typology with Jesus.). Jesus goes beyond the service rendered by these earlier good shepherds, to actually lay down His life and become the “great and last sacrifice . . . an infinite and eternal sacrifice” (Alma 34:10).

John 10:16 “other sheep” This is our clearest reference in the NT to the Nephites and others we don’t know much about yet (3 Nephi 16:1).

John 10:17–18 “no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself” Jesus declares this as the reason why His Father loves Him, He willingly will give Himself as

Other Sheep by Matt Warrren. Winner of the 2016 Book of Mormon Central Art Contest.



our Redeemer and Savior. John's theme of Jesus' power over death, is seen throughout His Gospel, including the controlled and willing manner that John illustrates Jesus' passion narrative (which we will see in a few weeks as we compare and contrast each of the Gospel accounts of the Lord's death).

John 10:19–21 “division . . . again among the Jews” Do you see the same arguments today used against Christianity and the Restored Church of Jesus Christ?

FEAST OF DEDICATION OR “HANUKKAH”

John 10:22 “it was winter” John moves three months ahead to the Feast of Dedication (Chislev 20–27, November/ December), which is also called the Feast of Lights, or Hanukkah.⁴² It is a holiday that began between the OT and NT. After the Maccabean revolt against the Greeks (164–160 BC), the priests rededicated their temple and later in 138 BC, celebrated it with another holy celebration.⁴³ Looking back at the second temple's rededication, the winter feast claimed the tradition that a miracle of one jar of sacred temple oil lasted the entire eight days of ceremonial needs.⁴⁴ The winter celebration developed into eight days of feasting, special worship services, and extra lights. This is the last of the series of feasts which began in John 5 (the Sabbath, Passover, Tabernacles, and now Feast of Dedication).

John 10:23 “Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch” The Temple Mount under King Herod's design was a huge space measuring more than 157,000 square yards (144,000 square meters, approximately 33–36 acres). It was one of the largest in the Roman world. To appreciate its grandeur, here are a few comparisons. The Forum in Rome was only half its size, the Acropolis in Athens one-fifth that size, and the largest temple complex in the world, Karnak in Upper Egypt, is only a third bigger and took 2,000 years to build. The outer most space was known as the Court of the Gentiles, because all were allowed on that space. People from all over the Roman Empire gathered in this area to discuss and debate issues of life. There may even have been benches or seats along the outer walls.

The outer four walls of the Court of the Gentiles had covered areas, known as porches, halls or cloisters. The flat roofs were supported by three rows of Corinthian columns, 37.5 feet high, each cut from a single block of marble. On the south was the “Royal Porch” supported by 160 pillars arranged in four rows of forty pillars each. Jesus came to the east porch, out of the wind, and overlooking the Mount of Olives. It was called, “Solomon's Porch,” because that is where Solomon's stables once stood. It was the oldest and loveliest porch.

John 10:24–25 “If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly” Jesus’ audience thought of their Messiah (or in Greek, Christ) as a conqueror, with strong political overtones. Jesus did *not* want to encourage this nationalist image. Instead, His response recalled His works as a witness of who He was to take them back to the biblical context.⁴⁵ To unbelievers Jesus’ answers must include witnesses. He explains that His works witness of Him.

John 10:26–27 My sheep listen . . . and they follow me” Jesus reintroduces the theme of sheep and ties the two halves of chapter 10 together (see John 10:11). He recaps that if they don’t follow Him, it is not because He is not The Shepherd, but because they are not His sheep.

John 10:28–29 “I give them eternal life” (ESV) LDS understand Eternal Life to mean Exaltation. It is the realm of the Father, who is “*greater than all.*”

John 10:30 “I and my Father are one” Trinitarian controversy hinges on this verse. Note the plural “*are*” suggesting plural. John 10:38 defines Jesus’ use of one, “the Father *is* in me, and I in him”

[Jesus Walks in the Portico of Solomon by James Tissot, 1899.](#)



John 10:31–33 “for which of those works do ye stone me?” Ironically, when Jesus answers their question, they cry “*blasphemy*,” and try to stone Him. Their two basic questions include: 1. Is Jesus the Messiah? (John 10:24), and 2. Does Jesus make Himself God? (John 10:33).

John 10:34–35 “ye are gods . . .” Jesus quotes Psalm 82:6, and then defines “*gods*” as those through whom God speaks (i.e. 1 Samuel 15:10; Hosea 1:1, Jeremiah 1:2, etc.). If God’s mouthpieces can be called on to speak for God, why do we not believe that the Word of God is the Son of God?

John 10:36 “. . . the Father hath sanctified” Jesus also returns to the theme of the Feast of Rededication. Even more than the temple was sanctified then, it is sanctified now with the fulfillment of ancient temple ordinances about to take place. “*Sanctified*” also means “consecrated.” As the one who will bear the sins of the world vicariously, Jesus is consecrated to become the living temple altar and Lamb of God. Many sacred things in the temple pointed to or represented the Promised Messiah (i.e. the brazen sea for washing, the anointing oil, the veil as a connection between the presence of God and earth, the Holy of Holies, etc.). If we can see Jesus as a temple as it were, one who bridges heaven and earth, and realize that His body literally houses our God, then this connection with the temple is even more powerful.

“sent into the world” Jesus also returns to the theme of being *sent from God* again. Jesus is the only being sent as half God, literally the Son of God. Disciples too are commissioned or sent forth to do God’s works, and angels are sent. But only Jesus is sent with the title: Emanuel, God with us.

John 10:37–38 “. . . believe the works” Jesus’ logic is beautiful. If He is doing God’s works, then God is working through and in Him. He represents the Father. John also lets us know that Jesus escaped again. Jesus’ enemies had no power over Him

Jesus Withdraws Across the Jordan River

John 10:40–42

John 10:39–42 This is the conclusion of “Part Three: The principal feasts” of John’s Gospel (chapters 5–10).⁴⁶ Some scholars call it, “the Book of Signs” as Jesus demonstrates signs of his Messiahship.⁴⁷ He now leaves the hostile land and people of Palestine and crosses the Jordan River into Perea. Many follow Him. There He finds the faith that was lacking in his own land. The author John, deliberately reminds us of JBpst. The scene takes place near where John the Baptist was baptizing across the Jordan and the fact that he bore witness of Jesus as the Son of God.

Header Image: Stained glass of Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd at St John the Baptist’s Anglican Church. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Parallels Between Jesus And

MOSES

1. Wicked kings tried to kill them at birth
2. Meek
3. Went to the wilderness to commune with God
4. Fasted 40 days, confronted by Satan
5. Called from Egypt to fulfill prophecy
6. Served as mediators, judges, and redeemers of Israel
7. Miracle workers—including controlling the elements
8. Turned water red (blood / wine)
9. Law givers and restorers
10. Miraculously feed thousands of people
11. Carried by the Spirit to a Mount and shown the world
12. Healed by looking up with faith
13. Rejected when first came to redeem Israel
14. Brought the children of Israel to the Promised Land

DAVID

1. Came when God had rejected those in authority
2. Came from Bethlehem
3. Came through Jesse
4. Good shepherds
5. Called “beloved son” (the meaning of David)
6. overlooked
7. Destroyed the enemy to Israel (Goliath, Satan)
8. Anointed to be kings of Israel
9. Became kings at age 30
10. Sacrificed on Mount Moriah to stop (the plague of) death



[Moses Breaks the Tablets of the Law](#) by Anton Robert Leinweber, 1910.

ENDNOTES

1. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks, *King Benjamin's Speech: That Ye May Learn Wisdom* (Provo, UT: Foundation of Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998), 148. We find evidence of many Jewish feasts in the Book of Mormon even without being named. We are also told to things like “feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.” (2 Nephi 32:3; see also 3:20; 9:51; Jacob 2:9; 3:2; etc.)
2. There are multiple James in the NT, but scholars assume that Jesus’ half-brother is the one referred to in the resurrection accounts listed in 1 Corinthians 15:7, “after that, he was seen of *James* then of all the apostles.” Paul also mentions visiting “James, the Lord’s brother” in Jerusalem (Galatians 1:19). Paul refers to him in the same letter as one of the pillars of the church (Galatians 2:9) We understand this James, could not be Zebedee and Salome’s son James, the brother of John. We think of this James as a member of the first presidency at times as he worked closely with Peter and John the Beloved when they saw the Lord transfigured, and were asked to pray in Gethsemane. Acts 12:2 records that Herod Agrippa kills this James son of Zebedee, near a Passover sometime before Herod’s own death in AD 44.
3. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.9.1.
4. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John* (Collegeville, MN: the Liturgical Press, 1988), 48.
5. *Ibid.*, 49.
6. Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: Religious Perspectives* (Boston, MA: Brill, 1999), 119. Also see, Mishnah, Shabbath, 22:6; 17:2 ; 14:3; 6:10.
7. Brown, *John*, 50.
8. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, Reprint, 1980), vol. 5, 499–500. The prophet Joseph taught, “You might as well baptize a bag of sand as a man, if not done in view of the remission of sins and getting of the Holy Ghost. Baptism by water is but half a baptism, and is good for nothing without the other half—that is, the baptism of the Holy Ghost.”
9. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to Luke* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 412 and Introduction.
10. Brown, *John*, 51.
11. *Ibid.*, “Some manuscripts place it in Luke among the cunning question presented to Jesus during Holy Week; this would be a far better setting . . . the Greek style is closer to Luke than to John.”
12. Raymond Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John 1–XII* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 337.
13. Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ’s Emancipation of Women in the New Testament* (Palo Alto, CA: Good Publ., 2015), chapter 1.
14. Brown, *Anchor: John*, 334–337.
15. *Ibid.*, 334
16. Augustine, “*Relicti sunt duo, misera et misericordia*”
17. Isaiah 49:6 “...to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my sal-

vation unto the end of the earth.” In D&C 88:7–9, Jesus announces that He is the source of all light, within and without. Jesus is “the light of the sun ... the light of the moon the light of the stars.” Other scriptures explain that He is the “true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9; D&C 93:2; Moroni 7:16–19). During the millennium we will “need no candle, neither light of the sun,” for the Lord will be their light (Revelation 22:5; Isaiah 60:19).

18. Brown, *John*, 52.
19. Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple and its Ministry and Services as they were at the time of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, reprint, 1987), 48. These chests were narrow at the top and wide at the bottom like a trumpet, and hence were called “trumpets.”
20. Brown, *Anchor: John*, 361–362.
21. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 15.xi. Herod’s addition to the Second Temple became a 80 year project, built from 19 BC to AD 63 or 64.
22. Avraham Steinberg, ed., *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics* (Jerusalem Israel: Feldheim, 2003), 34, “Any illness may result from sin.” Their society incorrectly presumed that physical imperfections made one a sinner, because priests with birth defects were not allowed to serve at the altar of the temple: “No man that hath a blemish of the seed of Aaron the priest shall come nigh to offer the offerings of the LORD made by fire” (Leviticus 21:21, 17–23).
23. *Ibid.*, 107.
24. Margaret Barker, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (London and NYC: T & T Clark, 2010), 232.
25. Wilson, *Emancipation of Women*, chapter 7. “In antiquity, blind people filled the cities and temples as alms collectors. Most blind people did not reach their potential, were considered worthless to society, were frequently hungry and sometimes starved to death. Blindness was universally considered to be a great tragedy, and mostly as punishment for sin.” Steinberg, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics*, 106.
26. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ doctrine of a pre-mortal life is not generally shared by Jews or Christians currently
27. Brown, *Anchor: John*, 371.
28. *Ibid.*, 372. The Mishnah recorded a curse on anyone who uttered charms over a wound, notably, while spitting.
29. Alonzo Gaskill, *Sacred Symbols: Finding Meaning in Rites, Rituals and Ordinances*, (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2017), 41–42. Cyril (AD 313 – 386) elaborated on early Christian anointings: “Ointment is symbolically applied to thy forehead and thy other senses; and while the body is anointed with the visible ointment, thy soul is sanctified by the Holy and life-giving Spirit. Ye were first anointed on the forehead, that ye might . . . reflect as a mirror the glory of the Lord. Then on your ears; that ye might receive the ears which are quick to hear the Divine Mysteries, of which Esaias said, The Lord gave me also an ear to hear [Isa 1:4 and Mark 4:9] . . . Then on the nostrils; . . . Afterwards on your breast; that having put on the *breastplate of righteousness, ye may stand against the wiles of the devil.*” The Bible records ritual anointings priests, kings, sacrifices, lepers, tabernacle and temple furnishings (Leviticus 14:15–18; Exodus 29:4–8; 29, 36; 40:9–15; Numbers 3:3; 6:15; 1 Samuel 16:1, 13; 1 Kings 1:39). They kept their special olive oil for anointings in horns to consecrate things or people to God (1 Samuel 16:1).
30. Brown, *Anchor Bible: John*, 29:380–381.

31. One is near the Ghihon spring in the Kidron Valley, the other just south of the Temple, outside the wall.
32. Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 335.
33. Studies in Scriptures: Gospels, 5:121).
34. Gaskill, *Sacred Symbols*, 39. Tertullian (160–225 AD) explained that what we do to the body is really for the Spirit: “The flesh, indeed, is washed, in order that the soul may be cleansed; the flesh in anointed, that the soul may be consecrated; . . . the flesh is shadowed with the imposition [or laying on] of hands that the soul may be illuminated by the Spirit.”
35. *Mishnah*, *Abot* 5:21, outlines stages of the ideal male life “At 5 to Scripture, 10 to Mishnah, 13 to religious duties, 15 to Talmud, 18 to the wedding canopy, 20 to responsibility for providing for a family, 30 to fullness of strength, 40 to understanding, 50 to counsel, 60 to old age, 70 to ripe old age, 80 to remarkable strength, 90 to a bowed back, and 100—he is like a corpse who has already passed and gone from this world.”
36. Brown, *John*, 57.
37. Brown, *Anchor: John*, 389. “In particular, Ezek xxxiv, which, as we shall see, is the most important single OT background passage for John x, served as the *haphtarah* or prophetic reading in the general time of Dedication in the second year of the cycle.”
38. John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 248.
39. Kent Jackson, and Robert Millet. *Studies in Scriptures: Gospels vol 5* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1986), 140.
40. Brown, *Anchor: John*, 386.
41. Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 374. Women were considered dishonest and the source of all sin since Eden.
42. B. H. Roberts, *Seventy’s Course in Theology*, 1:57. In 198 B.C., “After a series of contests Palestine was taken from Egypt by Antiochus the Great, annexed to Syria, and divided into five provinces, viz., Judea, Samaria, Galilee (W. of Jordan), Peraea [*sic*], and Trachonitis (E. of Jordan). From this time, owing to its position between the two great powers Egypt and Syria, this country [Israel] became a frequent prey to both, until Antiochus Epiphanes took Jerusalem (B. C. 170), foully polluted the temple, and compelled the Jews to sacrifice to idols. He erected the statue of Jupiter on the altar of burnt-offering, committed all books of scripture to the flames, and prohibited the worship of God. The high priests, corrupted by Greek licentiousness, prepared the way for declension, and encouraged the adoption of foreign customs. But the attempt to finally stamp out Judaism produced a recoil. It culminated in the attempt of Antiochus to force the Jews publicly to eat the flesh of swine sacrificed on God’s altar to the honor of Jupiter. One aged scribe refused, was followed by a mother and her seven sons, who all suffered martyrdom with the extremes of torture. This was followed by Mattathias, a priest of the Hasmoean family, who killed both a renegade Jew, when about to offer idolatrous sacrifice, and the royal officer who presided. Aided by his five sons, he rallied the faithful round him, threw down the heathen altars, fled to the mountains and raised the standard of liberty, on which were inscribed M. K. B. I., the initials of their Hebrew war-cry, *Mi-Kamoka Baelim, Ihovah*, ‘Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods?’ (Exodus xv: 11), from which the insurgents got the name of ‘Maccabees,’ whence the eldest son and successor of Mattathias is known in history as Judas Maccabaeus. Under him they were victorious. Antiochus died of a loathsome disease, stricken by God.”
43. Josephus, *Antiquities*, xii, 7:7.

44. The apocryphal books, 1 and 2 Maccabees, include two different origins of the holiday. As previous accounts of Moses' tabernacle and Solomon's Temple included God's blessing with extraordinary light, the later tradition including a miracle of light unfolded in 2 Maccabees. We also find records of this tradition by James Talmage: "After almost three years, Judas, son of the priest Mattathias had the Jews return to Jerusalem and found the Temple deserted, as it had been left by the army of Antiochus. Its gates had been broken down and burned; and within the walls weeds were growing. Judas tried to cleanse and rehabilitate the House; he brought in new vessels, and replaced the candlestick, the altar of incense, the table of shewbread, and the veils, and built a new altar for burnt offerings." (James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord*, 44). On the third anniversary of the day that it was polluted, Zerubbabel's Temple was purified (*Chislev* 20, B. C. 164). Decades later, they began celebrating this with another feast. The tradition claims that only one consecrated jar of oil was intact and bore the high priest's unbroken seal. Miraculously, this jar of oil burned for all eight days of the temple rededication.
45. Brown, *Anchor: John*, 406. Also see *Psalms of Solomon*, 17:21–25, dating from first and second century B.C. (<http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/psalmssolomon.html>)
46. Brown, *Anchor: John*, 404,
47. Brown, *John*, 24.



LUKE 12–17; JOHN 11

JESUS TRAVELED SOUTH AND VISITED BETHANY TO RAISE LAZARUS

Setting

After Jesus' time teaching, preaching, and healing in Galilee, Luke's Gospel follows Jesus and his traveling companions (including several women, Luke 8:1–2) on their journey from Galilee to Jerusalem for the Passover. This is the only passover pilgrimage found in the Synoptic Gospels during in Jesus' ministry. The nine chapters are filled with conversations, parables, healings, and teaching.¹ In ancient Palestine, the preparations for Passover began weeks in advance.

The accounts in this week's chapters may overlap with some of these Second Temple traditions that preceded Passover:

- **Six weeks before:** Rabbinical agents went out to the countryside to inspect roads and bridges to determine what repairs were needed after the winter rains for pilgrims to safely travel to Jerusalem. They surveyed public squares (for pilgrims to sleep as they traveled), and determined if there were adequate wells to provide water for the travelers.² Once in Jerusalem they made sure there were enough *mikvaot* for travelers to be purified in Jerusalem, and ovens to roast the lambs properly.³ Ritual purity took time, so many came early “to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves” (John 11:55).
- **One month before:** Bridges and roads were repaired in preparation for the hordes of pilgrims. The red heifer was burned and its ashes prepared as the “testing draught” for women suspected of committing adultery (Numbers 19:1). Those who chose to remain as indentured servants for life, had their ears pierced and wore a hoop as a mark of identification. All the sepulchers were painted white (so that travelers knew where they were, and could stay away in order to maintain ritual purity).⁴
- **Two weeks before passover:** Flocks and herds were tithed, temple treasury chests opened and emptied.
- **One week before passover:** Thoroughly cleaning to remove all traces of leaven from the house (Exodus 12:15,19; 13:7; etc.).
- **Four days before passover:** Select the pascal lambs, and display them in a public place (Exodus 12:3).
- **One day before passover:** Cook all the food and finish removing the last of the leaven.

Jesus Warns of Being Puffed Up

Luke 12:1-12

Luke 12:1-3 “an innumerable multitude . . .” The words actually describe two things, either an indefinite very large number, or literally 10,000. To emphasize the enormous size of the crowd, Luke includes that they “trampled on one another.” As the crowd gathers, Jesus talks to his close disciples nearest Him, as “friends” (Luke 12:4).

“leaven of the Pharisees” Jesus’ conversation pointed to the upcoming Passover and Feast of the Unleavened Bread, by using the analogy of leaven. Before the feast, Israelites carefully remove all the leaven or fermenting yeast agents from their homes, and do not eat it for the entire week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:15,19; 13:7; etc.). It represents their ancestors in Egypt whose bread did not have the time to rise because they left in haste after the destroying angel passed over them. In addition, leaven also grew to symbolize corruption. Jesus spoke against those who had internal leaven, or those who were puffed up with pride. He specifically denounced the Pharisees’ pride which led to hypocrisy. Jesus warns that all the wicked thoughts and behaviors will at some time be revealed loud and clear.

Luke 12:4 “I say unto you,” is repeated nine times in this chapter (and more in the rest of Luke’s Gospel). It introduces Jesus’ authoritative teachings.

Luke 12:5 “Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell” Jesus taught that we should be more aware of our spiritual safety than our physical safety. Mortality will end, we do not need to fear death. But if we have lost our spiritual bearings, there are eternal consequences.

God’s Awareness of our Witness

Luke 12:6-12

Luke 12:6-7 “are not five sparrows sold . . . the very hairs of your head are all numbered . . . ye are of more value than many sparrows.” God’s awareness of every bird and hair demonstrates that He oversees the details of our lives, “not one of them is forgotten before God.” Jesus recognized the value of the fact that even the little things that seem insignificant are known and valued by God.



Luke 12:8-9 “. . . he that confess me” we can witness of Jesus or deny Him with our words, thoughts, and deeds. Those who testify of the Son of God will find the Lord defending them in heavenly courts. The opposite is also taught by Jesus. This message was very real for the early Christians who were being killed for confessing their belief in Jesus. The JST adds that the apostles felt condemned: “*Now the disciples knew that he said this, because they had spoken evil against him before the people; for they were afraid to confess him before men . . . saying, he knoweth our hearts, and he speaketh to our condemnation, and we shall not be forgiven.*” This explains why the Lord then went on to teach about the sin against the Holy Ghost.

Luke 12:10 “. . . blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven” The sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, “is a sin which is unpardonable,” if one has had a sure witness, or if the Holy Ghost “once has had place in

you” (Alma 39:5–6; also see Hebrews 6:4–6; 10:26). Joseph Smith clarified what one has to do to deny the Holy Ghost: “He must receive the Holy Ghost, have the heavens opened unto him, and know God, and then sin against him.”⁵ Similarly, Pres. Kimball further explained, “The sin against the Holy Ghost requires such knowledge that it is manifestly impossible for the rank and file to commit such a sin.”⁶

Luke 12:11–12 “For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the very same hour” Jesus promises divine inspiration as we defend Him. Pray that it happens to you. However, this only comes when we have learned the language of the Lord. As President Russel M. Nelson warned in his first General Conference as prophet, “in coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.”⁷ Like the early Christians, this may become a matter of our spiritual life or death.

Stewardships: Earthly Treasures

Luke 12:13–21

Luke 12:13–15 “Guard against every form of greed” (NASB) A new scene opens, with someone approaching Jesus for help to divide his inheritance. It begins a long discussion on possessions, including a few parables. Luke includes Jesus’ warning against valuing wealth and position more than any other Gospel. The narration invites us to ask ourselves, “How do we view this world’s goods?”



God gave Moses and the children of Israel laws for inheritance (see Numbers 27:1–11; 36:6–10; Deuteronomy 21:15–17). They were often a topic of dispute. Contention over financial issues has plagued most generations. Satan has tempted humanity with greed or a love of materialism since Adam’s children. Hugh Nibley helped define the problem: “We have been warned against things of this world . . . but exactly what are the things of the *world*? An easy and infallible test has been given us in the well-known maxim ‘*You can have anything in this world for money.*’ If a thing is of *this world*, you can have it for money; if you cannot have it for money, it *does not* belong to *this world*”⁸ (emphases added).

Stewardships: Parable of Rich Fool

Luke 12:16–21

Luke 12:16–18 “a certain rich man brought forth plentifully” A lack of understanding of the principle of stewardship is seen here. The rich man claims that he owns “my fruits, my barns, my goods.” Personal pronouns (I, me, himself) are mentioned ten times in two verses (ten of the 45 words) to emphasize the foolish man’s

problem is self-centeredness that leads to self-indulgence. This is the antithesis of God's laws to love God and our neighbors. The man has forgotten that the earth is the Lord's. Humans are only stewards of God's property. All we have is His.

Luke 12:19–21 “take thine ease, eat, drink, *and* be merry” Jesus attacks the dream of getting rich enough to retire with a life a leisure. The parable reminds his audiences that not only is the future not in our control, but also that storing up riches is self-centered foolishness. The Lord reveals the Law of Consecration to teach a better way. God's creation has plenty for all, if we all do our part to work hard and share. The answer is found in the Law of Consecration, which was restored in 1831 in Kirtland, Ohio (with more details taught over time in D&C 42, 58, 105, etc.). Consecration works on three major principles: 1. Agency, 2. Stewardship, and 3. Accountability.⁹ The parable poked fun at the foolish man's shortsightedness to teach that all is God's and we have the responsibility to bless others with our gifts.

Stewardships: God's Solution as our Provider

Luke 12:22–34; Matthew 6:19–21, 25–34

Luke 12:22–23 “take no thought . . . life is more than meat” Jesus taught this same message as part of his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:25–34). There he instructed his apostles about their focus as missionaries and full-time servants for the kingdom. God promises to provide for those sent out to serve and work with Him. He also teaches them not to worry, or “be anxious about your life” (ESV). With faith and trust in God's care, our anxiousness about the future diminishes. Parts of this advice apply to all, and parts are specifically for his special audience (the apostles). God also directed us to plan ahead and to balance our need for daily bread and dependence on God with hard work and the sweat of our brow (Genesis 3:19).

Luke 12:24–25 “Consider the ravens . . . God feedeth them.” God takes care of even the unclean birds like ravens (Leviticus 11:15), and reminds us, “how much more are ye better than the fowls?”

Luke 12:27–28 “Consider the lilies” We, like the beautiful lilies, are God's handiwork. We are most beautiful when shining His light. How do you move from anxiousness to trusting God? The answer is, “ye of little faith...seek the kingdom of God”



“will he clothe you” In the discussion on Matthew 6:28, this appears to also address temple promises, as the word for “clothe” is a form of “endow or indue.” The word “endow” came from the idea, “to provide with a dowry” and is occasionally used for one who “is endowed by his Maker with reason; to endow with privileges or benefits.”¹⁰

Luke 12:29–33 “Seek ye first the kingdom of God” The Lord’s counsel to not worry about meals and clothing appears to be mainly for those serving Him full-time as apostles, but there is also application for all disciples. As we put our priorities in seeking God’s will and His kingdom above earthly wants, including “fear not” and giving our excess to the poor, God promises: “all these things shall be added unto you.” This is an extraordinary return. By giving our time and money to God’s Kingdom, He will supply us with everything else we need and more. God offers an amazing investment.

Luke 12:34 “your treasure is . . . your heart” Our heart’s desires become our treasures. Heavenly treasure is inexhaustible. When we exercise faith, we connect our thoughts to trust in God. It helps to look at how Jesus’ directives grow in this section: verse 22, “Do not be anxious;” verses 24 & 27 “Consider;” verse 29, “Do not seek [or] worry;” verse 30 “Seek his kingdom;” verse 32 “Do not fear;” verse 33 “Sell [and] give alms....”

Stewardships: Parable of the Prepared Servants

Luke 12:35–40, JST; Matthew 24:42–44; Mark 13:33–37

Luke 12:35–40 “wait for their lord . . . when he cometh . . . open unto him immediately” Good servants wait on the Lord, like a waiter at a fine restaurant graciously waits on the guests’ every need. The Lord needs disciples who will anxiously wait on Him. While we wait on the Lord, we actively serve and are to “watch. . . for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not” (Luke 12:40). Jesus asked disciples to wait with ears listening for promptings of the Spirit and active efforts to stop the adversary. As Elder Larry Y. Wilson expressed:

As we wait on the Lord’s timing it is not enough to just follow the people in front of you. . . [This] approach takes little thought or effort. You can just do and think what others are doing and thinking. This works fine in sunny weather. But the storms of deception and the mists of falsehood arise without warning. In these situations, being familiar with the voice of the Holy Ghost is a matter of spiritual life and death.¹¹

When we wait on the Lord in this way, we are prepared and listening for Him to knock and be ready to open.

Stewardships: Parable of the Unfaithful Servant

Luke 12:41–48, +JST; Matthew 24:45–51

Luke 12:41–47 “Blessed is that slave . . . at work” (NET). Jesus did not directly answer Peter’s question as to who is included as his servants. Instead, the Lord gives a short parable to describe the qualifications of servants

of God. His kingdom needs active servants. His audience understood what servitude entailed. It helps to remember that the word for slave and servant were interchangeable at the time of Christ, and, additionally, one of those words also meant child. One third of the population of the Roman Empire, and one half of cities (including Jerusalem) were either servants or slaves.¹² Jesus lived his life as a servant and even more so in his death (Matthew 26:39; Mark 10:45; etc.). He asked his disciples to do the same—*until he comes again*, “at an hour when [we are] not aware” (Luke 12:46).

Luke 12:48 “much is given . . . much required” Returning to Peter’s question (who is supposed to give up their cares of the world to work for the kingdom, and who is God going to bless for waiting/serving Him), the Lord now answers that he expects more of his servants who have received more light and truth. The punishment for slothfulness and inattentiveness will be greater for those to whom he has given more.

Coming Judgments

Luke 12:49–59, JST; Matthew 5:25–26; 10:34–36; 16:2–3

Luke 12:49–59 “I have come to bring . . . division” (BSB) Jesus realized that Satan is at war with God’s teachings. His message will not fall easily on those who serve the devil. Discipleship requires standing up for Christ’s message, even in times of social conflict and family strife. (These verses have been discussed previously in Matthew as well.) The prophet also brought up this same point in his Conference Report this past April (April 6, 2019 Priesthood Session).

Tragedy and Repentance

Luke 13:1–5, teachings unique to Luke

Luke 13:1 “Blood Pilate had mingled” News traveled to the pilgrims about heinous murders among their people. The story was that the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate killed Jews from Galilee and supposedly added their blood to the temple sacrifices. In this account we learn more about what the Jews thought of Pilate and his atrocities.

Luke 13:2–3 “Suppose ye that the Galileans were sinners? . . . Nay” Whether or not the murders happened as described, Jesus seized the opportunity to confront a misconception. A major part of the restoration Jesus brought included cutting away at cultural baggage. He used this opportunity to teach that bad things happen to good people too (i.e. Job!). Life includes suffering and losses as part of our developing faith, hope, and charity and are not necessarily consequences of sin.

Luke 13:5 “But except ye repent . . .” Jesus’ main point is that we all need repentance as we will all come before our maker at some time.

Parable of the Fig Tree

Luke 13:6-9

Luke 13:6 “A certain man had a fig tree” Jesus began with calling all to repentance and then gave an illustration. The parable speaks of the need for good fruit. Jesus knew that repentance brings good works and righteous influence. Sincere repentance brings the change of heart which then can bring good fruit. Jesus asks us to live in a way so that we are ready to meet our Maker. As this was early spring, the figs should have formed and will not ripen until late summer.

President Russel M. Nelson spoke on repentance in his April 6, 2019 Priesthood Session encouraging the Saints to develop daily habits of repentance or fine tuning our spirits to be in tune with God. He said, “we can do better and be better.”

Luke 13:7-8 “Three years” may refer to Jesus’ ministry, but the Gospel of Luke never refers to Jesus’ ministry lasting three years (only John’s Gospel). Looking beyond the time, his message deals with fruit. A tree without fruit, is to be removed—especially because fig trees deplete the soil. The man asked, “Why should it use up the soil?” The parable also teaches that God warns His people before their destruction.



Allegorically, God moves the trees around His vineyard to see if they will produce fruit elsewhere. By cutting down this tree, God can provide the fertile soil for others of His spirit children to come to earth. But the servant does not want to destroy the tree yet, and encourages the man to work towards repentance one more time—with dung and digging. Not that this sounds like Zenos’ allegory of the olive tree in Jacob 5. As we discussed in Matthew, we can find several accounts with a similar theme scattered across the Bible.

Luke 13:9 The “dresser of his vineyard” God will authorize the cutting. The cutting symbolizes God’s judgment to determine the sincerity of the fruits of repentance.

The Infirm Woman

Luke 13:10-17

Luke 13:10 “He was teaching in one of the synagogues” We are back in another synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke included 17 references to synagogues), though, this is the last time Luke takes us to a synagogue. As was his practice, Jesus chose to perform healings on the Sabbath to not only restore those suffering, but also to teach the higher laws of Sabbath worship and human suffering. The woman does not approach the Lord, nor does anyone exert faith—the message is that Jesus wanted to teach a principle about the Sabbath. The Old Testament (OT) teaches that Sabbath observance is a sign of the covenant (Exodus 31:16–17).

Luke 13:11 “a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years” (ESV) Her years of scoliosis or osteoporosis left this woman bowed over. Physical deformities had social side effects in the society of the Bible. They saw illness as God’s curse, or an evil spirit, which had demeaned her. Yet, in conjunction with Jesus’ earlier messages on repentance (Luke 13:5; 8–9), by placing this healing here, Jesus used this opportunity to teach that the woman’s infirmity did not make her a sinner. Luke may have chosen to include this story of Jesus here to further illustrate another aspect of repentance.

Luke 13:12–13 “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity” (NIV) Jesus’ message is deliverance, and he demonstrated it immediately and permanently. The woman saw God in this great work and is remembered as “glorifying God.” Luke did not mention the Lord laying his hands in conjunction with healing very often, but he did here.

Luke 13:14–15 “the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation . . . not on the sabbath” Regardless of the miracle and power of God just manifested, the rabbi could not see beyond the oral laws that have defined his Sabbath worship (see discussion on Matthew 14). The crux is that Jesus chose to act mercifully and heal as part of his Sabbath worship. He pointed out the hypocrisy in the law by giving the example of watering an animal on the Sabbath. He asked them to compare and contrast the greater value of humans to animals. His actions paralleled his teachings of the sparrows and lilies from Luke 12:27.

Luke 13:16 “daughter of Abraham” To further emphasize the previously-infirm woman’s worth, Jesus gave her an honorary title. This may also have helped her social healing and raised her from the false judgement she had endured. Luke also included that Jesus equated her illness with Satan’s binding. By doing so, it shows how Jesus’ healing pushes “back the power and influence of Satan’s kingdom.”¹³



The Woman with an Infirmity of Eighteen Years by James Tissot

Parables of Growth and Equality: Mustard Seed + Leaven

Luke 13:18–21; Matthew 13:31–32; Mark 4:30–32

Luke 13:18 “What is the kingdom of God like?” Repeatedly, Luke used “Kingdom of God” to draw attention to *He* whose Kingdom it is. (Luke was a Gentile convert to Christianity, and did not have a problem referring to God, whereas Matthew, as a Jewish Christian avoided using the name of God, so he changed the phrase to, “kingdom of heaven.”) Also, Luke’s parables were often placed in pairs or triplets using different genders, ages, and professions. The message is that *all* are needed to build the Kingdom of God. Here, a man plants and a woman bakes.

Luke 13:19–21 “like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden . . .” (NIV).



Image of mustard seeds by Ajale via Pixabay

John W. and Jeannie Welch described:

The endearing parable of the tiny mustard seed teaches the principles of growth and progression that are essential to the operation of the plan of salvation. All people who come to this earth are here to grow, to learn, and to progress. . . . In this context, Jesus then used the unsuspecting mustard seed that grew to fill God’s purposes and kindly welcomed all the needy birds of the sky to enter in and make their homes in its branches.”¹⁴

All three Synoptic Gospels include this parable. For more on these two parables, including what Joseph Smith taught on it, see my discussion from *Come Follow Me*, Matthew 13 and Luke 13 (March 18–24, 2019).

Citizens of the Kingdom

Luke 13:22–30

Luke 13:22 “He went through the cities and villages” Luke continued to describe Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem for Passover, by stopping off in many local towns to preach, teach, and heal. A city was usually defined as a community with a wall, even if it had a small population of only a dozen homes.

Luke 13:23 “are there few that be saved?” The idea of a “chosen people” brings questions of exclusiveness. Many Jews at the time mistakenly believed that only those Israelites born through Abraham’s son Isaac could get to heaven. They saw heaven as a place only for Abraham’s righteous seed. It is a question from the perspective of scarcity; as if Heaven were not big enough, so only has room for a few. It also assumes a limit. This is wrong. All

who qualify will be warmly welcomed. We can choose to be chosen by following Jesus.

This is why Jesus restored the message that *he* is the way, baptism is the gate, and the condition of our hearts and minds matter. Both John the Baptist and Jesus denounced the idea that your lineage will save you by teaching the need to “do the works of Abraham” and “raise seed to Abraham from these stones” (Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8).

Luke 13:24 “Strive to enter in at the strait gate” Those who “strive” to enter, is a phrase used for “athletic contests and thus has to do with focused, intense effort.”¹⁵ It also sounds like the Celestial Kingdom requirement, “valiant in their testimony of Jesus” (D&C 76:78–79; also Matthew 7:13; Revelation 22:14; etc.).



Abraham's Journey from Ur to Canaan by József Molnár, 1850. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

“I say unto you” Jesus spoke from a position of authority and had no need to quote scripture here. The JST adds an important conditional, “for the Lord shall not always strive with man,” highlighting the need for repentance before judgement day.

Luke 13:25–26 “Ye . . . knock at the door” The great banquet of the Lord is repeated throughout scripture. All are invited, but only some qualify.

Luke 13:27–28 “ye know not from whence ye are” (JST) This addition clarifies that it is not God who keeps us from heaven, but our level of understanding stemming from our choices. Our Savior will work everything out, but not all understand or want his gift enough to become like him. At the end they will regret it with weeping.

Luke 13:29 “they shall come . . . and shall sit down in the kingdom” In answer to the question, people from around the world will be able to enjoy the banquet in the kingdom of heaven. Often the cardinal directions (north, south, east, west) link to the temple in biblical texts. Here too it refers to those who will return into the presence of God.

Luke 13:30 “first which shall be last” Before Jesus’ Second Coming, those who did not receive the promises will receive them. The Gentiles are allowed to be God’s servants by laboring to bring forth the kingdom of God on earth. They will bring God’s news to the children of Abraham, who will be the last (as a people) to receive the message of Jesus’ Gathering of Israel.

Jerusalem’s Future

Luke 13:31-35; Matthew 23:37-39

Luke 13:31-32 “Depart hence, for Herod will kill thee” Luke alone included this conversation where Jesus is warned that Herod wants to kill him too. Jesus responded by calling him a “fox.” Luke’s inclusion is not merely to note a change of locale, but also to stress the inevitability of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection. He will not die in Galilee from Herod, but like the prophets of old, Jesus will die in Jerusalem (and Herod will add his voice there).

Luke 13:33-35 “I have gathered thee . . . as a hen” Jesus choose to describe Himself as a mother-bird trying to protect her young. The image of his wings describes his work on both sides of the veil, going and coming in behalf of his young.

“your house is left unto you desolate” The house of God is the temple. The Jewish house can also be the temple, the people, or their future kingdom. The problem is, it is empty. It gives a message of judgment.¹⁶ Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem stretches to back to its history of killing prophets. It echoes other lamentations found in the OT (2 Chronicles 35:25). Yet it is written in present tense, with the ever-present attitude toward heaven-sent messengers.

Jesus Healed a man with Dropsy on the Sabbath

Luke 14:1-6

Luke 14:1 “he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees” The setting changes on their journey south to a home. A Pharisee invited Jesus to join him for a Sabbath supper. According to Josephus, the festive meal on the Sabbath was at the end of the synagogue service at the 6th hour (noon). To keep the Sabbath according to the Pharisaic oral laws, all the food was prepared on Friday.

Luke 14:2 “a man before him had the dropsy” The text leaves the possibility open that the man was “planted” there to trap Jesus in breaking the Sabbath. Dropsy was the name for swelling or the condition we call edema. Fluid accumulated in the tissues that caused swelling as only the symptom, although the person usually has a more serious problem with circulation, the heart, or kidneys.

Luke 14:3 “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” Jesus asked the first question. As Lord of the Sabbath, he knew the answer, but wanted to teach the importance of helping our fellow human beings, and keeping the higher law of Sabbath observance. Healing on the Sabbath also points as a sign to the greatest Sabbath healing Jesus will offer, the Resurrection.

Luke 14:4–5 “And he took him and healed him” Jesus acted and taught with authority. Deuteronomy 22:4 records the Mosaic injunction to help an ox that falls, so why not a human. However, the Palestinian Jewish community rule book states: “Let no one assist a beast in giving birth on the Sabbath day. Even if it drops (its newborn) into a cistern or into a pit, one is not to raise it up to the Sabbath. Later rabbinic literature states: “they may not deliver the young of cattle on a feast-day, but they may give help.”¹⁷

Jesus’ Teachings on Humility

Luke 14:7–11

Luke 14:7–11 “he put forth a parable” At the same dinner party, the Gospel of Luke adds that Jesus told them a parable (this story is also similar to wisdom literature). Luke divided this section of dinner conversations into two parts—the first a parable about someone of lesser social status usurping a position and the second about God’s feast.

“He marked how they chose out the chief rooms” Jesus’ attention now turned to the way guests chose where to sit. Why do you try to get the best seats, when you may not be the most important guest invited? He repeated a similar account found in Proverbs 25:6–7 (“do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king . . .”), which here has a double meaning as he first taught humility and secondly, he subtly taught that *he* is The King. He asked for more humility in all settings. Jesus’ parable warns of self-righteousness before God and man. This advice for dinner parties can be applied by disciples to other public gatherings and prideful thoughts. The message can relate back to Jesus’ earlier comments on where we think we fit in God’s heavenly home or kingdom. This latter view offers further eschatological overtones.

Luke 14:8–10 “when thou art bidden” Both the first and second dinner parables begin with this phrase, tying the two together. At the time, dinner guests “reclined” rather than the KJV choice, “sit”; starting from a reclining position would make it even harder to get up (and possibly more humiliating) to move to “economy class,” as it were.

Luke 14:11 “whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased . . .” with the exception of “and/*kai*” for *de*, this verse is word for word the same as Luke 18:4, and similar to Matthew 23:12.¹⁸ Repeated messages are there for emphasis. Luke introduced this topic earlier in 13:28–29. The message becomes clearer as Jesus repeatedly taught the need for his disciples to seek humility, not status or notoriety. His example spoke even louder than his words.



Parable of the Wedding Feaster by Andrey Miranov, 2014. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

The Parable of the Great Supper

Luke 14:12–24; Matthew 22:1–14 about The Wedding Feast

Luke 14:12 “to him that bade him . . . call not thy friends” Jesus’ second parable turns from the guests to the host. Jesus encourages this prominent Pharisee (and all of us) to not socialize with your friends and family who will return the favor, but reach beyond your circle to those in need. (Matthew 22 records a similar message at a wedding feast, which gives the story an eternal sphere of the Second Coming or the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.)

Luke 14:13 “the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind” Luke often included messages to the outcasts and here emphasized Jesus’ theme of befriending the socially unclean or misfits. Interestingly, three of the four handicaps that Jesus listed as the unclean that should be invited were specifically excluded from the list of “sons of light against the sons of darkness” in the Qumran *War Scroll*, and from the priests serving in the tabernacle in Leviticus 21:17–23. His message directly hit and tore down the false thinking of his day.

Luke 14:14–15 “. . . be recompensed at the resurrection” The message Jesus taught goes beyond serving the needy, he also taught about charity. “Real love never reckons with recompense.”¹⁹ He pointed to the resurrection to give this counsel eternal implications. When a guest chimes in about the rewards in heaven for the upright, Jesus turns his teachings to another parable.

Luke 14:17 “Come for now things are all ready” Luke gives a general statement about the preparations, while Matthew 22:4 includes a few details about the preparation of the feast—the calf has been slaughtered, and foods prepared—which adds eschatological implications to this “marriage feast.”

Luke 14:18–20 “began to make excuse” The invited guests gave legitimate excuses, but that made it more

tragic—they do not see the value of the feast. These were good things they were doing, but the feast is the best thing they should do. (Note how three examples or witnesses are often used in Jesus’ parables, as we saw in the Good Samaritan.) The story begs us to ask, “What are we doing that gets in the way of coming to Christ’s feast?”

1. **“I have bought a piece of ground . . .”** The Greek is in the present tense, “I am in the act of buying . . .” but in the ancient world that was a very long drawn out process over time.
2. **“I have bought five yoke of oxen . . .”**
3. **“I have married a wife”**

Luke 14:21–23 “Go out quickly, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed and the halt and the blind”

The three affluent groups are contrasted with the same four unfortunate groups that Jesus mentioned earlier (as those unable to return a favor in Luke 14:13). Twice the servant went out and there was plenty of room.

The word “compel/urge” was the license that Augustine claimed to use physical force against heretics, and then again in the middle ages during the Inquisition. Latter-day revelation contradicts this, “No power or influence can or ought to be maintained . . . only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned” (D&C 121:41). We believe in the gospel of peace (D&C 27:16) and leave judgment to God (D&C 82:23; 98:16).

Luke 14:24 “not one . . . will get a taste of my banquet” Those who miss the Lord’s Feast, have mixed up their priorities. Those who want to come enough will rearrange their lives to join the Lord. This message bridges Luke’s next section that asks disciples to prioritize the things of God above all else—family included.

The Conditions of Discipleship

Luke 14:25–33; Matthew 10:37–38

Luke 25–27 “went great multitudes with him . . . if any man come unto me . . .” As crowds followed, Jesus taught them that following him comes at a great sacrifice. Discipleship requires a list of very hard conditions:

1. In order to follow God, disciples “hate,” or are willing to give up, even the favor and protection of parents, wife, children, and siblings.
2. Disciples must be willing to give their “own life”—meaning both giving their life to serve Him and in death if required (as it did in Luke’s community).
3. Disciples “bear his cross,” literally meaning a cross of crucifixion, but figuratively meaning they are willing to suffer even unto death.

Nothing that life has to offer should deter a person from following Jesus. The JST changes in Luke 14:27 emphasize this point: “Settle this in your hearts, that ye will do the things which I shall teach, and command you.” To further illustrate his message, Jesus uses three examples: building a tower, making war, and the parable of salt.

ANALOGY OF BUILDING A TOWER

Luke 14:28–30 “first sit down and count the cost to see if he has the resources to complete it” (BSB) Just as we financially and emotionally need to count the cost of our house projects—we likewise, spiritually must count the cost of discipleship before making covenants. Not finishing a project is a blunder, but it does not have eternal ramifications. In that sphere, Jesus’ message is more than just being prepared, it extends to the importance of making and keeping our covenants. If we choose to follow Christ, we must follow him with all our heart, mind, might and strength.

ANALOGY OF MAKING WAR

Luke 14:31–33 “sit down first and deliberate whether he is able . . .” A benevolent king would never risk the lives of his soldiers without making sure they had a plan to win. Jesus used these examples hoping that all his followers would ask: “am I willing to pay a similar cost?” We do not know what our specific or individual cost will be to enter the Kingdom of God, we must always walk humbly and trust that God’s will is better than our blurred perspective. We must be willing to consecrate our all to build His kingdom.

PARABLE OF SALT

Luke 14: 34–35 “if salt has lost its taste” (ESV) In the ancient world salt was very valuable and at times, people were even paid wages in salt. (Salt became the root of our word, salary.) Jesus saw his disciples as very valuable, but only if they are going to continue to add flavor and value. If their commitment stopped, thus becoming figuratively tasteless, their once great value is gone and they are worthless. This parable of losing flavor bridges to the next three on losing disciples.

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER 15

Jesus came to earth to save lost souls (that means all humanity). In Luke 15, he shared three similar parables—each about lost souls. All three answer the pharisaic murmuring. All three stories include a little hyperbole shock value to keep the Pharisees listening. The first pair included opposite genders, one relatively rich and the other relatively poor.

Luke 15:1–2 “This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them” The Pharisees condemned Jesus for eating with sinners earlier as well (Mark 2:16; Luke 5:30). I couldn’t find anything in the Torah that forbade eating

with sinners or unclean (unless you were a priest), but often eating was looked at as a covenant or a sacred rite—so you would not want to make a covenant or contaminate yourself through eating with a sinner. The idea that publicans were all sinners developed with Jewish hatred of the Roman tax collectors.

Parable of The Lost Sheep OR “The Gospel of the Outcast”

Luke 15:1-7

Luke 15:4 “What man of You” Jesus addressed the Pharisees as if they were shepherds. This may have been a social slam, as shepherds were socially unclean, not trusted, and not allowed to stand as a legal witnesses because of their traditional dishonesty. On the other hand, 80–90% of the people in Palestine lived an agrarian lifestyle, so many Pharisees had close contact with livestock and could relate to the parable.

Luke 15:5–6 “when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders . . .” Sheep who fall onto their backs cannot aright themselves. Depending on how long the sheep is in that position, their legs may be weak from a lack of circulation.²⁰ This sounds like the situation as the shepherd carries the sheep back to the flock.

“he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me” Such extravagance is an unusual practice for shepherds. The climactic center of all three parables is a communal celebration over finding something that was lost. This was unheard of, in fact, extraordinary. Yet, in God’s flock, it coincides with His work and glory.

Luke 15:7 “joy in heaven over one sinner who repents” Jesus’ interpretation explains that the sheep



represent humans. The lost one is the repentant sinner who returns to the fold of believers, much to the joy of the angels. (For more see Come Follow Me, Matthew 18:1–5).

Parable of The Lost Coin

Luke 15:8–10

Luke 15:8–9 “a woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one . . .” The word “silver” is translated from the ancient Greek coin *drachma*, which was a half day’s labor in Athens. Women usually did not “own” anything. The money they earned or found was the property of their husbands or fathers. So perhaps this is why it is so important that she find it. Even her “bride price” was given to her father.²¹ Or perhaps the coins had sentimental value as part of the woman’s dowry (yet her father/guardian was given the dowry and rarely in Judaism was it given to the bride. However, in other cultures the bride sewed her bridal coins into a bedecked head-dress).

Luke 15:10 “joy in the presence of angels of God over one sinner than repenteth” The message of the parable is clear. If humans will exert such effort to recover their property (*light a lamp, sweep, search*), how much more effort will God Himself expend to regain one of His children? The message is that God will initiate even greater efforts with his grace and love to find a lost soul. Jesus repeated this three times as all three of these neighboring “finding the lost” parables end with an exuberant eruption of joy when the lost is found.

Parable of The Prodigal Son—or Two Sons or Father’s Love

Luke 15:11–32

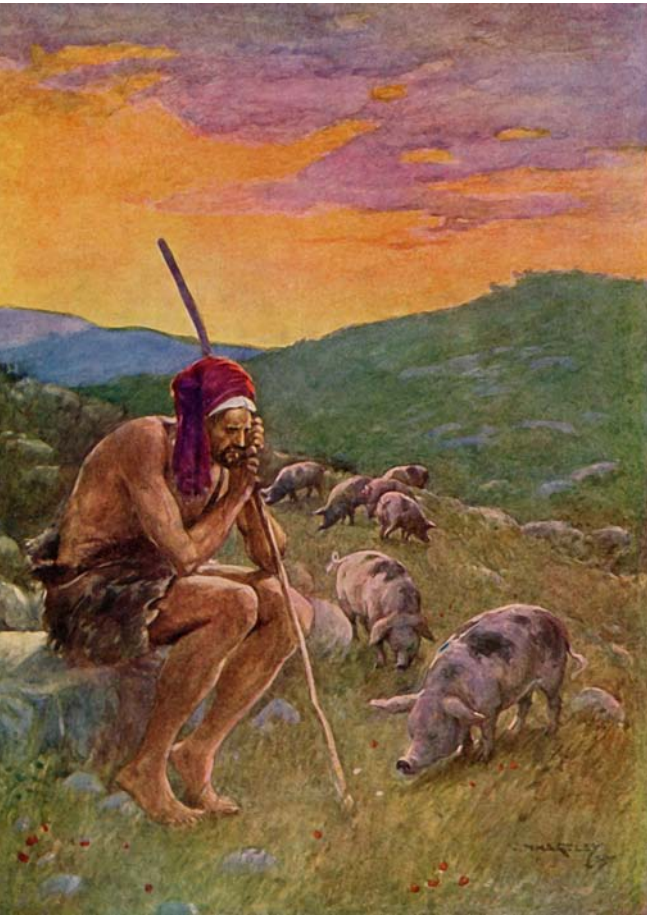
This parable is seen by many as the greatest of all parables. It beautifully teaches God’s plan of salvation. It also ties in the message that repentance is a free gift, God honors agency, estrangement, responsibility, and grace. In Keith Meservy’s analysis of this parable he sees that we are initially spiritual, and if our spiritual needs are not met, then regardless of how many other physical and material satisfactions we may have, we long for more.²²

Luke 15:11 “a certain man had two sons” The central figure in this parable is the father. Elder Gordon B. Hinckley taught that “every parent ought to read it again and again. It is large enough to encompass every household, and enough larger than that to encompass all mankind . . . who need to repent and partake of the forgiving mercy of our Heavenly Father and then follow his example.”²³ Jesus’ parables teach us about whom we worship as well as how to better worship Him. The two sons set up the two-part parable.

Luke 15:12 “give me the share of property that falls to me” (RSV) Jesus began with an outrageous request. A Jewish son from that time would never ask his father for his share of the inheritance while his father was yet alive. Scholars have not one case of any son, older or younger asking for inheritance from a father who was in good health in Middle Eastern ancient literature; it “was equivalent to wishing his father’s death.”²⁴ The inheritance required dividing his land and property. Asking while the father was still alive would have required the father to



The Return of the Prodigal Son by James Tissot, 1899.



The Prodigal by J. H. Hartley, 1929.

sell his land, his source of income. Jesus used this to show the extreme rudeness and indignance of this son.

The Law of Moses divided inheritance by giving the first born a double portion, and everyone else equal portions (Deuteronomy 21:16–17). With two sons that means the oldest received 2/3 of the estate and the younger 1/3. The text describes the man as if he were not married, so the use of “younger” may possibly mean that he was in his teens.²⁵

Luke 15:13 “wasted . . . with riotous living” This is the only time in the Bible we find the word, “riotous” or “loose living” (RSV). It means “dissolutely, extravagantly, wasteful, reckless, decadently, or licentiously.”

“a far country” The young man has left his covenant people and gone to live among heathens. Later the older brother denounces him spending the father’s estate on “prostitutes” (Luke 15:30). In each parable we see pictures of Jesus too—in this case Jesus was perceived as associating with heathens like Samaritans, and was chastised for “eat[ing] with publicans and sinners.” Perhaps his audience thought of Jesus as a prodigal too.

Luke 15:14 “famine” The weather often describes God’s judgments in the Bible. In the ancient Israelite world, prophets sealed the heavens, and promised good weather for good behavior.

Luke 15:15 “fed swine” For a Jew, the most degrading of all occupations was serving gentiles. This is one step worse: this young man serves an unclean gentile’s unclean animals (Deuteronomy 14:8 and Lev 11:7).

Luke 15:16 “he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat.” This has got to be the best description in the Bible of utter dire need. The husks the pigs ate, as we find in the footnote, were carob pods. The tree is found all over the Mediterranean. It grows long pods filled with a sweet pulp and an indigestible seed. It is often used as food for animals. He could have eaten the pulp, but was too disgusted with himself to partake. In addition to his physical needs, Jesus describes his social isolation too, “No man gave unto him” any food that was more suitable for humans.

Luke 15:17 “when he came to himself” In this foreign state—living recklessly, with gentiles—the young man was not fully himself. However, his conditions had completely humbled him. His broken state allowed him to become contrite (or crushed) so that he had a new perspective. In his soliloquy he is inspired by the idea of returning home. This is how the Spirit of the Lord works in all of us. When we are humble enough to listen, we can again hear the Spirit’s voice.

The first message of the Spirit in such a situation is to “return”—this is the meaning of repentance. John W. Welch sees the steps of repentance and restoration included in this parable.²⁶

1. Realizing one’s life is out of harmony with God’s will
2. Remorsefully and genuinely recognizing one’s situation
3. Resolving to make a permanent change
4. Requesting forgiveness
5. Relying on mercy, putting oneself in God’s hands
6. Receiving gestures of forgiveness
7. Rejoicing
8. Restitution and repairing
9. Reforming habits
10. Resisting the temptation to fall back
11. Reinforcing repentance by renewal
12. Retaining the remission of sin by returning God’s grace.

Luke 15:18–19 “I will arise . . . make me as one of thy hired servants” In his soliloquy, the starving young man chooses to return to his father, not the estate. Psychologically and legally, though, he realizes that he can no longer be called a son—he will have to take a place as a hired servant. But he is motivated to move on and “arise/*anastas*,” to resurrect or come back from his spiritual death.

“**sinned against heaven**,” is the phrase used to mean “sinned against God” without using God’s name. It was too sacred to be spoken. He also realizes that he has sinned against his father—his father’s name, covenants, teachings, and inheritance.

Luke 15:20 “a great way off . . . his father, ran” The father was either looking off in the distance, or as he was out in the fields, he recognized the emaciated silhouette of his son on the horizon. The father’s love broke through social propriety, where ancient robed men *never* ran anywhere, but this father allowed his love to dictate his behavior and like a child, he ran to the one he loved. Jesus’ story telling techniques make it even more captivating for those with the cultural background.



“fell on his neck, and kissed him” The father’s spontaneous hugging and kissing, again demonstrates rejoicing over the lost. Jesus set a dramatic illustration of love. In a Divine context, it manifests God’s forgiveness.

Luke 15:21 “no more worthy” The son’s repeated confession emphasizes his repentance. When sufficiently humble, with a broken heart and contrite spirit, this becomes the message we all cry to heaven.

Luke 15:22–24 “the best robe . . . ring . . . shoes . . . calf” The “best” also means the “first in rank” so the robe is an honorary (in Greek it can also mean: influence, honor; chief; principal). In an allegorical light, a robe is symbolic of premortal heavenly dress. The ring possibly represents authority as rings were used to seal documents. Rings were also worn by the rich and may be symbol of returning to luxury. Shoes were a sign of wealth in a land where most wore sandals. The celebration brings the whole community together to rejoice with a feast with meat and merriment. The ring of authority and robe of honor could allegorically refer to a covenant meal as well.

If Jesus' story reflected his culture, the neighbors may have gathered to see the returning prodigal, but rather than welcoming him, they would have taunted, mocked and possibly even physically abused him by spitting or hitting him. Among their accusation for sexual immorality, they may have suggested a trial to have him stoned. Instead, in Jesus' shocking rendition, the younger son not only is not treated as a servant, but rather as an honored guest. This speaks of Divine forgiveness. In a timeless world where God lives in the present, the sins of those who repent of their by-gones, are gone (D&C 58:42). God's compassion acts to "cheer on every runner" as they return home.²⁷

Luke 15:24 "my son was dead and is alive again" The prodigal was spiritually dead, and by returning *to his father's house*, is alive spiritually again. This verse parallels Luke 15:32, emphasizing Jesus' message of forgiveness and God's mercy.

Luke 15:25–27 "his elder son in the field" The elder son is not told about the situation. This may suggest that he was either absorbed in his work, or not looking (expecting?) his lost little brother to return. He was not as quick to forgive and see the situation as his father does. I presume, over the years, the big brother has experienced humiliation or at least embarrassment from the actions of his reckless brother. He many have enjoyed not having the complainer around. Whatever the motivation, he is upset by the feasting and rejoicing over the returning trouble maker.

Luke 15:28–29 "he was angry, and would not go in" The responsible, hardworking older son was asked to join in the meal, but his anger kept him out. The Greek word for "anger" is the same one used when Jesus was cleansing the temple. Here, the older brother's anger did not include a forgiving heart. Even when his father asked him to come, he refused. We can see how mad the older brother is by not even claiming a relationship to his brother later in vs. 30, but calls him, "thy son."

"went out and pleaded with him" (AB). The father hears of his first-born son's anger, and comes outside to talk to him. Again, we see the father as the driving force in this parable. Family relations are the hardest relationships at times. The son complains, "you never even killed a goat for me," which is a far less valued animal than a fatted calf. The older son does not feel justified. Frustrating as it may be, justice is not part of this life—at least from a mortal's perspective. Even when we obey the commandments, work hard, honor our parents, it does not always bring the happiness and rewards we think we deserve. The balance doesn't seem right from our limited view of life. However, the parable goes on to teach that life is longer than we think. Mercifully, justice will be dealt with.

The father represents God's willingness to come to us, wherever we are, and listen to our complaints. Yet, when He does, we need to hear, learn and follow His advice, as the older son in the parable does.

Luke 15:30 “thou hast killed for him the fatted calf” This is a powerful statement. It is the third time that killing the fatted calf is mentioned (Luke 15:23, 27). This time though, it is the most clear reference to the symbol of the sacrificial “fatted calf” that the Father killed for the sinner (Leviticus 4:4; 16:6). God killed the best He had, when he allowed His only begotten Son to be slain for the sins of the world.

Luke 15:31 “all I have is thine” The father begins with a loving title in Greek, “my child.” He explains that rejoicing for his lost brother does not diminish his love and rewards that are in store for him. For we know that “he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father’s kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him” (D&C 84:38). The older son’s jealousy has not taken him out of his father’s inheritance.

Luke 15:32 “it was meet . . . thy brother . . . is alive again” From Jesus’ perspective, finding and nurturing the lost soul is “meet” or *necessary*. It is the second time Luke used the word “lost,” which in Greek can also be translated as “destroyed.” Luke’s writing skill has the father turning the message from him crying out, “your son” (vs. 30) to now being told, “YOUR brother who has returned!”

From the times of the early Christians, this parable represented a loving Heavenly Father, “filled with mercy toward one son and justice toward the other.”²⁸ The story also exemplifies each of us who return from our self-centered behaviors through repentance to seek forgiveness and then enter into the loving and compassionate arms of our Heavenly Parents.

RAISING OF LAZARUS

John 11—7th miracle

Why did Jesus perform miracles?

Approximately 14% of the four Gospels are devoted to recording Jesus’ miracles (Matthew 12%, Mark 25%, Luke 13%, and John 9%). Of the 47 recorded miracles, Jesus never refused to help (though, he often required a second request).

THEY SHOW . . .

- Power over nature (John 6:19)
- The Father’s witness (John 10: 25)
- The glory of God (John 11:5)
- Open hearts how to believe (John 18:10)

- To testify of the Messiah (John 20:30–3)
- Power over sins (Luke 8:35–42)
- Power shared with others (Matthew 10:1)
- Power over defects (John 9:1–7)
- Power over death (John 11:17–46)

Setting of John 11

John's Gospel explains that Jesus had been across the Jordan River in Perea for most of the winter (ever since the Feast of Dedication in November/December in John 10:22–39). Then, in the early spring, a few weeks before the Passover, Jesus' friends in Bethany urgently call Him back. As Jesus and his group of apostles and ministering women cross the Jordan River back into Judea, they follow the path of Joshua and the Children of Israel into the Promised Land. Figuratively, the path crosses from "the world" into to "the Promised Land." Though for Jesus, his promised land will be when he unites with his Father in a few days.

Only John's Gospel records this story of the raising of Lazarus. (Although, Luke 10:38–42 mentions Jesus in Bethany with Mary and Martha). John placed this as Jesus' seventh miraculous sign. This miracle was the last straw that provoked the wicked leaders to set in motion their plan to kill Jesus. It triggered the Jerusalem leaders to act. This miracle becomes a sign of what Christ will do—except, rather than raising humanity back to mortality, he will raise us to immortality to never die again.²⁹ It concludes the first half of the Gospel of John (sometimes described as the Book of Signs) and introduces the second half—Jesus' passion and resurrection.³⁰

Jesus Received News that Lazarus was Ill

John 11:1–6

John 11:1 "Lazarus was sick" (NIV) The name Lazarus means, "whom God Helps." I find no connection between the two men named Lazarus in the NT (the other is a beggar in a parable recorded in Luke 16:20). This Lazarus is the brother of Mary and Martha mentioned throughout the Gospels.

"**Bethany,**" was a suburb to the east of Jerusalem, 1 ¾ miles from the old city (3,000 cubits or 15 furlongs/stadium, John 11:18). The distance was just far enough outside the city to separate the "clean and unclean." The name Bethany meant, "House of Affliction," and may have been one of the three places designated for the care of the sick (including one for lepers). The Qumran Temple Scroll mentions they were located to the east of Jerusalem.

Bethany is approximately 25 miles from the Jordan River, which forms the border with Perea (modern Jordan). A town built on the ruins of Bethany is called El Azariyeh (named after Eleazar or in Greek, Lazarus). Bethany's distance was ideal for pilgrims to stay there during the three major pilgrimage feasts to Jerusalem. Jesus stayed there with his friends. During pilgrimage feasts, the boundaries of Jerusalem expanded in order to house every-

one within the city. Bethany was 1.5 miles from Jerusalem and close enough to be included in the extended holiday city boarder to eat the Passover.

John 11:3 “Lord, the one you love is sick.” As dear friends of Jesus, Mary and Martha sent messengers to Perea seeking Jesus’ help when Lazarus became seriously ill. (Indirectly this informs us that Jesus communicated with his friends while outside of Judea). This Greek word for “love” is *phileo* and it is used 25 times in the New Testament for love/friendship (other words for love include *agape* used for charity and *eros* used for physical attraction). *Phileo* has a broad meaning of brotherly love (i.e. Philadelphia means the city of brotherly love). John used the verb *phileo* to describe God’s love for his Son (John 5:20) and the disciples (John 16:27). The relationship with Lazarus’ family was close enough that Jesus often stayed with them in their home. The Gospels give evidence that this family enjoyed plenty of means (sending messengers, their large house, parties, spikenard, etc.)

John 11:4 “for the glory of God” Jesus’ purpose in performing this miracle is broader than compassion alone, it is specifically to show the “glory of God.” He will glorify God by setting the stage for his own death and resurrection. The previous miracle John includes, the healing of the blind man, was done “that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (John 9:3). Jesus knew Lazarus’ outcome while still in Perea. If Jesus were only performing the miracle to heal a dear friend he would have come immediately, but his timing testified of his broader message to teach in addition to heal. We can always be assured that the Lord knows the end from the beginning and trust his plan and his timing, even when it appears impossible.

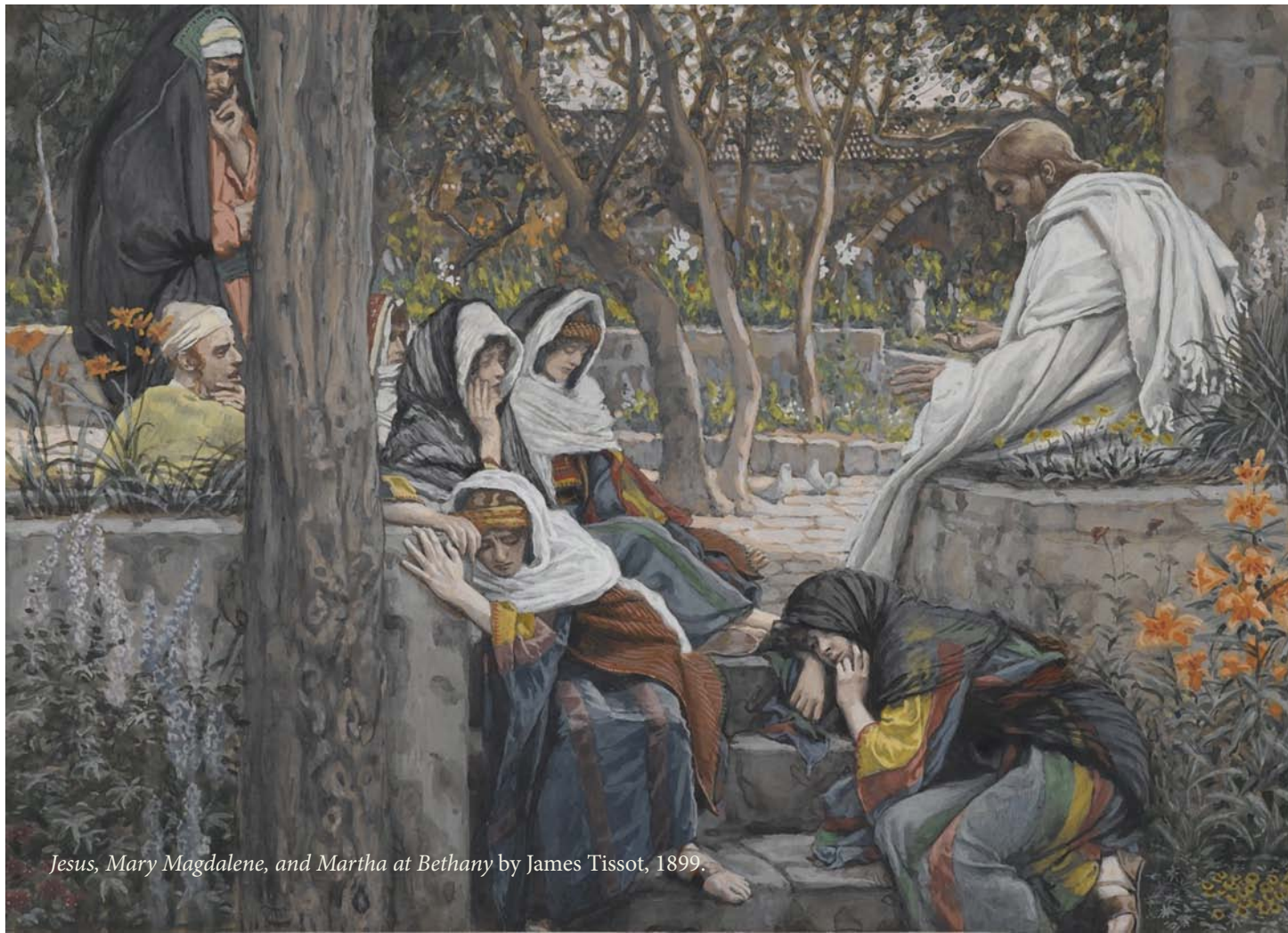
John 11:6 “He abode two days still” As with all miracles, Jesus’ timing of this miracle is especially important. On the surface the delayed arrival tested the faith of Mary and Martha and the other disciples. Jesus wanted to teach something more. By delaying his arrival, Jesus was able to address a doctrinal issue.

Prophets in the OT, like Elijah, also raised the dead. But they always performed the miracle shortly after the death. Some see the “two days” in John 11:6 as a parallel to Jesus’ own resurrection, as he rose on the morning of the third day, after two days in the tomb. Yet Lazarus was not resurrected, only returned to his second estate. He had to die again. Jesus was the first resurrected being on earth.

Jesus and Disciples walked from Perea to Bethany

John 11:7-16

John 11:7-8 “. . . the Jews were but now seeking to stone you” The disciples expressed their concern about Jesus’ safety. This is *real* because the last time they were in Judea some Jews tried to stone Jesus (John 10:31). The 25-mile hike from the Jordan River to Bethany was through some very dangerous areas where robbers were known to wait. Jesus knew that he could not be harmed until God deemed his mission complete and it was the right time.



Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Martha at Bethany by James Tissot, 1899.

John 11:9–10 “walk in . . . the light of this world” Jesus countered the disciples’ worries with his plan to walk in the daylight, as the “light of the world” can refer to both the sun and the Son (D&C 88:7). John returned to one of his favorite themes: light and darkness. Symbolically, we will not stumble spiritually if we have the Light of Christ and the fire of the Spirit burning brightly within our hearts to guide our thoughts and actions.

John 11:11–14 “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth” The Greek word for “sleepeth” is *koimao* and is used eighteen times in the NT. Usually it means to fall asleep, and once it is translated “death,” so it is understandable why the disciples became confused. We use the same euphemism now in English.

John 11:15–16 “To the intent that ye / you may believe.” Jesus emphasized the relation of the miracle to the disciples. Interestingly, it is Thomas/Didymus (meaning twin) who spoke out this way. He must have also been very close to Lazarus, but his comments also show us a little more of his nature. He jumped to conclusions without exercising his faith. The JST adds an extra sentence, “for they feared lest the Jews should take Jesus and put him to death, for as yet they did not understand the power of God.” This may mean that Thomas refers to dying with Jesus, not Lazarus.

Jesus Arrives in Bethany

John 11:17-40

John 11:17-18 “He had lain in the grave four days already” Without embalming or refrigeration, dead bodies begin decomposing immediately. Within the day that one breathed their last, the body was laid in the tomb, and then after three days the tomb was usually closed with a stone to keep wild animals away. Later, it was opened, the bones removed and put in a sarcophagus so that another body could use the grave site.

Many Jews believed that a spirit stayed near its dead body for three days. By Jesus delaying his arrival until the fourth day, no one could doubt that Lazarus was completely dead (Note the JST adds that He came to “Martha’s house”)

John 11:19 “Many of the Jews came . . . to comfort” This also means that many witnessed the miracle of raising Lazarus. According to funeral customs in Jesus’ time, after one died and the body was buried, for the next day or two loved ones or their servants rubbed oils and spices into the body and wrapped it. Funerals included elaborate traditions. The more money one had, the more extensive the burial procedures.³¹ “At the moment of a man’s death, his wives, daughters, and female relations united in cries of lamentation” (Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 101).

Women could be hired as professional mourners to wail, shriek, and cry for days. The Mishnah calls for even the poorest man to hire at least one mourner at the death of his wife. As usual, the men and women were separated in public, including walking separately to the burial spot in a funeral procession. After the burial the women returned alone from the grave to mourn for 30 days. This mourning included loud wailing and dramatic expressions of grief.³² The Jewish men also played a prominent part in mourning rites.

Jesus has already shown his distaste for this tradition when he asked all the mourners to leave before He raised Jairus’ daughter. It appears this tradition was motivated by the adversary as it distracts the mourner from feeling the Spirit of God that can be close during that sacred time when the veil is thinner.

John 11:20-22 “Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him” I love Martha’s interaction with Jesus—this time she is not in the house preparing for the company (Luke 10:38-42), but is the first to go outside, down the street, and outside of her village, to greet Jesus (John 11:30). She actively seeks Him out, even in her overwhelming grief. We can only imagine how disappointed the family must have felt with the Lord’s timing. They knew Jesus had been asked, and they also knew that Jesus had not hurried to their side.

John 11:23-24 “Thy brother shall rise again” As mentioned earlier, the word “rise/*anistemi*” is used multiple times in the NT and can refer to the resurrection (i.e. John 20:9, but usually that is *anastasis*). Martha’s clear faith opens the door for Jesus to testify of his divinity.

John 11:25 “I am the resurrection” This verse augments the prologue theme in John 1:4 “I am Life” to include Eternal life through the resurrection too. As Jesus had earlier taught, the first, or mortal, death is not to be feared; only the second or spiritual death. All sons and daughters of God who have not committed the unpardonable sin will live again in glory.

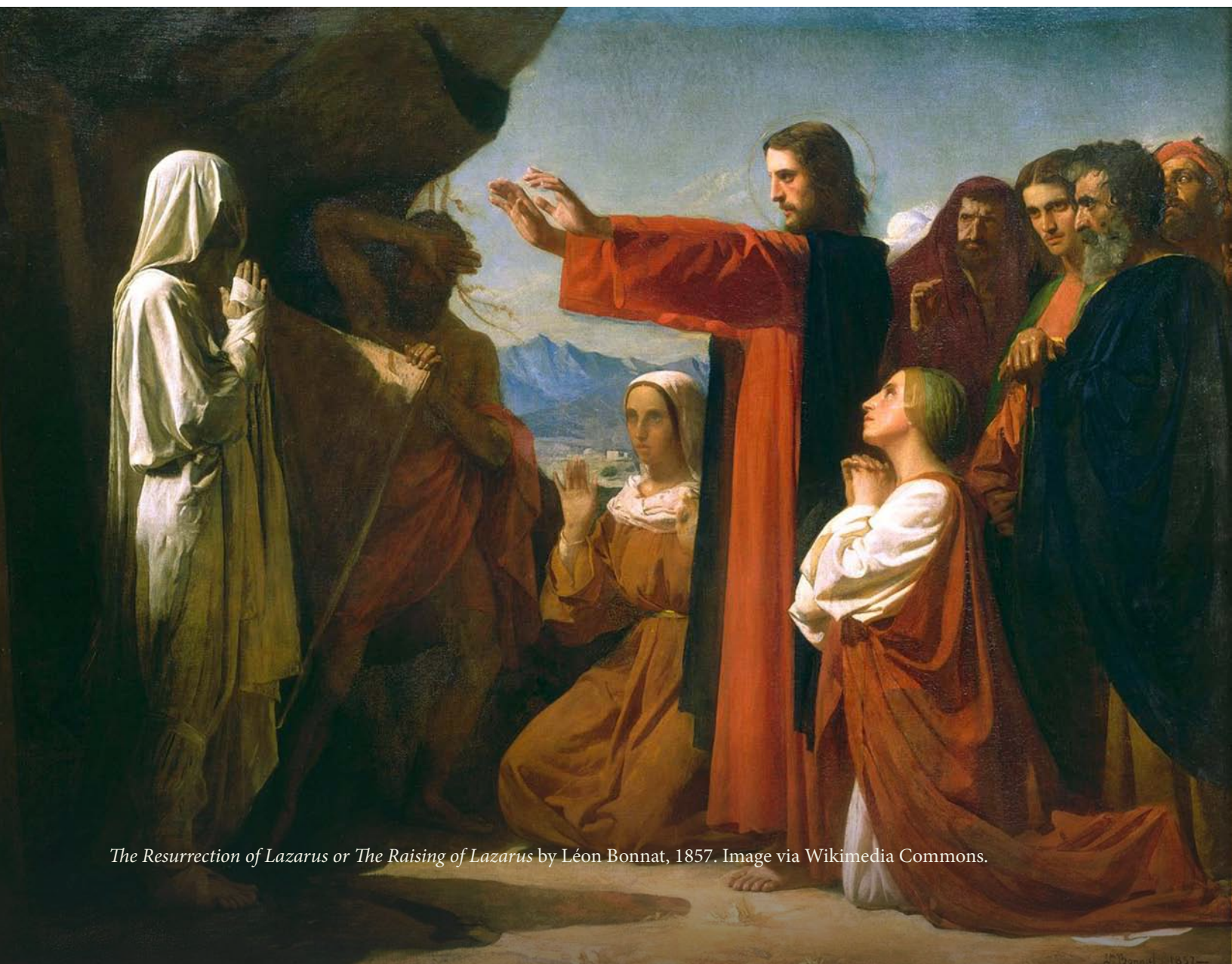


John 11:27, “Yea, Lord: I believe” Martha’s testimony is the clearest witness of Jesus’ divinity in John’s Gospel. She testified that he is the one they have long awaited, “the Christ,” which is the Greek equivalent to the *Messiah* in Hebrew, and the Son of the God. Her vibrant testimony shines as a second witness beside Peter’s in Caesarea Philippi, voicing almost the same words.

Martha's two additional witnesses, "Yea Lord I believe," and that Jesus is the one "which should come into the world," makes her testimony the most comprehensive as well. She may not quite understand everything that will happen to her brother, but one thing for sure she knows—Jesus is the Promised Messiah—and that is all that we *really* need to know.

John 11:28–30 "She . . . called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come and calleth for thee" Why does Martha cautiously whisper to her sister? Will so many people rush to Jesus that Mary cannot have a private conversation with Him? Or perhaps, Mary and Martha sought privacy out of concern for the Lord's safety? We do not know. In John's Gospel, Jesus is referred to as: "Teacher/Rabbi/Lord/Master."

John 11:31 "To weep" really means, "to wail!" Supposedly, the noise from mourners was heard from quite a distance.



The Resurrection of Lazarus or The Raising of Lazarus by Léon Bonnat, 1857. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

John 11:32–33 “Mary . . . fell down at his feet” John described Mary of Bethany in this same position for most of her interactions with Jesus. She used the exact same words that her sister, Martha, spoke when she first met the Lord: “if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” Her sobbing moved Jesus to compassion and he was “troubled / deeply moved in the Spirit” (RSV).

John 11:34 “Where have ye laid him? . . . come and see” First, Jesus’ disciples asked, and he told them to come and see” (John 1:39). Now the disciples said it to Jesus. All who follow him now will see God’s power to bring life from death.

John 11:35–36 “Jesus wept . . . behold how he loved him” Jesus’ compassion for Mary was so great that he wept even though he knew that he will shortly raise Lazarus from the tomb (John 11:4, 43). It teaches much about his nature too. Jesus taught his disciples what real compassion is and how to mourn with those that mourn. In Jesus’ sermon on the mount he blessed those that mourn. Jesus’ actions validate the need to mourn. We also have record of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem in Luke 19:41 and a reference to the tears shed in Gethsemane in Hebrews 5:7.

We find other examples of our Lord crying in empathy in scripture. Twice among the Nephites Jesus expressed his love through tears of gratitude, and twice with “compassion” (3 Nephi 17:5–10). Jesus wept after exclaiming, “And now behold, my joy is full” (3 Nephi 17:20–22).

John 11:37 “Could not this man . . .” The local Jews knew that Jesus had healed a blind man in Jerusalem three months earlier and added their belief that Jesus could have kept Lazarus from dying (John 9:1–7). They appear to be a group filled with faith. However, to bring Lazarus “back from the dead required not only that his spirit be brought back from the spirit world to be united again with his body, but also that the physical elements of the body be changed from a decomposed or unorganized state to their former or more organized state, thus seemingly defying laws of nature.”³³

John 11:38 “It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it” This foreshadows Jesus’ garden tomb. Carved vertical shafts were more common for private burial than horizontal caves. Larger burial areas also had a mourning room adjacent to the burial room. The stone kept animals away. Jewish townspeople kept their burial places outside of the town in order to avoid ritual impurity from contact with the corpses.

John 11:39–40 “. . . he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days” Again John included the fact that Lazarus had been dead four days—emphasizing he was completely dead, and his spirit was gone. The “stench” refers to the decomposition that occurs without complete embalming. Martha’s response shows that her faith isn’t perfect yet—we can all increase in faith. In one of the Greek manuscripts of the Gospel of John, there is an extra phrase,

Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead by William Hole, 1905.



“Lord, why are they taking away the stone?”³⁴ Jesus reminded Martha (and all his disciples) that the purpose of performing this miracle is for the “glory of God” (John 11:4).

Jesus’ Raised Lazarus from the Tomb

John 11:41-53

John 11:41–42 “Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee” Jesus’ gesture of looking upward as a prelude to prayer is also mentioned in Luke 28:13; John 17:1; Matthew 14:19. Gratitude fills his prayers. I love the fact that Jesus thanks the Father for hearing him, even before he performs the miracle.

John 11:43 “He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus come forth” Lazarus is the third recorded instance of Jesus restoring life, and is the most dramatic (the 12 year old daughter of Jairus, within the hour of her death, Matthew 9:18–25; Mark 5:38–42; Luke 8:35–42; and the widow’s son, on the way to his grave in Nain, Luke 7:11–17). Peter and Paul also raise the dead (Acts 9:40; 20:9–10), and in the OT there were others (Elijah, etc.).

John 11:44–45 “came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes” Lazarus’ grave clothes are described just like Jesus’ are, with a separate head cloth left in the tomb. Their practice was to wrap the bodies with spices and oils. Lazarus would use his death clothes again, for he was not resurrected, but only restored to life. The burial clothing was often thin strips of cloth wrapped around the limbs.

John 11:46–53 “Many . . . believed on him. . . some of them went their ways to the Pharisees” Ironically this miracle to restore a life leads to Jesus’ death. Some who were eye witnesses shared this great miracle with antagonistic Pharisees, who used it to spur the Sanhedrin to plot Jesus’ death. It became so well known, that it became the “last straw” in the minds of those who wanted to kill Jesus. They also added Lazarus to their list of those they hoped to kill (John 12:10). And they sought to do it as soon as possible (John 11:57).

Fortunately, Lazarus is not killed by the Sanhedrin. In an apocryphal source we read: “Lazarus came back to life just twelve seconds after Jesus spoke.” Early sources also sketched, “Lazarus’ later career as ‘treasurer of the church at Philadelphia’ and dying ‘when 67 years old, of the same sickness that carried him off when he was a younger man at Bethany.’³⁵

When Jesus’ raised Lazarus from the dead is not clear. It appears to have happened either a few days or a few weeks before his Sunday morning triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He may have stayed in Bethany during those days or weeks. John does not tell us, but Jesus is back in Bethany six days before Passover (John 12:1).

Header Image: The Resurrection of Lazarus or The Raising of Lazarus by Léon Bonnat, 1857. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

1. In John's gospel Jesus spends the last three months of his life in Perea. Luke has Jesus' traveling. The two may not be contradictory, but we assume that Luke uses this travel time to fit in many of the sources he hopes to include in his text (Luke 1:1–3).
2. *Mishnah, Shekalim* 1:1.
3. *Mishnah, Tractate Ta'anit*, 3:8. Mikvaot (singular is mikveh), are purification immersion baths, most often with seven steps down into a small square (or rectangle) pool of water.
4. Charles R Barnes, *Dictionary of The Bible; Biographical, Geographical, Historical, and Doctrinal* (NYC, NY: NY University, 1900). 60.
5. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, Reprint, 1980), vol. 6:314.
6. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (SLC, UT: Bookcraft, 1969), 123.
7. Russell M. Nelson, "Revelation for the Church, Revelation for our Lives," General Conference (April 2018).
8. Hugh Nibley, "Leaders and Managers," BYU Speeches, Commencement Address, August 19, 1983.
9. Steven Harper, "All Things Are the Lord's: The Law of Consecration in the Doctrine and Covenants," published in Andrew H. Hedges, J. Spencer Fluhman, and Alonzo L. Gaskill, ed. *The Doctrine and Covenants: Revelations in Context* (Provo and SLC, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, and Deseret Book, 2008), 212–28.
10. Web site accessed 4/13/19. <https://biblehub.com/topical/e/endow.htm>
11. Larry Y. Wilson, "Take the Holy Spirit as your Guide," General Conference (April, 2018).
12. Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: GP, 2015), chapter 8.
13. Kent Brown, Eric Huntsman, *The Testimony of Luke—A New Rendition*, Brigham Young University New Testament Commentary (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 663.
14. John W. and Jeannie Welch, *The Parables of Jesus Revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2019), 68–70.
15. Kent Brown, *Luke*, 670.
16. Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to Luke X–XXIV* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 1035.
17. *Ibid.*, 1040.
18. *Ibid.*, 1044. These two-twin passage in Luke both end sections that only Luke record.
19. *Ibid.*, 1045.
20. Welch, *Parables*, 98.
21. *Mishnah, Ketuboth*, 4.7; 5.1. The contract included the groom's payment of a "bride price." The minimum sum was 200 denarii for a virgin, with no maximum (a denarius was one day's minimum wage, thus 200 days' labor).
22. Kent P. Jackson, Robert L. Millet, *Studies in Scripture: The Gospels* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1986), 5.356.
23. Gordon B. Hinkley, "Of you it is required to Forgive," General Conference October 1980.

24. Bruce A. Van Oren, and Brent Top eds., *The Lord of the Gospels: the 1990 Sperry Symposium on the New Testament* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Education, 1990), 58.
25. The ideal age for a young man to marry was 18, though it was legal at 12 ½. If he were still single at 25, he would have to pay a higher tax. See Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of New Testament Women*, chapter 7.
26. Welch, *Parables*, 106.
27. Jeffery R. Holland, "The other Prodigal," General Conference April 2002.
28. Welch, *Parables*, 109, paraphrasing Tertullian.
29. Raymond Brown, *The Anchor Bible Series: John 1–XII* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 420; "a sign that Jesus is the life."
30. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John* (Collegeville, MN: the Liturgical Press, 1988), 61.
31. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 1.363. Josephus describes more than a month-long procession and other elaborate displays in conjunction with Herod the Great's death.
32. Jacob Neusner, ed, *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), "mourning."
33. Jackson, *Studies in Scriptures*, 5.334.
34. Raymond Brown, *Anchor: John*, 426.
35. C. Wilfred Griggs, ed., *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1986), 93.



MATTHEW 19–20; MARK 10; LUKE 18

JESUS TEACHES A NEW SOCIAL HIERARCHY WITH SERVITUDE

Jesus offered a new look at servitude by turning social hierarchy upside down. In His Kingdom, the first are last and servants are “the greatest.” Jesus did not denounce servitude; He denounced the aristocracy that did not serve. He tried to teach masters how to serve. Through His example and words, He encouraged us to serve each other with love. In the first century, one-third of the Roman Empire was in the class of slaves and servants (but it was more similar to what we think of as the feudal system).¹

The Law of Moses allowed the poor, who needed room and board, to sell themselves to another Jew: “If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing” (Exodus 21:2). When Jesus came, instead of getting rid of slavery and servitude, Jesus worked to rid the culture of harsh masters, hatred, prejudice, and class systems. Anyone who sought a position of domination over another, with power-hungry or money-thirsty motives, was not welcome in His Kingdom. Everyone in His Kingdom serves one another and The Father in humility and love.

JESUS LEAVES GALILEE

Matthew 19:1; Mark 10:1 “when Jesus had finished these sayings” The Gospel of Matthew uses this phrase repeatedly to identify a change in location and topic (also see Matthew 7:28, 13:53; 26:1). Jesus and His disciples now went to the east side of the Jordan River and began to head south to Jerusalem. This is similar to Luke 9:51 (except The Gospel of Luke does mention crossing the Jordan River) and John 10:40 (which has Jesus near Bethabara for His last six months).

“**coasts/horia**” The KJV word is often translated “region,” and means “the boundaries of a place, hence: districts, territory.”²

Matthew 19:2; Mark 10:2 “Great multitudes followed him; and he healed them” The Matthew JST precedes the healing with an important observation: “*and many believed on him*” (Matthew 19:2). Healings make up the vast majority (75%) of Jesus’ miracles recorded in the NT. Of all the miracles that God could have used as a sign of the coming Messiah, the OT prophesies primarily identify the Messiah as one who will heal—the blind, lame, possessed and dead—inside and out. The NT miracles reflect Jesus’ compassion and love, and they teach that His healing is more than physical; He is the One who makes us whole. Mark’s parallel account is similar, but rather than describing healing, Mark focuses on Jesus’ teaching.

Marriage and Divorce

Matthew 19:3–4; Mark 10:2 “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” (NIV). A group of Pharisees in the crowd want to continue to test Jesus’ teachings.³ They have been mad that Jesus shamelessly does not live by the 10,000 oral laws that they added since the Babylonian exile. This time they question Him on the hot topic of marriage and divorce. People held very strong and differing opinions about this topic across the Jewish and Roman world. A few examples were covered in Matthew 5:31, but I will add a little here.

The average Roman had four to five divorces.⁴ It appears that number was lower in Jewish families living in the late second Temple period (AD 20–70). Yet Jewish husbands could obtain a divorce merely by writing a “bill of divorcement” that included a date, signature, and witnesses.⁵ Arranged marriages were rarely based on love. The ideal situation was to arrange your daughter’s marriages before she turned twelve and a half.⁶ The father’s task of arranging marriages was complicated by familial, financial and political motivations. Given their young age at the time of marriage, their culture of gender segregation, and the social hierarchy that put women and children on the same level as slaves, it is unsurprising many marriages did not last.⁷

The unilateral right to divorce was entirely the husband's. A popular Jewish writer who was widely admired by the time of the NT wrote: "the wife who does not make her husband happy [is evil]."⁸ And, "an evil wife is a plague to her husband. What is the remedy? Let him drive her from his house [i.e., divorce her], and he shall be healed from the plague of her."⁹ He continued by defining a "wicked woman" as one who socializes outside of her home, or contradicts her husband. Elsewhere, he continues, "I would rather dwell with a lion and a dragon than dwell with an evil wife."¹⁰ If a woman "speaks inside her house so that her neighbors hear her voice," she was labeled a "scolding woman," which was cause for divorce.¹¹ The constant cultural threat of divorce suffocated many marriages.



Matthew 19:4 "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator . . ." (BSB) Jesus addresses their cultural baggage by going back to the scriptures. The Lord denounced the stifling practices of temporary marriage and explained the higher law of marriage given in Eden.

Matthew 19:5–6; Mark 10:6 "from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female" The eternal significance of maleness, femaleness, and marriage has become a priority again with living prophets (as well as in the Book of Mormon, Jacob 2:7–35).

"what God has joined together, let man not separate" (BSB) The desire to become unified as a couple is a life-long goal for married couples. At the time of Christ, very few, if any, understood the principle of marriage lasting for time let alone eternity.

Matthew 19:7–9; Mark 10:5–11; Luke 16:18 "Why did Moses then command . . . divorcement, and to put her away?" The Law of Moses encouraged marriage and discouraged divorce (Malachi 2:16). Nevertheless, divorce was an option if one broke the law of chastity (i.e. Deut 22:13–29; 24:1–4). But Moses' Law became shackled over time with hundreds of oral laws based on Satan's lies. The culture at the time of Jesus included arranged marriages and a segregated lifestyle. Generally speaking, the lack of communication and mutual respect destroyed mutuality in marriage.¹² Jesus' audience needed a dramatic paradigm shift in understanding the value of marital relationships.

In the higher law of marriage, Jesus calls disciples to stop divorces, unless immorality was involved (and later Paul adds one more justification for divorce in marriages with unbelievers, 1 Corinthians 7:10–17). Jesus restored the commandment given in the Garden of Eden (“. . . shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife” Genesis 2:24). Throughout His mission, Jesus called for more love, reconciliation, patience, communication, understanding, and forgiveness. He demonstrates how to honor and respect one other. If His example were lived in marriages, we would not need the lower law to divorce.

Matthew 19:10–12 “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry” (NIV) These verses only appear in the Gospel of Matthew. They receive a lot of discussion because they can be interpreted very differently. The verses can be read to support celibacy in certain situations (i.e. for “eunuchs”). Celibacy was practiced in the ancient world by some, including certain Essenes. They saw it as a higher law of purity. These two verses may reflect those thoughts. Some disregard them as a later editorial addition. On the other extreme, some interpret them as encouraging castration for the kingdom of God. This later view seems to contradict what Jesus has just said in Matthew 19:4 about the importance of man and woman becoming one flesh and God creating them in the beginning as such.

Fortunately, the Prophet Joseph Smith restored the importance of marriage in God’s Plan of Happiness. D&C 49:15 addresses this very issue: “whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man” (also see D&C 131:2; and heading to D&C 70). Other prophets have taught in *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*, and elsewhere, that God created the earth for the spirit children of Heavenly Parents to receive bodies.¹³

Jesus Blesses the Children

Matthew 19:13–15; Mark 10:13–16; Luke 18:15–17

Matthew 19:13; Mark 10:13–14; Luke 18:15 “. . . unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them” The Lord’s disciples were initially so entrenched in their culture that they were not accustomed to having infants around. In Luke 18:15, the word, “children” is “babies” (NASB). Their culture rarely welcomed children in public, and they were to be kept out of sound and out of sight. Even in wealthy homes, children were often segregated to be away from adults and public life.

Jesus did not live by these segregating restrictions for children (or anyone). He refused to isolate them and treated them as valued individuals. Earlier He allowed children to join the group of five thousand and later the group of four thousand who gathered to hear Him teach in Galilee (Matthew 14:21; 15:38).

Matthew 19:14–15; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16–17 “. . . forbid them not: for such is the kingdom of God” Jesus’ response turned their social hierarchy upside-down. He inverted the hierarchy by honoring children—who were

often categorized with servants and called, “young slaves” (*paidon/pais*¹⁴). In their culture, children waited on their fathers like servants (washed their faces and feet, helped them dress, eat, etc.). But Jesus acknowledged them as citizens in the Celestial realms. Shortly before this scene in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus gently embraced a child, “when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me” (Mark 9:36–37; similar to Luke 9:48). His message and tenderness become our example to follow.

“whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it” (RSV) How do little children receive the Kingdom of God? Especially because Luke refers to babies, I think this includes their innocence from being covered by Jesus’ atonement. Children also have great faith, meekness, and love.



“What Lack I Yet?” by J. H. Hartley, 1929.

Jesus Teaches a Rich Young Ruler

Matthew 19:16–22; Mark 10:17–27; Luke 18:18–27

Matthew 19:16; Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18 **“Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”** This is the second time this question is asked in Luke’s Gospel (10:25–37 and 18:18–17), but the answers are customized to the needs of the individual. (It reminds me of the similar council given to similar questions asked by new members of the church in the D&C 4, 6, 11, 12, 14, etc.)

Matthew 19:17; Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19 **“ . . . there is none good but one”** Throughout Jesus’ ministry, he tears down the rank and pride of the upper class. In a world where masters were highly respected, He wanted everyone to be respected without expensive dress, special seats, fancy foods, and social status (see Matthew 18:1–4; 23:2; Luke 11:43; etc.). Jesus never sought acclaim and even denounced the title “good” used for Him!

Matthew 19:18–19; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20 **“You know the commandments . . .”** (RSV) In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus quotes the 5th through 9th commandments from the Decalogue (each Synoptic Gospel quotes a slightly different list). Even in the OT, the list of the Ten Commandments is written differently in different places (compare Exodus 21:10; Deuteronomy 24:14; Ecclesiastes 4:1).

Matthew 19:20; Mark 10:20; Luke 19:21 “what lack I yet?” The rich young man is also obedient and reports his efforts to live the Law of Moses his whole life. He is still open to learning more. He acts as if he is willing to sacrifice more and thus, the second question—is there more I need to do to gain eternal life?

Mark 10:21a “Then Jesus beholding him loved him” Mark alone adds this touching addition—allowing us to image what it would have looked like to watch the Lord’s eyes fill with admiration and love as He examined the young man’s heart.

Matthew 19:21; Mark 10:21b, Luke 18:22 “If thou wilt be perfect . . .” The idea of becoming perfect in Greek is only an extension of the word “*teleios: having reached its end, i.e. complete, by ext. perfect*”¹⁵ He lacks a generous heart and an understanding of which riches matter in heaven. Jesus asks the young man to consecrate his goods. This is an example of how we can live the law of consecration without a church-wide mandate. Interestingly, in the Sermon on the Mount, the last things Jesus taught before His charge to be perfect / complete. was to live the law of consecration.

Matthew 19:22; Mark 10:23; Luke 18:23 “Sorrowful,” or “grieved,” or “his countenance fell,” or “being struck sad,” or “shocked” (RSV, DRB, ISV).¹⁶ Our choice is between caring for wealth or caring for things of God. We may not recognize wealth as a problem now, but if it is used for selfish purposes we may be in the same situation as the rich young ruler. President Harold B. Lee recounted the atrocities and trials that the early saints underwent (i.e. starvation, murder, etc.), and then added: “We are the inheritors of what they gave us. But what are we doing with it? Today we are basking in the lap of luxury . . . as never before...It would seem that probably this is the most severe test of any we’ve ever had in the history of this church.”¹⁷ He made this statement in the early 1970s! The fear is that our generation tends to live the law of consumption more than the law of consecration.

Jesus Teaches on Riches and Discipleship

Matthew 19:23–30; Mark 10:23–31; Luke 18:24–30

Matthew 19:23; Mark 10:23–24; Luke 18:24 “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (BSB) Jesus has already taught why this is the case when he holds up children as examples of those who will enter the kingdom of God. Wealth often breeds pride, a false sense of self-sufficiency, and an attitude of domineering power. Each of these are the antithesis of how Jesus led. He meekly submitted to the will of His Father, regularly going out to the wilderness to pray alone, and serving those in need all day long.

Matthew 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25 “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle . . .” Jesus’ hyperbole was to startle the audience. The Greek text could be literally translated “through the aperture of a sewing needle.” Camels were often associated with merchants in the ancient world.¹⁸ There was a nineteenth century minister who named a short gate the “eye of the needle” after the parable. A camel could not enter unless it was

unloaded from bags. But this was unknown at the times of the Apostles. Jesus' proverb is just another funny and exaggerated image used to teach.

Matthew 19:25; Mark 10:26; Luke 18:26 “Who then can be saved?” The listening disciples now feel that it is impossible to get into heaven. But Jesus has already taught that they need to be willing to live the law of consecration. Zion can only be built on that principle (D&C 105:5; 3 Nephi 26:19; Moses 7:18). We find stories of wealthy righteous prophets in the OT (i.e. Job, Abraham, Isaiah, etc.) suggesting that if one selflessly serves the Lord with all their heart, their wealth doesn't need to be a barrier to entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27; Luke 18:27 “Jesus beheld their thoughts” (JST). Salvation is a gift from God, and only through Him are all things possible. The JST adds to each of these verses (additions *in italics*):

MATTHEW 19:26

With men this is impossible but *if they will forsake all things for my sake*, with God whatsoever things I speak are possible.

MARK 10:27

With men *that trust in riches* it is impossible, but not impossible *with men who trust in God and leave all for my sake, for with such* all things are possible.

LUKE 18:27

Unto them, I tis impossible for them who trust in riches, to enter into the kingdom of God; but he who forsaketh the things which are of this world, it is possible with God that he should enter in.

Matthew 19:27; Mark 10:28; Luke 18:28 We have left all we had to follow you” (NIV) Peter again is the spokesperson for Twelve. He comes across as so earnest and relatable.

Matthew 19:28 “in the resurrection, . . . ye shall sit upon twelve thrones . . .” (JST) Jesus promises them a rich reward for their sacrifices. The JST changes the KJV, “regeneration,” for “resurrection,” The Greek word is “a new creation.” Ministers from the time of the Prophet Joseph used the biblical word, “regeneration,” as the Holy Spirit instigating a rebirth. With the JST change to resurrection, it emphasizes the role that the early apostles will play in the future. Jesus prophesies that the apostles will judge the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

Matthew 19:29; Mark 10:29–30; Luke 18:29–30 “no man who has left house, or . . . shall not receive manifold” All sacrifices are acknowledged, remembered, and rewarded by God. All three Synoptic Gospels include this promise.

Matthew 19:30; Mark 10:30 “**But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first**” This is an example of a simple chiasm found in the Bible. This prophecy has multiple applications. In part, it foretells that the gospel will be taken from the Jews to the Gentiles. The JST in Mark, Jesus adds a gentle rebuke for Peter’s bragging: “*But there are many who make themselves first, that shall be last . . . This he said, rebuking Peter.*” Jesus has just promised him he will become a great judge—but still offers a good reminder to beware of pride.

LAST FEW WEEKS BEFORE JESUS’ PASSION AND RESURRECTION

Parable of The Laborers in The Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

As we follow the Prophet Joseph Smith’s counsel to understand parables by looking to “the question which drew out the answers,” we have to look back to Peter’s question in Matthew 19:27, “Behold, we have forsaken all and followed thee; What shall we have therefore?”¹⁹

Matthew. 20:1 “. . . **early in the morning to hire labourer’s into his vineyard**” This is very early start of the work day The Hebrew day begins at 6:00 am as the first hour (daytime was divided from 6:00am to 6:00pm for the day hours, and four watches for the night hours). The analogy of God’s servants working in His vineyard is reiterated in scripture (especially, Isaiah 5:1-7, and Jacob 5, the Allegory of the Olive Tree). We can interpret the timing of this parable on several different planes. The early morning could refer to the early history of mortality. Perhaps the householder starts his search at sunrise, which could represent the beginning of Adam’s and Eve’s posterity. Or perhaps the “morning” refers to the beginning of a dispensation. On an individual level, those who have been born into families where you begin serving in God’s vineyard in your early years of life after baptism. It may also be seen as one work day, and just refer to someone who begins to work as soon as the sunrises.

Matthew 20:2 “**a penny a day**” or in Greek, *denari*, was the average daily wage for a laborer or a soldier for a day.²⁰

Matthew 20:3 “**the third hour**” is 9:00. We are idle in the market-place when we are not working for God.

Matthew 20:4-5 “**whatsoever is right I will give you**” A monetary price is not set, but a fare wage is promised. More laborers are called at noon, 3:00 and 5:00 pm. These different times may represent different times of one’s life, or even times in the history of the world. The times may be random, or represent a specific period. In light

of the dispensations outlined in the Bible, perhaps each of these times could fit into the period when God sent Adam (6:00 a.m.), Noah (9:00 a.m.), Abraham (noon), Moses (3:00 p.m.) and Christ (5:00 p.m.). The timing across scripture is not consistent, but within the book of Revelation, one day is 1,000 years (D&C 77:6).



Icon of the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard. Photograph by bobosh_t via Flickr.

Matthew 20:6–7 “eleventh hour” This was 7:00 pm, which means there is very little time to work in the daylight. If we use the dispensation analogy above, this is the last dispensation, opened by the restoration with God calling the Prophet Joseph Smith shortly before the advent of the millennium. In this interpretation, we are living in eleventh hour on Saturday night. This is the perspective of D&C 33:3, “the field is white already to harvest; and it is the eleventh hour, and the last time that I shall call laborers into my vineyard.” We are blessed by the Lord as the last group of laborers in the vineyard. We have not had to wait for either the Lord’s resurrection or the restoration of all truth—we just need to work our very hardest for the time we have been allotted. The parable has many different levels of meanings as well. Older converts and life time members all serve their best as they work together to build God’s kingdom.



[Peasant woman binding sheaves by Vincent van Gogh, 1889. Image via Wikimedia Commons.](#)

Matthew 20:8–9 “give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first” The parable elaborates on Jesus’ message in Matthew 19:30 (last will be first). This is the characteristic of the kingdom of heaven. Elder Talmage said, “The principle which Christ lays down is, that, while nothing done for Him shall lose its reward, yet, from one reason or another, no forecast can be made, no inferences of self-righteousness may be drawn. It does not by any means follow, that most work done—at least, to our seeing and judging—shall entail a greater reward. On the contrary, ‘many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.’ Not all, nor yet always and necessarily, but ‘many.’”²¹

Matthew 20:10–12 “murmured against . . . borne the burden and heat of the day” From an economic perspective, this parable creates a disturbing dynamic: all receive the same wages even if some work all day in the hot sun vs. work a couple of hours in the late evening. The time frame may be the time of life or the history of the world. From a spiritual perspective though, this is liberating and empowers all who come unto Christ and work for Him—even at the end of life (or in the next life). We are all children of a merciful God who welcomes all to join in the covenant. We rejoice with all who come to covenant.

Matthew 20:13–14 “Friend, I do thee no wrong” The Lord is no respecter of persons, all are alike unto God, black and white, bond and free, male and female, young and old. Our mortal sense of equality is warped—we must trust in God’s omniscience. I presume we all agreed to the wages of mortality prior to our arrival. We must take what lot is ours and do our best with it.

Matthew 20:15 “eye evil” refers to one who looks with envy or malice on the goal of fortune of others.

Matthew 20:16 “many be called, but few chosen” According to the context of this parable, all who are willing are called to work to build the kingdom, but it appears that the workers must do something more than receive their call to be “chosen.” The Lord repeats this teaching to the Prophet Joseph Smith while in Liberty Jail, and answers *why* this is the case in D&C 121:34–37.

And why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson—That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness. That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man.

In a sense, these workers who are called may choose to be “chosen” by their attitudes and behaviors.

Jesus Prophecies of His Death

Matthew 20:17; Mark 10:32; Luke 18:31 “**Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart**” This is one of the clearest examples of how Matthew uses the word “disciples” in lieu of “apostles.” It sounds like Jesus has a large group traveling together to Jerusalem. This was the norm for safety, as well as a blessing to those in the company of Jesus for that journey.

Matthew 20:18–19 “**The Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests . . .**” Although the Gospel authors record multiple prophecies detailing Jesus’ death, when His death actually happens, their shock and confusion suggest that they did not understand them until after His resurrection. Decades later, by the time the Gospel’s were finished, these prophecies were remembered as very important and were sprinkled throughout Jesus’ mission, especially toward the end of His life. His last several weeks of life, he had the burden of knowing how and when he would die, and the blessing of knowing of His resurrection.

Salome’s Desire for her Sons: James and John

Matthew 20:20–28; Mark 10:35–45

Matthew 20:20 Mark 10:35 “**mother of Zebedee’s children**” The mother’s name is Salome (Mark 15:40).²² A group of biblical scholars identify Salome as the “sister” to Mary, the mother of the Lord, who is mentioned in John 19:25.²³ This makes Jesus cousins to the apostles James and John. If this is the case, these familial relations make this conversation more plausible. Possibly a favorite aunt asks Jesus if His cousins can remain close to Him in the future kingdom. Mark does not have the request coming from Salome’s mouth, but from the two men themselves.

Matthew 20:21; Mark 10:36–37 “**two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom**” This request to sit beside Jesus, goes counter to what He has just taught about being no respecter of persons. I think Matthew placed this conversation here, directly after the parable of the workers in God’s vine-



yard, to hit the point again from a third witness that God is no respecter of persons. We don't want to miss His message that entrance into the kingdom requires service and submission.

Matthew 20:22; Mark 10:38 “**Ye know not what ye ask**” Have you asked amiss? With our mortal-myopia, we do not see our life and eternity as God does. Our prayers are filled with desires from our perspective, but we do not see the same view that God does. This is why the Lord instructed Oliver Cowdery, “ask me if it be right” (D&C 9:8); and King Benjamin added the same qualifier for our prayers: “whatsoever ye ask that is right, in faith, believing that ye shall receive” (Mosiah 4:21). The Lord Himself repeated this lesson to the Nephites, if they “ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you” (3 Nephi 18:20). With this perspective we can be grateful that all our prayers are not answered because the Lord will bless us with our answer only when it is right.

“Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink?” The cup that Christ will drink is greater than any could sip. It is the bitter cup, made so by the crushing pain He experienced. (Wine is bitter if the seeds and skin are crushed.) Jesus points out that the apostles will have to drink a bitter cup too; James son of Zebedee died a martyr's death (Acts 12:2), as well as nine of the other original apostles.

“. . . to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” The Lord refers to baptism in a new way. The disciples assume they all entered into Jesus’ service through being converted and baptized by immersion by either John the Baptist or Jesus and His disciples (John 3:22; 4:1–2). Here though, “Jesus’ baptism” is a change that will happen by being immersed in suffering. Have you ever thought of our trials as our baptism? The Father prepares us with trials in order to ready us to serve Him as needed and to become who we need to be in order to return to enter His presence.

Matthew 20:23–24; Mark 10:40–41 “to sit on my right hand, and on my left hand, is not mine to give” Jesus does not usurp His Father’s position. Over and over, He admits that He is only a servant of His Father, and He cannot make such an honorary promise, because it is the Father’s choice. The rest of the quorum were “moved with indignation” or “much displeased” with the situation because it appears that James and John (or their mother) tried to receive a place of honor above the others. It seems they created a competitive environment by asking for the best seats within the quorum.

Matthew 20:25–26 “it shall not be so among you” Even though there are social hierarchies in the world, Jesus wants none of that among His disciples. This is the antithesis of what He has been trying to teach by word and example. Jesus teaches a wonderful principle here that He repeats in the Book of Mormon (Jacob 5:63; Mosiah 2:12, 17; Alma 17:26; Ether 13:12). In God’s eye, the greatest are children and servants, and those who are humble, meek, and submissive to His will.

Matthew 20:26b–27 “whosoever would be great among you must be your servant and whosoever . . . first . . . your slave” (RSV) Jesus turns the cultural norm upside-down. No longer are servants and slaves on the bottom of the social hierarchal pyramid. In His kingdom, those that are the most committed and important in His kingdom are those who submit to serve Heavenly Father. Jesus transforms “great” to “servant” and “first” to “slave.” Obviously, with God as one’s master, there is no worry about abuse. The message Jesus is trying to teach is that we must submit our will to God’s as a slave submits to their master’s. Perhaps this is why wards and families are structured as they are on earth; we often have opportunities to serve without a lot of recognition.

Matthew 20:28 “The Son of man” As discussed in earlier chapters, “son of man” is used by the Lord in a different way than it was used by Ezekiel and the other prophets. Rather than referring to the son of Adam, as the prophet did, when Jesus uses it, it appears to refer to His *divine origins*. As mentioned earlier in Mathtew, Jesus uses this title as uniquely His. Enoch shared the name of Heavenly Father as, “Man of holiness” (Moses 6:37; 7:35). When Jesus is calls Himself the “Son of Man” it is a parallel for “Son of God,” without out offending His audience who does not understand.

“came not to be ministered not, but to minister” Of all the radical changes that Jesus made—from cleansing the temple and Sabbath laws, to restoring the higher priesthood and ordinances—this message is one of the most repeated. It goes against not only social hierarchy, but also the natural man tendencies, and economic theories. But in order to become disciples, we must apply it. Jesus came not only to redeem us, but to teach us how to become like Him. To do that, we must learn to serve each other and our God with a heart filled with love, we must have and as submissive a heart as a servant or child.

“give his life a ransom” Ransom was the price paid for the manumission of a slave. Jesus’ use of the word “ransom” emphasizes:

1. The voluntary nature of self-giving.
2. The vicarious nature of offering sacrificial obedience for someone who could not.
3. The universal nature of the gift.²⁴

Jesus’ example of living each day to be about the Father’s business is the same aim that His disciples must adopt: we submit to God’s will and serve those in our path.

Jesus Heals Blind Bartimaeus Near Jericho

Matthew 20:29–34; Mark 10:46–52; Luke 18:35–43

The three Synoptic Gospels record this miracle with minor differences: 1) Matthew has two blind men leaving Jericho, while 2) Mark has only one man, and 3) Luke has the one blind man entering Jericho. The differences sound like variations within oral histories. The other observation is that the Gospel of Matthew includes healing the blind five times (9:27–31; 12:22; 15:30–31; 21:14; 20:30–34). In one of those, Matthew 9:27–31, Jesus heals two blind men. Perhaps Matthew just mixes up these two accounts (and we have discussed his mix-ups elsewhere too²⁵). This is the last miracle story in the Synoptic Gospels before Jesus’ triumphal entry. This is the only healing of the blind that they all record, fulfilling Isaiah 61:1. Mark’s Gospel gives us the most details about this story.

Matthew 20:29; Mark 10:46; Luke 18:35 “a great multitude followed” As Jesus journeys south to Jerusalem, the crowd grows. They may have joined his caravan to Jerusalem for the Passover, or just joined for the day as he passes Jericho.

Matthew 20:30; Mark 10:46; Luke 18:35–36 “blind Bartimaeus . . . sat by the highway side begging” Mark tells us the blind man’s name and heritage. Bartimaeus positions himself on the road to beg. Luke 18:36 adds how the blind man tries to find out what all the noise was about. The news filters through the crowd and he learns that Jesus is coming. Bartimaeus now has a higher motive than begging for money. He wants Jesus to heal him.

Jesus Restores Sight to Blind Bartimaeus by William Hole, 1905.



Matthew 20:30b; Mark 10:47; Luke 18:36–37 “He cried, **Jesus Son of David, have mercy on me**” (JST) Bartimaeus, calling out, shows his faith in the Lord’s healing power. Notice the different titles used for our Lord. The multitude refers to Jesus by His geographic name, “Jesus of Nazareth” (possibly legal or full name). Yet, when Bartimaeus calls for help, he honors Jesus’ Messianic title: Son of David.

Matthew 20:31–32a; Mark 10:48; Luke 18:39 “. . . he should hold his peace: but he cried the more” The crowd found the loud blind man a nuisance and rebuked him. But Bartimaeus’ determination grows, and he calls out “exceedingly” (Mark 10:48 JST). Jesus stops because He either heard Bartimaeus’ call or He was just prompted. Most English translations say “called for him,” but literally Jesus “commanded” that the blind man come to Him. Perhaps this was needed because of the crowd’s chiding Bartimaeus.

Mark 10:49–50 “**Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you**” (NIV). I presume it was the density of the crowd that didn’t allow Bartimaeus to stand earlier and run to ask for help, but from his sitting position, he now leaves his robes behind and comes forward to Jesus.

Matthew 20:32b–34; Mark 10:51; Luke 18:41 “**What wilt thou that I should do?**” Even though it was quite evident that the man was blind, Jesus wants Bartimaeus to ask for healing. Jesus asks us the same question to all disciples, encouraging us to open a dialogue to ask God for our own needs. This echoes the explanation on prayer in the Bible Dictionary that some blessings are made conditional on the asking. The miracles begin to flow after he answers Jesus’ question. (I think that’s what happens?)

Matthew 20:34 “**Jesus had compassion . . . immediately . . . received sight, and . . . followed him.**” Matthew’s storyline wants to emphasize Jesus’ compassion, not the interplay with the crowd. Jesus’ compassion is an element in his healing (as well as in our healings now). The Gospel of Matthew does not mention it, but this miracle fulfilled Isaiah 29:18; 35:5; 42:7. Unlike John 9’s healing of the blind man, where Jesus also taught a lesson about the appropriateness of doing good on the Sabbath, this time, the healing happened immediately.

Mark 10:52; Luke 18:42–43 “**thy faith hath made thee whole**” Jesus acknowledges and

Praying woman with upraised hands. Catacomb of Calixtus, Rome, early 4th c. Frescoe. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



honors Bartimaeus' faith—which then furthers the healing of his whole soul. In a community where they attributed blindness to sin, Jesus' additional encouragement would have been gratifying and empowering. Luke also adds that when Jesus' disciples saw the miracle, it gave them even more reasons to praise God.

Requirements of Prayer

Luke 18:1-14

Luke alone includes these two parables in which Jesus teaches the need for prayer and humility in discipleship. In Luke's Gospel, this falls just after an eschatological prophesy, as if they are instructions on preparing for the last days with prayer.

The Parable of the Widow and Unjust Judge

Luke 18:1-8

Luke 18:1 “**pray, and not faint,**” is also translated, “not give up” (NIV), and “always to pray and not lose heart” (ESV), or “pray at all times and they should not grow weary” (AB). Discipleship requires constant hopeful prayer rather than discouragement.

Luke 18:2-5 “**a widow . . . saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary’**” (ESV) This parable teaches the value of continual prayers to God (similar to Luke 11:5). The widow pleads for help to “avenge” (repeated four times in 18:3, 5, 7, 8), or “Give me justice against my adversary” (BSB). As the widow seeks relentlessly for legal protection from the Judge. Her complaints become annoying, and so in order to stop them, he addresses her needs as soon as he can.

Luke 18:7 “. . . **elect, which cry day and night unto him**” Jesus defines the elect as those who pray day and night to God. The image of the nagging widow with selfish demands is not the role model for Jesus' disciples—the imagery only goes so far. But elsewhere Jesus teaches that He wants praying disciples who seek God's direction to serve Him better. Especially in the context of the calamities of the last days, disciples need to connect through prayer to keep their faith tethered to Him.

Luke 18:8 “**when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?**” I like to answer the questions Jesus asks in scripture, as if I were there with Him. I hope our answer to this question is, “YES—ours!” The JST footnote promises that the Lord will “avenge” the saints of their enemies. But only long-term remuneration is promised—not short-term.

The Parable of The Praying Pharisee and Publican

Luke 18:9-14

Luke 18:9 “were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else” (NIV) Jesus chooses another story to teach His self-righteous audience who “trust in themselves.” In this section, Jesus repeatedly highlights this theme. He denounces those who pridefully think they are better than others.

Luke 18:10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray” The two men represent opposites in the society. As mentioned in earlier weeks, Pharisees “or separatists” made up the largest group among the Jews (6,000 men) at the time and were honored for keeping the commandments with exactness. According to Josephus, they held “the most accurate interpreters of the laws.”²⁶ They believed in The Law, Prophets, Writings, and oral laws. They emphasized purity from following the rites of the oral laws, tithes of money and food, and strict Sabbath observance.²⁷ Publicans on the other hand were generally despised as they worked for the Romans to collect taxes.²⁸ The NT often categorizes publicans with sinners (Matthew 21:31; Mark 2:16; Luke 15:1; etc.).²⁹

Luke 18:11 “the Pharisee stood” and prayed thus with himself” The prayer is not to God, but to aggrandize himself as seen in his posture. Contrast the stance and prayer of the two different men—one stands while the other smites his breast and looks down from a distance. The Pharisee’s contempt for the rest of humanity is evidence of his lack of charity. The publican, on the other hand, smites or pounds his chest. This was a sign of sorrow and compunction. His humility won’t even allow him to look up to heaven.

Luke 18:12 “I fast twice a week” Some Jews at that time fasted Monday and Thursday to honor the memory of Moses ascending Mt. Sinai on Thurs and came down on Monday.

Luke 18:14 “everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself” Again we see the Lord turning the social order upside down. His main point is that the humble will be exalted. Similarly, he preached that the least will be the greatest (Luke 13:30).

Header Image: Christ and the Rich Young Ruler by Heinrich Hofmann, 1889. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

The Pharisee and the Publican by James Tissot, 1899.



ENDNOTES

1. Jacob Neusner, *The Economics of the Mishnah*, 65. Male slaves were released on the seventh year, unless they choose to be a servant for life. Women were not released, as they became a servant-wife and also bore their master's children. In the Roman world, slaves were released at age thirty or thirty-five (some sources record as high as age forty). Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 4.545. Ken Campbell, ed. *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 135.
2. Strong's Concordance of the Bible.
3. *Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII. 297–298. “the most accurate interpreters of the laws.” Josephus also claims there were 6,000 Pharisees or “separatists.” As the largest and most enduring Jewish group of the era, they recorded the history from their perspective. Their sacred texts included: The Law (Torah), Prophets, Writings, and ten thousand oral laws. They especially focused on strict Sabbath observance, the rites of the oral laws that made them pure, and tithes. Pharisees also believed in the resurrection.
4. Evelyn and Frank Stagg, *Woman in the World of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1978), 86; Ben Wirtherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* (NYC: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 20. David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 73.
5. *Mishnah*, Nashim, *Gittin* 1–9. *Gittin* 2.4. “All [men] are qualified to write a bill of divorce, even a deaf-mute, an imbecile, or a minor” (*Mishnah*, *Gittin*, 2.4).
6. *Mishnah*, *Yebamoth*, 13.1. The famous rabbi Hillel (60 BC to 20 AD), explained that after a girl was twelve-and-a-half, she “may exercise right of refusal four or five times” in the selection of her husband. In opposition, the rabbinic school of Shammai complained, “The daughters of Israel are no [such] ownerless property!” They allowed a young girl, who had not gone through puberty, to live in her father's home until “she is come of age.”
7. Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: Good Publisher, 2015), chapter 6.
8. Ben Sira, *Ecclesiasticus*, 25:23b. These writings of Ben Sira, were considered as a candidate for the Jewish cannon and are found in the apocrypha.
9. Arthur Ernest Cowley, Adolf Neubauer, eds., *The Original Hebrew of a Portion of Ecclesiasticus* (Oxford England: Oxford University-Clarendon Press, 1897), 24.
10. Ben Sira, *Ecclesiasticus*, 25:12–18 “Give the water no passage; neither a wicked woman liberty to gad abroad. If she go not as thou wouldn't have her, cut her off from thy flesh. . . . The wickedness of a wife changes her appearance, and darkens her face like that of a bear. Her husband takes his meals among the neighbors.” He continues, “[the husband] cannot help sighing bitterly. Any iniquity is insignificant compared to a wife's iniquity; may a sinner's lot befall her!” Ben Sira bemoaned, “An evil wife is an ox yoke which chafes; taking hold of her is like grasping a scorpion . . . Any wound, but not a wound of the heart! Any wickedness, but not the wickedness of a wife!” Ben Sira, *Ecclesiasticus*, 26:7, 25:13.
11. *Mishnah*, *Ketuboth* 6.6. Recorded after the NT was compiled, but probably applicable, Abba Saul justified divorce “if she curses his parents in his presence.”

12. Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of New Testament Women*, chapters 1 and 5.
13. <https://www.lds.org/search?lang=eng&query=value%20of%20marriage>
14. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance.
15. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance.
16. Mark often gives stronger emotions. This is especially evident in the Lord's passion. It is Mark who shows the Lord in deep anguish and pain in Gethsemane and on the cross.
17. Paul Y. Hoskisson, ed. *Sperry Symposium Classics: The Old Testament* (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and Deseret Book, 2005), 83–99.
18. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, edited by Don E. Norton (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1989), 315.
19. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, Reprint, 1980), vol. 5. 261. This is taken from the prophet's Journal, kept by Willard Richards, Jan. 29, 1843.
20. In 44 BC, Julius Caesar paid 225 denarii for a year of skilled labor (with skilled representing a range of tasks). In 27 BC, an unskilled laborer or soldier was paid 1 denarius. On an annual basis, a centurion earned 3,750, and the highest-ranking military officers, 15,000 denarii per year.
21. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ, 5th ed.* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1916), 486.
22. We learn a few details about the names and family relationships of the women in the Gospels in Matthew 27; 56; 28:1; Mark 15:40; 16:1; Luke 24:10; John 19:25. For a detailed table of this see *Come Follow Me, Easter*, Table 1.
23. Raymond Brown, *The Anchor Bible Series: John X111–XX1* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 98; “. . . the tradition that Salome, wife of Zebedee and mother of John, was Mary's sister, a relationship which makes John the cousin of Jesus” (also see note on xix 25 in *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 29A). He lines up the women listed in different places in the Bible and finds a possible family relation (see verse in note above).
24. *Ibid.*, 243.
25. Matthew's account at the triumphal entry uses two donkeys and everyone else just one. Matthew adds an incorrect heritage for the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah
26. From the 900BC. For more see Lynne Hilton Wilson, “The Confusing Case of Zacharias,” *Religious Educator*, 14.2 (2013), 107–123.
27. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII. 297–298.
28. Paul J. Achtemeier, *Harper Collins' Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1996), 842.
29. Even the Romans looked down on publicans. Supposedly, Theocritus, a third century Greek poet was asked what the worst wild beast was, and he answered, “On the mountains, bears and lions; in the city, publicans.” Fredric William Farrar, *The Life of Christ* (New York City: Dutton, 1874), 247. Jews tried to avoid marriages with publicans: “Take not a wife out of a family where there is a publican, for they are all publicans.”
30. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Hagner, “Tax Collectors,” 741–743. Eerdmans, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 1278. The Romans hired tax collectors in each region to enforce their 1% income-tax, 1/10 ground tax on production, a poll or head tax levied on all men over fourteen and girls over twelve up until age sixty-five, and an “indi-

rect tax,” which covered imports and exports that crossed a major street or harbor. The tax ranged from 2.5% to 12.5%, providing plenty of room for favors or extra charges or partiality. Edersheim, *Jesus the Messiah*, 133.



MATTHEW 21–23; MARK 11; LUKE 19–20

JESUS' TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

As we exam Jesus' last few days of his life in more detail than we did over Easter Week, I want to look closely at the timeline given in the New Testament. The timeline is different in the Synoptic Gospels, because the Synoptic Gospels organized Jesus' mission geographically—they group everything together that happened in Galilee, then things that happened on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, and finally they grouped everything together that happened in Jerusalem. They telescope everything that happened in Jerusalem throughout Jesus' mission into the last few days of His life. In other words, Matthew, Mark and Luke organized their Gospels by location, not time. On the other hand, John's Gospel is more chronological. John describes Jesus traveling back and forth to Jerusalem at least six times during His ministry (including three Passover feasts, thus establishing His three-year ministry). John also includes a timeline for the Passover of Jesus' last week.

The timing is often misunderstood because of their different way of counting. It helps to remember that the Jewish "days" started at 6:00 pm.¹ They also counted a "day," for only a portion of the day. Also remember that all

holy days are “sabbaths.” The year Jesus died, it appears there were two sabbaths in a row—the Passover on Nisan 14 followed by the seventh day of rest or weekly sabbath. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels,² John’s Gospel outlines it thus:

8 Nisan	6 days before Passover <i>Fri. after 6 p.m.–Sat.</i>	Jesus came to Bethany and Mary anoints Him	John 12:1
9 Nisan	5 days before Passover <i>Sat. after 6 p.m.–Sun.</i>	Palm Sunday, Triumphal Entry	John 12:14–19
10 Nisan	4 days before Passover <i>Sun. after 6 p.m.–Mon</i>	Jesus teaches and Passover lambs are chosen	Exodus 12:3
11 Nisan	3 days before Passover <i>Mon after 6 p.m.–Tue.</i>	Jesus teaches at temple and sleeps on the Mount of Olives	
12 Nisan	2 days before Passover <i>Tue. after 6 p.m.–Wed.</i>	Prepare for the Last Supper	John 13:2
13 Nisan	1 day before Passover <i>Wed. after 6 p.m.–Thu.</i>	Gethsemane, trial, crucifixion as lambs killed, death at 3 p.m. In tomb day #1	
14 Nisan	Passover (Leviticus 23:5) <i>Thu. after 6 p.m.– Fri.</i>	Jesus burial completed during Passover meal In tomb night #1, day #2	
15 Nisan	Sabbath and week of unleavened bread begins <i>Fri. after 6 p.m.–Sat.</i>	Jesus organized missionary work in the Spirit World In tomb night #2, day #3	D&C 138
16 Nisan	Resurrection morning <i>Sat. after 6 p.m.–Sun.</i>	At least five visitations on Easter Sunday Risen after three days and three nights.	John 21; Luke 24

This time frame fulfills Jesus’ prophecy that He will fulfill the sign of Jonah with three days and three nights in the tomb (Matthew 12:40; 27:40), and also raise up “this temple” (meaning His body) in three days (Mark 14:58).

In this week’s *Come Follow Me*, we will look at the following events:

	MATT 21-23	MARK 11-12	LUKE 19-20	JOHN 12
5 Days until Passover	Triumphal Entry Cleansing Temple Return Bethany	Triumphal Entry Return Bethany	Triumphal entry Cleansing Temple Return Bethany	Triumphal Entry Teaching
4 days until Passover	Fig tree cursed and withers Teaching	Fig tree cursed Cleansing Temple	Teaching	(no details)
3 days until Passover	Teaching Warnings	Fig tree withered Widow's mite	Teaching Widow's mite	(no details)

JESUS' TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

Luke 19:28 “He went before, ascending up to Jerusalem” At that time, no matter where one came from, or from what geographic altitude they started, one always “ascended” to Jerusalem because of its holiness. With the temple and throne of God housed there, it was the highest place on earth to them. Looking back on this time when the temple stood, the Jews recorded “ten degrees of holiness” to emphasize the importance of their sacred space.³

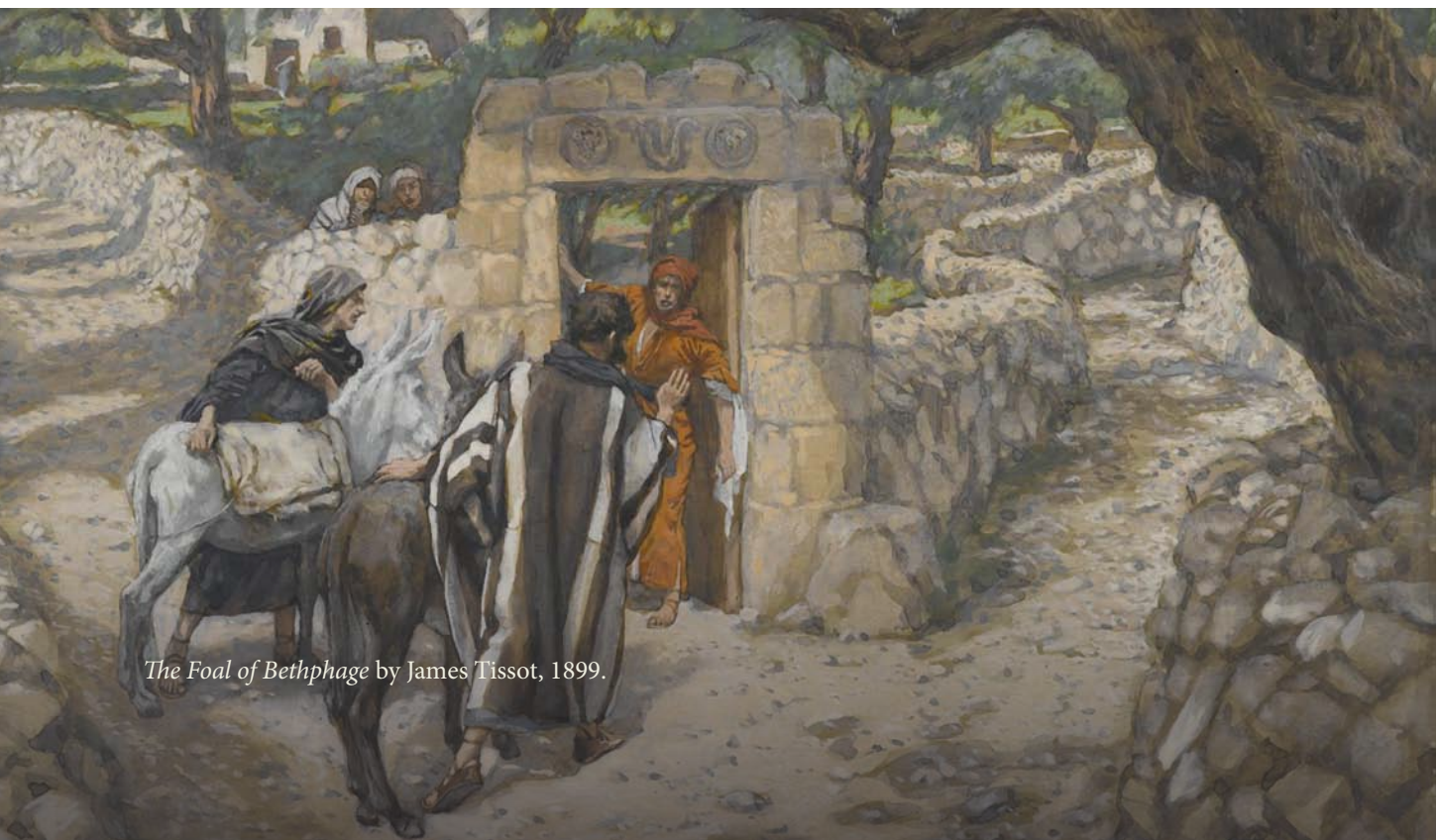
- The land of Israel is holier than all lands ...
- The walled cities [of the Land of Israel] is more holy
- Within the wall [of Jerusalem] is more holy
- The temple Mount is more holy ...
- The rampart is still more holy
- The Court of the Women is still more holy
- The Court of the Israelites is still more holy
- The Court of the Priests is still more holy
- Between the porch and the altar is still more holy than it
- The sanctuary is still more holy than it ...
- The Holy of Holies is still more holy than they all.

Matthew 21:1; Mark 11:1; Luke 19:29; John 12:12 “they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives”. Bethphage is thought to be on the crest of the western hill or Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem. The name means “house of figs,” and it is on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem (where Jesus set the parable of the Good Samaritan). Rabbis referred to a village “with a similar name whose outer wall was the official limit of the city of Jerusalem.”⁴

Matthew 21:2–3; Mark 11:2–3; Luke 19:30–31 “Go into the village and find an ass . . .” The Old Testament is filled with promises, types and shadows of the coming Messiah. At least two Old Testament prophecies and other patterns are being fulfilled, including:

- **Genesis 22:5**, foreshadows Jesus, just as Abraham took Isaac up the Mount Moriah for a sacrifice.
- **Genesis 49:10–11**, is Jacob’s blessing to Judah, “... binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass’ colt”
- **Zechariah 9:9**; their promised king will come riding in on a donkey, “Thy king cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.”

Only the Gospel of Matthew includes two donkeys—the mother and colt. We assume this because either his interpretation or memory of Zechariah 9:9 was slightly different than the other Gospel writers. (We see this same discrepancy in Matthew at other times as well.⁵) Most of his many citations of the Old Testament are found in a slightly different form than in our scriptures. The scripture used during his day was the Greek Septuagint (LXX). Whatever Matthew remembered as the Old Testament reference, it is different than in Mark, Luke, and John who only mention one donkey.



The Foal of Bethphage by James Tissot, 1899.

Mark 11:4 “colt tied by the door” This is often translated as tied on the “street,” but a textual scholar, Joel Marcus, points out that it is similar to the Greek word for “vine,” connecting the prophecy closely with Jesus’ role as the vine.⁶

Matthew 21:4–5 “all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet” Matthew repeats this verse almost verbatim fourteen times to highlight that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies in the OT.⁷ The fourteen citations demonstrate Matthew’s focus and provide a structure to the text.

John 12:12 “much people” John includes people gathering to see Jesus from different directions and countries, possibly foreshadowing the universality of Jesus’ message. Among the enormous throng of people were some who come to welcome a new prophet, some to worship a new king, and others out of curiosity. The crowd may have been interpreted as a religious and political threat to the establishment, but Jesus’ choice of animals communicates His intent. He did not want to fight the Romans or the Jewish leaders. Horses were the animal of war, but a domestic donkey communicated a peaceful message. Nonetheless, the Jewish leaders were very worried that Jesus’ vast following meant a threat to the theological status quo and their delicate political balance with Rome.

Matthew 21:6–8; Mark 11:7–8; Luke 19:35–36, “threw their cloaks over it, and He sat on it . . . [others] spread their cloaks on the road” Placing cloaks on the back of a donkey implied great respect and honor to the rider. To ride on a white donkey was the privilege of persons of high rank, princes, judges, and prophets. It is a peaceful expression of ruler-ship. Christ doing so attested that He entered the Holy City as its rightful king.

Matthew 21:8; Mark 11:8; John 19:13 “while others spread branches they had cut from the fields” The crowd’s jubilation included waving green branches as part of the festive procession.⁸ The practice of waving branches (or woven palm branches), was familiar to the Jews who participated in the Feast of Tabernacles (or Sukkot) processions.⁹



The Procession on the Mount of Olives by James Tissot, 1899.

Christ's Triumphal Entry Into Jerusalem by William Hole, 1905.



Matthew 21:9; Mark 11:9; John 12:13; “Hosanna!” is a plea for deliverance or used in adoration. It literally means “Save, please!” or “Oh save now.” At that time, it may have lost its original meaning and only meant “praise.”

“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” All four Gospels include the cheering crowd chanting or singing this phrase from Psalm 118:26. (This Psalm is included as part of Passover meal.) The crowd misunderstands Jesus’ intent and hopes that Jesus will become their king. The Gospels each include references of the promised kingship to David’s heirs, from 2 Samuel 7:12–26. Each Gospel includes other additional words of praise from the crowd:

- **Matthew 21:9** “Hosanna to the Son of David! . . . Hosanna in the highest!”
- **Mark 11:9** “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”
- **Luke 19:38** “Blessed is the King . . . Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”
- **John 12:13** “Blessed is the King of Israel!”

Luke 19:39-40 “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples! . . . If they remain silent, the very stones will cry out.” In this rare event as Jesus accepts praise, the leaders who oppose Jesus find fault and denounce Him for it. But Jesus, knowing His past and future, announces that even though the leaders don’t see it, He is their God. Even the stones are willing to testify that He is the Creator.

Luke 19:41 “When he came near, he beheld the city, and wept over it” Luke alone mentions Jesus weeping over Jerusalem because the inhabitants would not repent. He prophesies of the Roman invasion of Jerusalem in AD 68–70 and the destruction of the temple. His claim that the stones would not be left “upon another” seemed impossible. They were enormous blocks and so carefully cut that they did not need mortar. Most were over five tons, and some weighted up to 80 tons.

Synoptic Cleansing of the Temple

Matthew 21:12-16; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-48

Herod’s expansions to the Second Temple were still under construction during Jesus’ lifetime (20 BC–63 AD). Some Jews were upset by the flamboyant extensions and materialistic nature the temple. A group known as Essenes were upset enough that they stopped worshiping at the temple and chose to worship out in the desert. They became the most extreme sect of Judaism in their attempt to worship in a holy manner away from the corruptions they felt had entered into the priesthood.¹⁰ Jesus physically cleansing the temple from the money changers who sold in the court of the Gentiles was a representation of the spiritual cleansing that was also needed.



Fresco of Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Photo by Petar Milošević. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Nearly every aspect of the temple was supposed to typify of Christ. The ritual priestly path—including, in part, the washings, anointings, clothing, and sacrificing—represented the way back to the tree of life (represented by the menorah), in order to return to the presence of God cleansed from sin. The high priest vicariously carried the sins of the people before the throne of God to seek for redemption. After the ritualized cleansing on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Holy Place, passed the table of incense, shewbread, and menorah to commune with God at the veil. After several ritualized representations of blood sacrifices, he could enter into the presence of God through the veil into the Holy of Holies once a year (Leviticus 16).

At the time of the Lord, the corruption was not just from money changers, but from the political and financial motives of the leaders. Herod had removed the sacred nature of the role of the high priest who was to be a descendant of Aaron and serve for life, and changed it to a short-term political honor fostering priesthood aristocracy. Chief priests vied for the position and it was changed regularly at Herod's whim.¹¹

The Jews had other temple cleansings in their history. Over a century earlier, the priests who joined the Maccabean Revolt attempted to cleanse the temple from the pollutions caused by the Greek ruler Antiochus IV (2 Maccabaus 10:5). Jesus' cleansing removed the outer courtyard pollutions for a time. Yet, it appears it did not touch the sacred courtyards of the sanctuary (which housed the Holy Place and Holy of Holies). That cleansing took place during Jesus' suffering and death. His sacrifice opened the way into the presence of God for all. As the veil was rent, that inner cleansing took place, and opened a way for all cleansed to enter the presence of God.

Just a reminder, each Gospel records that Jesus only cleanses the temple once. John records it happened at the beginning of His ministry (John 2:13–17), and the others on different days during his last week where they record everything that happened in Jerusalem. John’s timing appears more feasible, because by the last week of Jesus’ life, the local leaders are already planning on killing Him and this could have triggered them to act earlier and put Jesus to death days before the Passover.

Matthew 21:12; Mark 11:15; Luke 19:45 “Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold”

The word for “cast out” is elsewhere translated “exorcism” (Mark 1:34, 39; 3:15, 22; etc.). This connects those who profane the temple with the devil’s work. There was a need for travelers to exchange their currency with the temple Tyrian, and purchase unblemished animals, but it appears that the need had gone awry and money making was corrupting the temple.

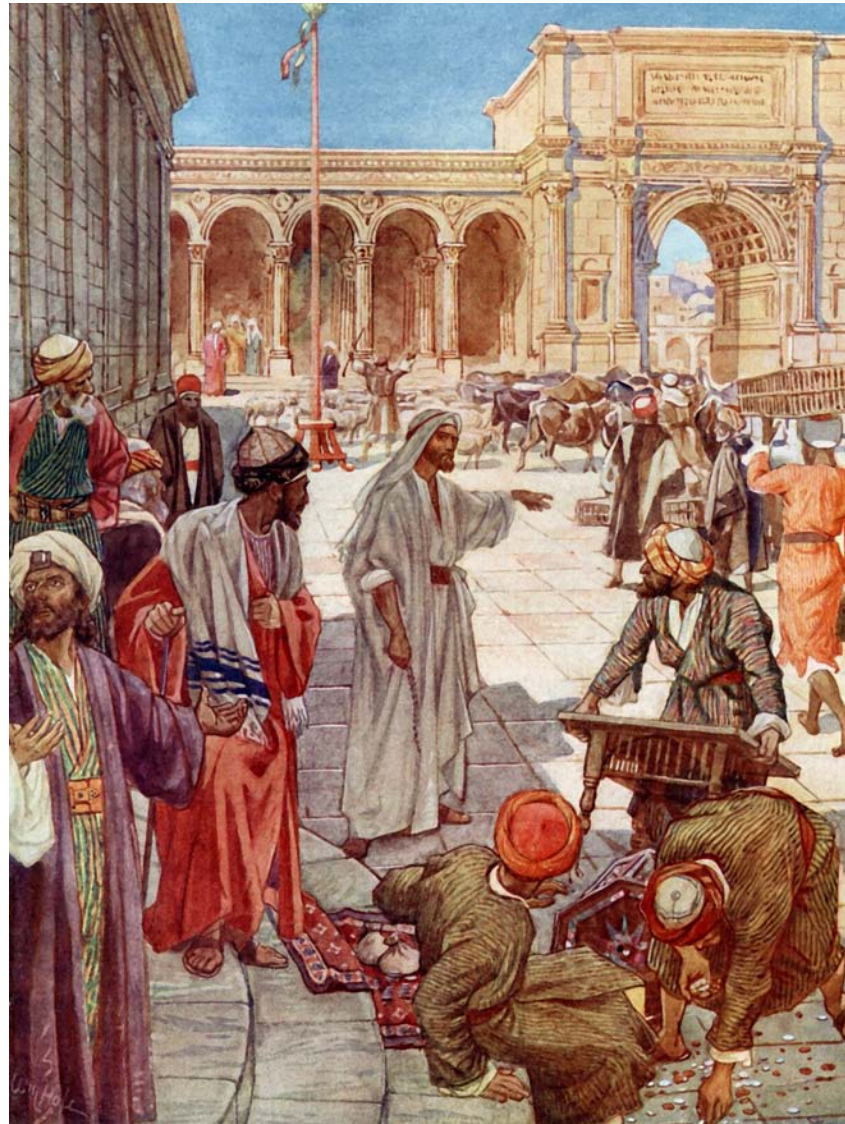
Jesus Purgeth the Temple by William Hole, 1905.

Matthew 21:13–14 “My house shall be called the house of prayer”

To answer His attackers, Jesus quotes his favorite book of scripture—Isaiah 56:7 (3 Nephi 23:1). Jesus quotes Isaiah eight times in the NT, many of which answered attacks from the devil and Pharisees.¹² The cleansing of the temple was a sign of the Promised Messiah. Jesus goes on to mention mentioned that He will also heal the blind and lame—both of which were also understood as Messianic signs (see Malachi 3:1; Jeremiah 7:11, Zechariah 14:21b, Isaiah 35:5).

Matthew 21:16 “Out of the mouth of babes . . . thou hast perfected praise”

This is Psalms 8:2, but in our version the latter end of the Psalm is different: “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.” More than any other book of scripture, Jesus quotes their hymnal, the Psalms, eleven times.¹³



2nd Day: Return to Bethany and the Cursing of the Fig Tree

Matthew 21:17; Mark 11:19; Luke 21:37

Matthew 21:17; Mark 11:19; Luke 21:3 “when even was come he went out of the city” Matthew has Jesus and his traveling companions (apostles and the Galilean women, Luke 8:1–3) going to Bethany, a village on the back side of the Mount of Olives approximately 1 ½ miles east of Jerusalem. Luke has the company sleeping “in the mount” of Olives. The slight discrepancy is a function of either the author’s or editors’ different memories years later, or different ways of saying the same thing.

Matthew 21:18–20; Mark 11:12–14 “seeing a fig tree afar off . . . he found nothing but leaves” Matthew and Mark record the fig tree stories slightly differently—Mark spreads this incident over 2 days, Matthew all at once. We assume the story was included for more reasons than to show Jesus’ disappointment. We see full leaves yet lack of fruit as symbolizing hypocrites, those people who have an outward appearance of being whole, yet they are not producing good fruits. The story also speaks of the prophecy in Jeremiah 8:13 of no figs. Furthermore, in modern scripture, D&C 35:16, the Lord revealed that it foreshadows an eschatological sign, “And they shall learn the parable of the fig-tree, for even now already summer is nigh” (also see Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:38; Isaiah 34:4).

Image of Fig Tree by Thomas Hoang via Pixabay.



The LDS Reference Library includes an account from the nineteenth century German biblical scholar, Alfred Ederseim, who went to Israel and “looked for a fig tree. Finding one, he reached into the branches, and drew out his hand, and found he had a few leaves from the previous autumn, and some round grey substances. They looked like lozenges. Edersheim sought out several pedestrians until he found one that could speak German. He was told that the little grey objects were edible. That travelers used them to postpone hunger until they could reach an inn. ‘Unless you find those on the tree branches in the spring,’ he was told, ‘the tree will not bear fruit in the summer.’”

Matthew 21:21; Mark 11:20–23 “if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go’” (NIV) Jesus finds another chance to teach faith. If disciples can develop their faith, they will find it more powerful than natural laws.

Matthew 21:22; Mark 11:24 “whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, in faith believing, ye shall receive” (JST). We learn that God hears every prayer, but to answer our prayers, we must believe. The addition of “in faith” by the JST, is also included by Jesus when He visits the Nephites as a qualification needed for God to answer prayers. From that text we find one more requirement to petitioning the Lord. We must have belief, ask in faith, and ask for that “which is right” (3 Nephi 18:20). With the combination of these three (plus humility and patience), we trust that God will answer our prayers and work His miracles.

Chief Priests Question Jesus' Authority

Matthew 21:23–27; Mark 11:27–33; Luke 20:1–8

Matthew 21:23; Mark 11:27; Luke 20:1 “chief priests” Within the temple precincts, it is appropriate that we find the chief priests questioning Jesus. During the late Second Temple period, the chief priests came from priestly families who administered over the temple buildings, treasures, heads of the 24 priestly classes, and the like. The selection process for these positions had become corrupt (In the records, we find financial extortion, etc.).¹⁴

“Elders” is a translation of *presbuteros*. Nearly half of the 70 times we find it in the NT, it refers to leaders of the Jews. This could include leaders in the synagogue, Sanhedrin, or even priests.

“Scribes” were more than men who copied documents, clerks, or secretaries. They were legally trained and drafted legal documents, including marriage and divorce contracts, inheritance, loans, and land sales. They were also professional theologians. Every village needed at least one.

“By what authority . . .” It appears that these leading men have devised a scheme to discredit Jesus. They hope to trap Him on the issue of authority to teach and act as He does. The Jewish nation was built on the Law of Moses and grew into the rabbinic interpretations known as the oral laws of Moses. All teaching needed to follow these traditions. Outside of the Aaronic and Levitical blood lines, a teacher gained authority from his master teacher. After years of education, one was ordained to the office of rabbi, elder, or judge.

Matthew 21:24–27; Mark 11:29–33; Luke 20:3–7 “I will also ask you one thing . . . Was the baptism of John from heaven or man?” (JST) Jesus turns the tables, and asks His accusers a question instead. The answer to His question becomes their answer. Yet they see Jesus’ question as a trap and refuse to answer. Jesus answers them with the next three parables as recorded in Matthew 21:28–22:14 (or one parable in Mark and Luke). The stories allow Him to teach on several levels in a way that helps them (and us) really understand His authority.

Parable of the Two Sons

Matthew 21:28-32

As this parable is translated into English it loses a large part of its meaning. In English it sounds like a lesson on giving action, not just one's voice, to serve and follow God. Jesus then ties the story back to John the Baptist showing how the prophet testified of Jesus' authority. Jesus applies the condemnation of only giving lip service to God, to his questioners. The Greek text has a deeper message that allows us to better see how this parable answers the question of "where" Jesus received authority, and "who" gave Him authority.

Matthew 21:28 "a man had two sons . . ." There is another way to read this parable, dealing more specifically with the question asked. The Greek text can be interpreted as the pre-mortal life when Jesus received authority from God. John W. Welch finds an alternative translation of Matthew 21:29-30 by seeing that Jesus answers the question of where and who gave Him authority.

Matthew 21:29 "I will not" or "I do not want to, I will it not . . .but afterwards . . . reconciled himself to the task"¹⁵ The first son's answer can be understood, "Not my will," or "Not as I will," but he reconciled himself and went (rather than the KJV phrase, "I will not").

Matthew 21:30 "the second . . . said, I" The second son is literally called, "the other," and represents the opposition. In the Greek text, there is no word "go"—it says simply, "I / ego," as in, "my way." By applying the context



The Parable of the Two Sons by Andrey Miranov, 2012, oil on canvas. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

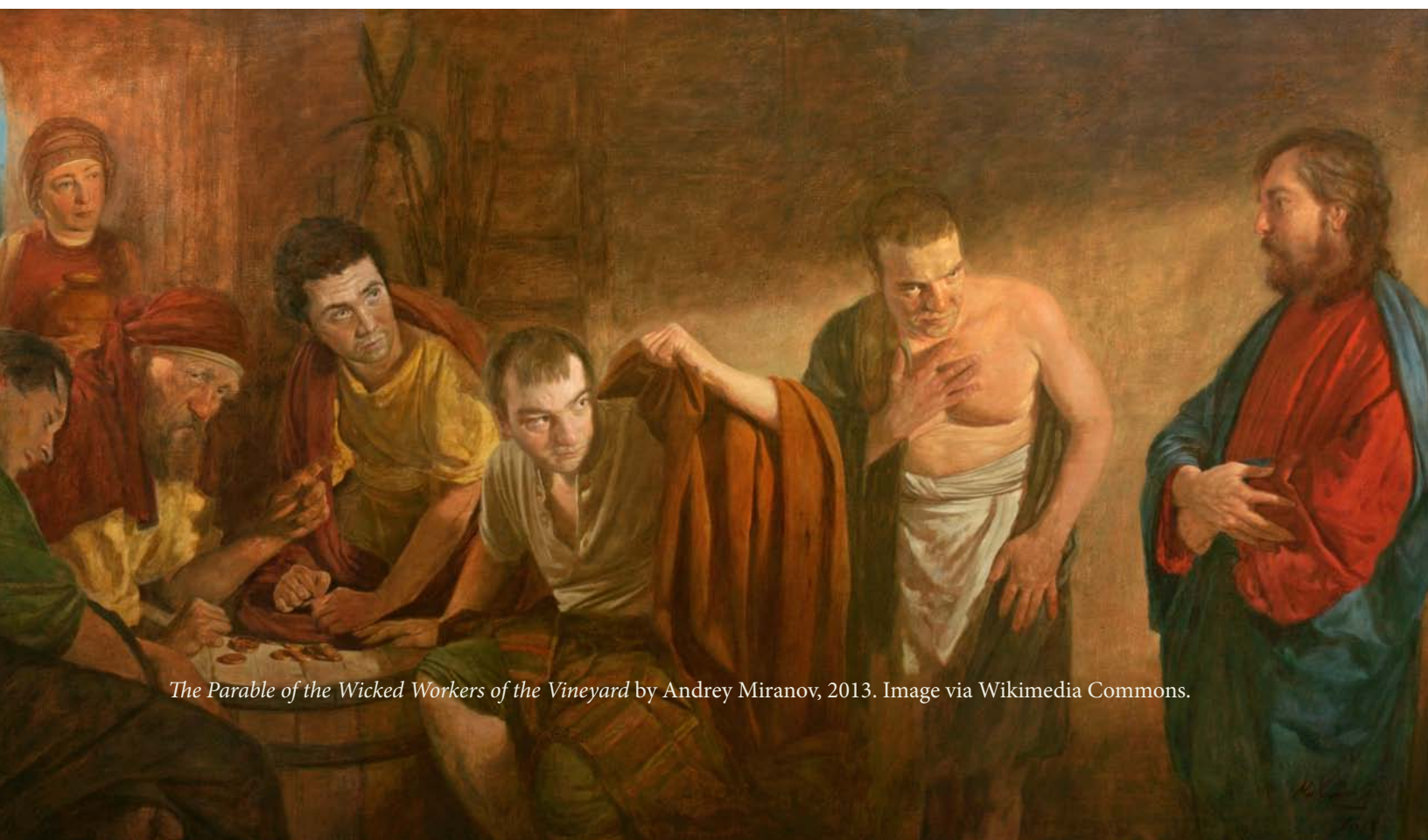
offered in Moses 4:1–2, we learn that pre-mortally, the Father asked Jehovah and Lucifer to help Him with this earth, but only Jehovah submitted to the Father’s will. This premortal counsel is where Jesus received His authority.

Mathew 21:32 “**John came . . . and bore record of me. and ye believed him not**” (JST) Jesus’ dialogue returns to His question that asked about John the Baptist’s heaven-sent authority. The JST addition testifies that when John the Baptist prepared the way of righteousness, it referred to Jesus. His challenge suggests that by rejecting the prophet John the Baptist’s authority, they also rejected their Messiah. They rejected the message, authority, and salvation. The Book of Mormon taught the same message about rejecting the prophet —the “words” of the prophets represent authority to speak for God (1 Nephi 3:18; 7:14; Jacob 6:8; etc.). 2 Nephi 25:18–19, also prophesied that the Jews would reject their Messiah.

Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen¹⁶

Matthew 21:33–46; Mark 12:1–12; Luke 20:9–19

Matthew 21:33; Mark 12:1; Luke 20:9 “**A man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge about it**” (JST Mark). Jesus begins with a familiar story from Isaiah 5:2–7 about a good farmer who carefully planted a vineyard. (It also sounds like Jacob 5:3.) We see evidence that Zenos’ allegory of the olive tree was known in the Jewish world.¹⁷ Isaiah 5:2–7 and Jacob 5 helps us understand the symbolism of “digged” and “hedged it round about,” as a demonstration of divine nurturing. The vineyard of the Lord, becomes the House of Israel.



The Parable of the Wicked Workers of the Vineyard by Andrey Miranov, 2013. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Matthew 21:34–39; Mark 12:2–8; Luke 20:10–15; “He sent His servants” God’s servants include His prophets. The husbandmen or workhands abuse the owner’s servants. Their cruel and exaggerated measures sound extreme, but Jesus fills His parables with shocking details and hyperbole. It keeps his audience engaged, which opens new ways to learn. In this parable, Jesus answers the question about His authority by introducing the “heir.” In the parable, the murdering of the heir, foreshadows Jesus’ arrest in Gethsemane and death in Golgotha.

Matthew 21:41; Mark 12:9; Luke 20:16 “destroy those wicked men” When the Jewish leaders condemned the wicked husbandmen, they pass judgment on themselves.

Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17 “Did you never read in the scriptures . . .” Jesus quotes a very well-known passage from Psalm 118. It was part of the “Hallel,” which Jews regularly recite in their ceremonies.¹⁸ Jews had a tradition that a stone first rejected by the builders later becomes the chief cornerstone. The “Head of the Corner” meant the stone used at the building corner to bear the weight or stress of two walls. It functioned like a capstone. It was a crucial stone to the whole structure. Other OT scriptures also describe important stones, typologically referring to Jesus who was most likely a stone mason (Daniel 2:34–35, 44–45; and Isaiah 8:14–15).

Matthew 21:44; Luke 20:18, “ground to powder” This description is the definition of the word “contrite.” We must become broken hearted and contrite to follow in Christ’s footsteps.

Matthew 21:46 “I am the stone:” (JST) The JST addition gives a long dialogue between Jesus and his disciples explaining the parable.

Parable of the Marriage of the King's Son

Matthew 22:1–14

In Matthew’s Gospel, this is the third parable answering the question about Jesus’ authority. He tells a story about those who were given authority but do not live up to its requirements, and are killed for their wickedness. In turn, all are invited to God’s banquet, but only those willing to be washed and clothed as God directs will be allowed to have a place at the feast. Jesus’ authority was not just given, but earned. Likewise, His disciples must earn authority by obedience to the King.

The description of a wedding feast is similar to the parable of the ten virgins: Those not prepared will not be given a place at God’s banquet or heavenly kingdom. Across scripture we find wedding images to describe God’s relationship with his people (Isaiah 49:18; 51:1; 61:10; 62:5; Jeremiah 2:32; 3:8; 33:11; Hosea 3:3; 4:15; etc.). The banquet represents the joys of God’s kingdom. A few troublesome verses will be highlighted.

Matthew 22:7 “when the king heard that his servants were dead, he was wroth” (JST) The chosen guests act disrespectfully, ignore their King’s invitation, and even kill His servants. Their wickedness is punished. The message of accountability here can seem harsh. Jesus always taught the need for repentance to avoid punishment. Within the context of our Savior’s love, God’s punishment will actually open the way for the wicked to stop sinning, possibly see their folly, and repent in the next life.

Matthew 22:9–10 “Go into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage . . . both evil and good” God’s graciousness is stretched out to all. His mercy is extended to everyone. It is the individual who chooses to accept or reject His invitation to His banquet. He emphasizes the importance of agency again at the end of the parable (Matthew 21:14).

Matthew 22:11–13 “Not dressed in wedding clothes” This sounds similar to the Old Testament account from Zechariah 3:3–4. The high priest has a vision of an angel, but the priest “was dressed in filthy garments as he stood before the Angel.” The angel then explains to the high priest, “See, I have removed your iniquity, and I will clothe you with splendid robes” (BSB; or “pure vestments” in ESV). Once he is clothed, the angel puts a “mitre upon his head” (KJV), or “a pure diadem” (ISV), or “a clean priestly turban” (CEV). Finally, the high priest is dressed appropriately to be in the presence of angels.



The Parable of the Wedding Feast by Andrey Miranov, 2014, oil on canvas. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

In this parable the reader is not told the historical context, but it helps to understand it. In the ancient world, when people were invited to a special event, even to a kingly meal, they must dress appropriately.¹⁹ In the parable, it appears that some guests accept the king's invitation, but they are not willing to comply or follow the royal protocol for dress. Jesus teaches that being invited to enter into the kingdom of God is not enough. Guests must follow His rules in order to become true disciples. The heavenly dress or robes are described in scripture as the robes of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10; 2 Nephi 9:14; D&C 29:12; 109:76; etc.). Yet the parable is not about clothing, but rather about the importance of putting on godly attributes. The parable warns those who reject Jesus' invitation to come unto Him, or those who do not come on His terms. As John Welch explained, "These are cautionary tales to all disciples: look to your own life and behaviors."²⁰

Matthew 22:14 "Many are called but few are chosen" Jesus' warning does not speak of a God who predestines some to be chosen. On the contrary, He often speaks of stewardships, responsibility, choice, and agency. Jesus is denouncing those who expect a free ride on their birthright who do not develop into godly traits. The Lord revealed as part of the restoration that we can choose to be chosen: ". . . few are chosen, and why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson—that the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the power of heaven and that the power of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness . . ." (D&C 121:34–36). We choose to be chosen when we obey the principles of righteousness—gentleness, meekness, and love.

Tribute to Caesar

Matthew 22:15–22; Mark 12:13–17; Luke 20:20–26)

Matthew 22:15–17; Mark 12:13–14; Luke 20–22 "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar?" A group of men who belong to two opposing parties, the Herodian and Pharisee, usually do not work together on anything. Herodians are relatives who hope to maintain power among the family of Herod; they have done everything they can (sold their souls) to Rome in hopes of maintaining power in their family. The two diametrically opposed groups are mentioned to show how desperate they want to ensnare Jesus. They want to find a reason to kill Him. The men begin with flattery and then ask about the volatile issue of Roman taxes.

Matthew 22:18–19; Mark 12:15; Luke 20:23 "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Show me the tribute money" Jesus saw through their pretended sincerity and taught an important lesson. Temptations come from those doing Satan's bidding too.

Matthew 22:20–22; Mark 12:15–17; Luke 20:24–26 "Whose image is this . . . render to God the things which are God's" (JST). Jesus has no problem paying taxes, but He uses this opportunity to teach an important lesson. In the ancient world, some people even put an image of their god on their forehead. Genesis 1:26–27 teaches



Tribute to Caesar by Bartolomeo Manfredi, ca. 1610, oil on canvas. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

that humanity is created in the image of God—both male and female. The Lord asks for children and servants of God to put on His image. Alma taught a similar message, “Have ye received his **image** in your countenances?” (Alma 5:14).

Marriage after the Resurrection

Matthew 22:23–33; Mark 12:18–27; Luke 20:27–39

Matthew 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27 “Then came to him certain of the Sadducees” Now that Jesus stumped the Jerusalem Herodians and Pharisees, another opposing party steps up to try. The Sadducees focused on the temple and believed that only the first five books of Moses were scripture.²¹ As a result, when the temple is destroyed in AD 70, few of their sect and writings survive (one of which is in the Apocrypha, *Ecclesiasticus* or *Sirach*). They filled most of the seats for chief priests.

Matthew 22:24–28; Mark 12:19–23; Luke 20:28–33 “. . . in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven?” Generally, Sadducees did not believe in life after death, but felt that “one is survived by one’s good reputation and by one’s children.”²² So the silly example was not a sincere question, but a common practice of Jewish debate of the law. They are trying to find fault. The story describes an exaggerated example of a “Levite marriage” where a woman married seven brothers. Deuteronomy 25:5–10 describes the practice which was given to make

sure families took care of widows and kept their property within the family. (We see examples of it in Genesis 38:6–11 and Ruth).

Matthew 22:29–30; Mark 12:24–27; Luke 20:34–39 “ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God” Jesus focuses on the resurrection and quotes Exodus 6:3, which silences the Sadducees. He does not give a full explanation of the higher law of eternal marriage, probably because the audience is not ready to learn. He points out that their misunderstanding of the resurrection and a non-eternal nature of Levirate marriage comes from a misreading of the scriptures and a disbelief in God’s power. You can also interpret His response as saying that if the marriage is not sealed on earth, it has no eternal nature. Given the argumentative attitude of the Sadducees, it is not surprising that this is not in the right time or place to teach celestial marriage as He does elsewhere.

Jesus did teach the high law of eternal sealings to His apostles. They received authority and power so that “whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven” (Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:18). Also in Matthew 19:4–7, He taught a different audience that marriages are to last. “For this cause shall a man . . . cleave to his wife . . . Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together let not man put asunder.” We know the Lord revealed the higher ordinances of sealings because Peter mentions “calling and election made sure,” which can only be received by a husband and wife sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise (2 Peter 2:1–10; D&C 53:1; 128:14; 132:19; 1 Corinthians 15:29; etc.).

Lawyer Asks about the Great Commandment

Matthew 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–34

Matthew 22:34–38; Mark 12:28–30 “Which is the great commandment in the law? The different antagonistic groups gathered at the temple continue to confront Jesus. The Pharisees saw that He silenced their rivals, so they ask about one of their favorite topics: the commandments. In addition to recording and interpreting the law, scribes also did legal work and were trained in the law, so it is not a problem to have Matthew 22:35 have a lawyer asking Jesus the question, while Mark 12:28 records a scribe is the voice—it is probably the same person.

The Pharisees are known for their strict interpretation of the Law of Moses. After the Jews were taken to Babylon, in an attempt to protect the Law of Moses, rabbis built a “fence around The Law.”²³ They counted 613 commandments in the first five books of Moses.²⁴ They claimed that it was living the Law that would save them. To protect their beloved Laws, they added ten thousand additional commandments as a buffer zone and called them the “oral laws” or oral Torah. Pharisees systematized these “oral laws” to govern a pious life. However, throughout Jesus’ mission He attacks and deliberately broke these oral laws (i.e. “pick up thy bed . . . he spat in the dirt . . . is it right to do good on the Sabbath?”).

“**thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all they heart . . .**” Jesus answers the Pharisee’s question by going back to the basics. He cites a Deuteronomy 6:5. This verse was very well known by all Jews at the time. It is one of the verses in the *shema*, which was repeated daily by Jews in their homes, temples, and synagogue, and written on their door posts and inside their phylacteries (Deuteronomy 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Numbers 15:37–41).

Matthew 22:39–40; Mark 12:31–34 “the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself”

Jesus next quotes verbatim, the very center of the Torah, Leviticus 19:18. The central message is often the most important message in ancient structure, especially in chiasmas. Jesus points to two foundational laws that were well known, but it appears they were underappreciated. We see these two as the roots of the ten commandments received by Moses too. The first four commandments speak of how to love God, and the second half how love one’s neighbor and self.

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me
2. Thou shalt [have no] . . . graven images
3. Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain
4. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy
5. Honour thy father and thy mother
6. Thou shalt not kill
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery
8. Thou shalt not steal
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness
10. Thou shalt not covet

Love God

Love Neighbors
as Self

Jesus’ Question

Matthew 22:41–46; Mark 12:34–37; Luke 20:40–43

Matthew 22:41–46; Mark 12:34–37; Luke 20:40–43 “What think ye of Christ?” Jesus now asks those surrounding Him in the temple courtyard a question (Matthew 21:23). Just like when He was a twelve-year-old young man, Jesus joined in the popular Jewish tradition of questioning, debate and discussion, in the Court of the Women in the temple. The word “Christ” is the Greek word for, “anointed one,” or “Messiah” in Hebrew. Jesus’ question is not only to His contemporaries but for each reader to respond.

Mark 12:37 “. . . but the high priest and the elders were offended at him” (JST) Jesus did not shy away from addressing confrontational topics. He defended truth even when it was rejected. But those who disagreed with Him could not reconcile His attacks of their beliefs. They were so offended by the current cultural issues, that they could not see His miraculous signs and miracles as fulfilling the messianic prophecies.

Jesus Warns against Hypocrisy and Pride

Matthew 23:1-12; Mark 12:38-40; Luke 20:45-47

Matthew 23:1-2; Mark 12:38; Luke 20:45-46 “Moses’ seat” After answering several questions, Jesus remains in the temple courtyard and begins to teach. He warns His listeners to beware of scribes and those who sit in “Moses seat,” or a seat of judgement (Exodus 18:16). As this phrase is only mentioned here in the NT, extra scriptural texts help us identify that it was the name given to the seat in the synagogue where one gave a discourse or interpretation of the scriptures and Law, or the place of judgements.

Matthew 23:3 “they will make you observe and do; for they are ministers of the law, and they make themselves your judges” (JST). Jesus’ agrees that it is important to follow all council to live the Law, but He denounces the hypocritical example given by the same leaders or scribes. Jesus encourages them to live the law of Moses, even though He is come to fulfill it. (We see the same in 2 Nephi 25:24 “we keep the law of Moses, and look forward with steadfastness unto Christ, until the law shall be fulfilled; also see Alma 25:15; 30:3.)

Matthew 23:4 “Their works they do to be seen of men” (JST) Jesus warns that our motives matter. He wants us to serve and act out of love of God and our fellow humans, not to for selfish reasons. Ironically, the Pharisees and scribes inadvertently made the Law of Moses into an idol that they worshiped. They surrounded the Law by minutiae and endlessly debate. They neglected “love” which was the sum or purpose of the Law.

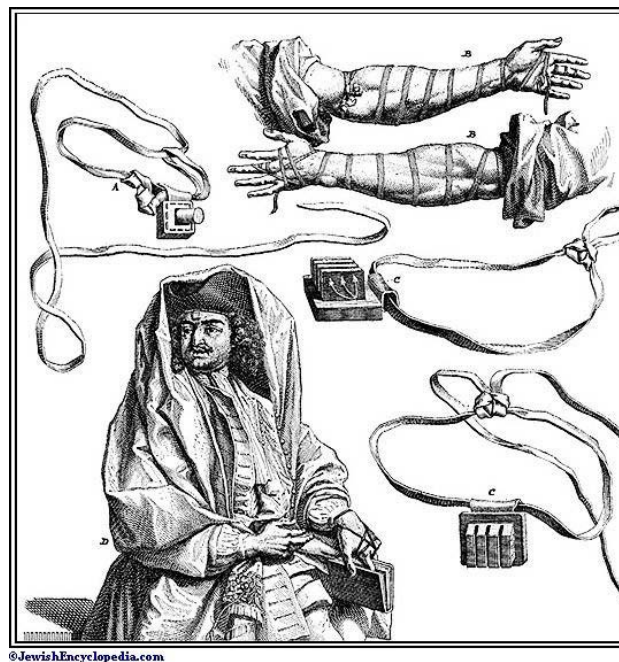
DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God [is] one LORD. And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates . . . it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my command -ments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul

Matthew 23:5 “. . . **phylacteries**” The phylacteries were texts of the Law written on sheep skin, enclosed on small containers and tied with leather strips one’s forehead and/or left forearm (to be over the heart) while praying. Archeologists have found numbers of these at Qumran. This is the only reference to phylacteries in the New Testament.²⁵ The text was enclosed in small cases and included: Exodus 13:1–10, 11–16 and Deuteronomy 6:4–9.

The phylacteries “were thought to have power, like amulets, to avert various evils and to drive away demons. The Pharisees were accustomed to widen, make broad, their phylacteries, that they might render them more conspicuous and show themselves to be more eager than the majority to be reminded of the law of God.”²⁶ The “boarders of the garments” are mentioned in Numbers 15:38; Deuteronomy 22:12.

Matthew 23:6–7; Mark 12:39; Luke 20:46 “**long robes . . . chief rooms . . . highest seats**” Jesus condemns vain glory and putting on heirs. Places of honor and social station were offensive to Him. He wanted to teach masters how to serve. He combats this social protocol in the next few verses.



Matthew 23:8 “**One is your master**” Jesus teaches that our master should be our God. Jesus also despises dress and social position that elevate some above others. The Anchor Bible related examples from Jewish literature of Jesus’ day where disciples were obliged to follow a recognized teacher without question. A disciple was to afford his teacher the highest honor. They had rules for how disciples should walk behind their teacher—never beside him.²⁷ Even Jesus did not seek a position of honor, but lead by serving and ministering. He also did not ask for blind obedience.

Matthew 23:9–10 “**One is your creator and heavenly Father, even he who is in heaven**” (JST) Matthew prefers using “Father” in reference to Heavenly Father (41 times), rather than God (23 times). Matthew’s usage speaks of the message or theology he wants pass on that he learned from Jesus.

Matthew 23:11 “**Greatest shall be your servant**” This repeats a favorite theme of Jesus—see Matthew 18–19. It also describes Jesus role as the one who comes to serve others with His healing, teaching, ministering, and even washing feet. Jesus’ refers to Himself here as His life was spent serving His fellowmen and yet He is the greatest ever to live on earth

Jesus Delivers Eight Woes

Matthew 23:13-31

Matthew listed “**8 Woes**” or denunciations which seem to share ideas from Jesus’ **8 Beatitudes** (JST)

8 WOES

- 1 Matt 23:13 If reject Christ and living revelations “shut up the kingdom of heaven”
- 2 Matt 23:14 Greed under a cloak of piety
- 3 Matt 23:15 Missionaries of false faiths
- 4 Matt 23:16 Oaths without meaning
- 5 Matt 23:23 Emphasized minutia and omitted the weightier matters of the Law like mercy
- 6 Matt 23:25 Excessive ritual washings-cleanliness That only clean the body, not the spirit
- 7 Matt 23:27 “Whited sepulchers” when outside ceremonially clean, but within are filthy
- 8 Matt 23:29 Honoring or venerating the graves of prophets without following their teachings.

8 BEATITUDES

- Matt 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit who come unto me for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”
- Matt 5:6 “Blessed . . .hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.”
- Matt 5:8 “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.”
- Matt 5:7 “Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.”
- Matt 5:8 “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God”
- Matt 5:12 “Great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets”

Matthew 23:29 “Woe unto you . . . because ye build the tombs of the prophets” The custom of venerating the prophets by paying honor to their grave sites was well established in Jesus’ day. Pious men’s graves were adorned

with sepulchral monuments from the Second Temple period.²⁸

Matthew 23:33 “Ye serpents . . .” This is a strong denunciation! Serpents in Hebrew lore were animals that injured without gain for itself. The serpent grew stronger with age. Its venom built up in the lymph tissues then slowly destroyed cells and ruptured capillaries causing death by internal hemorrhage. The venom doesn’t necessarily cause intense pain, rather one may feel better for a time while the internal destruction continues—the parallels to sin and Satan are obvious.

Matthew 23:35; Luke 11:49–51, “upon you may come all the . . . blood of Zacharias son of Barachias” Jesus refers here to the sixth century high priest who the wicked slew in the Temple before the Babylonian captivity, as if it were currently happening by His generation. Luke 11:49–51 and Matthew both quote Jesus saying this. Matthew adds an extra phrase giving Zachariah’s heritage—but Matthew mixes up two famous Zechariah’s. That is understandable as it is the most common name mentioned in the Bible (~40 people over the 10 centuries, with slightly different spelling). Matthew confuses the heritage for the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah with a high priest Zechariah son of Jehoiada who lived three hundred years earlier. For the sake of clarification, I will just list some of the scriptural clarifications to help you not confuse Zacharias:



Photo by Alfonso Castro on Unsplash

1. In Matthew 23:35 mentions to “Zacharias son of **Barachias**.” This man is the last of the minor prophets in our Old Testament from the 6th century, “Zechariah the son of **Berechiah**” (Zechariah 1:1). But Matthew mixes up the story and name. The story belongs to the 9th century high priest.
2. 2 Chronicles 24:20–21 mentions a 9th century high priest, “son of **Jehoiada**.” He was stoned to death in the Temple court at the end of the ninth century. Luke identifies this Zachariah without mistaking his father (Luke 11:51)
3. Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, in Luke 1:5 is a priest of **Abia** (not the high priest).

The problem with this mix-up is that Christian literature, including our church manuals, have mixed up John the Baptist’s father with the high priest Zachariah who was slain in the temple nine hundred years earlier.²⁹



Jesus Laments Over Jerusalem

Matthew 23:36–39

Matthew 23:36 “How often would I have gathered . . .” Jesus laments that He has called, but His people will not gather. The JST footnote that expounds on how accountability spans generations. “. . . *Behold your father did it through ignorance, but ye do not; wherefore, their sins shall be upon your heads.*”

Matthew 23:37–38 “. . . a hen gathers her chicks” Hens gather their chicks for feeding by a guttural sound, known as a brooding call. With danger the sound changes to an alarm call and the chicks run to her. If the danger persists, she fluffs out her feathers to further hide her chicks and scare the intruder away. The hen also attacks with her beak. The Lord’s protective symbol is very maternal. He wants to help; but His calls go unheeded. The sad result is that the Judaic homeland would become desolate.

Above: The Murder of Zechariah by William Hoel, 1905.

Header Image Photo of palm fronds by Pexels via Pixabay.

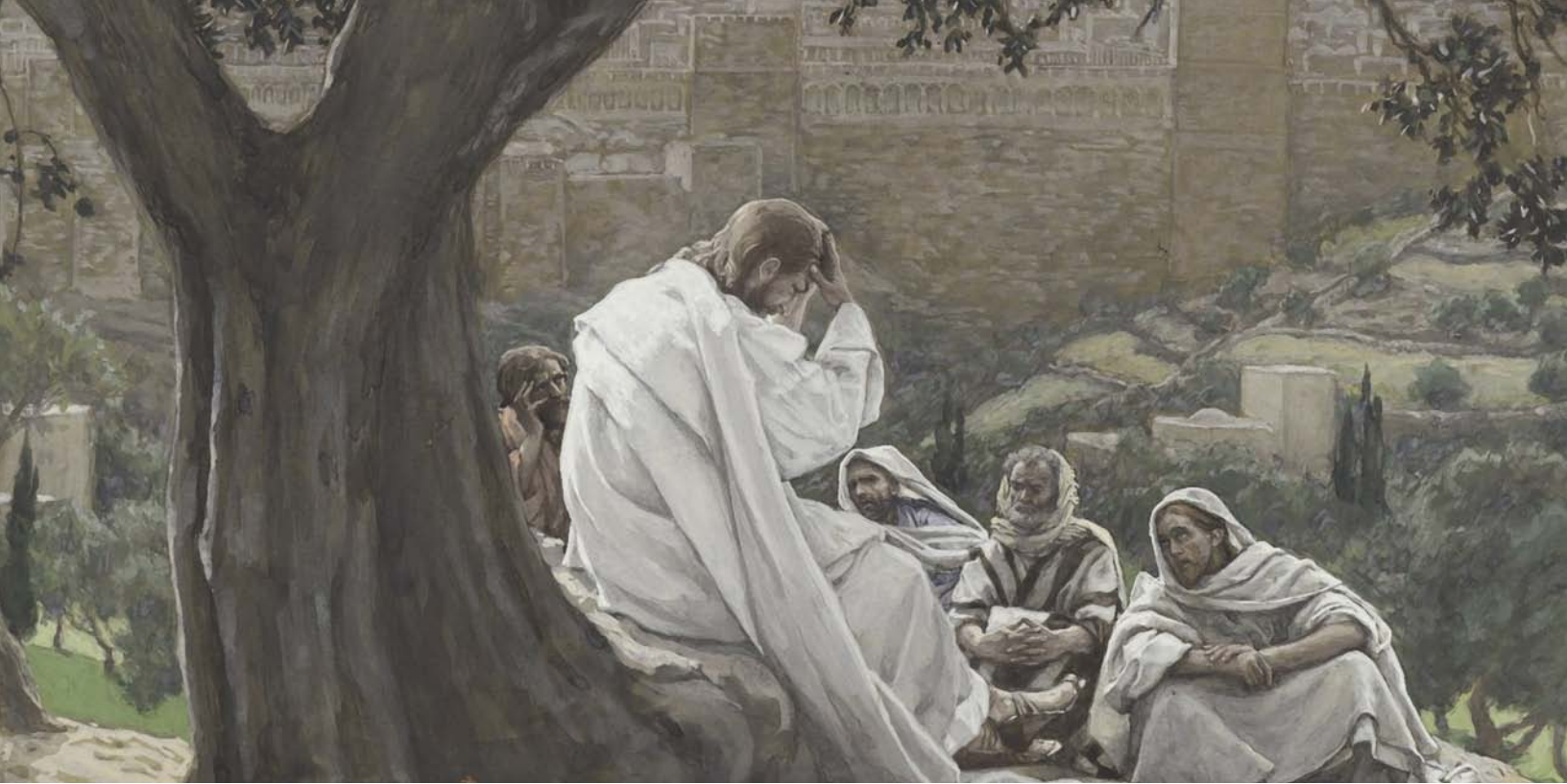
ENDNOTES

1. The Jewish day started at night, because the creation started with darkness before light.
2. Mark's Gospel outline of the timing is problematic because of Mark 14:1 and 12. It either gives an extra day or two with nothing recorded between "two days before" and "on the first day," or the author/editor uses words for days that differ from the Leviticus 23:5-6 calendaring of "Passover" (which is eaten in the evening on the 14th), and "Feast of Unleavened Bread" (which begins on the 15th day of the first month). In any case, the timing is no longer understood. This apparent mistake does not allow two or three days and nights in the tomb.

Sunday	Mark 11:1-11	Triumphal Entry
Monday	Mark 11:12, 19	"next day" Cleansing Temple "even was come"
Tuesday	Mark 11:20, 14:1	"in the morning" Debate authority, Parables, discourse, "two days before Passover", Supper in Bethany
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday	Mark 14:12	"on the first day of unleavened bread" Last Supper
Saturday	Mark 15:1	"early in the morning", Trial, Death
Sunday	Mark 16:2	"very early in the morning, on the first day of the week" Resurrection

3. *Mishnah, Kelim*, 1:6-9.
4. Joel Marcus, *The Anchor Yale Bible: Mark 8-16* (New Haven, CT: The Anchor Yale Bible, 2009), 771.
5. Matthew quotes over fourteen Old Testament portions in his Gospel. Most are consistent with texts we now have, but some are not. This may be because he was quoting them for memory, or perhaps because the text he cited was different than currently available. Most Jewish villages had only a few scripture scrolls (most frequently the first five books of Moses or Torah, and the Psalms). If the town had enough people and money, the next most frequently found scripture scroll discovered is Isaiah. Only larger more wealthy communities of Jews (i.e. Magdala, Jerusalem) had a fuller set of Writings and the Prophets. These scrolls were kept in a communal location for their study and Sabbath worship. As very few people had access to them daily, memorization was often used more. It appears Matthew's memory was different as see when compare Matthew 23:35 with Luke 11:50-51 too.
6. Marcus, *Mark*, 773.
7. Matthew's fourteen fulfillment prophecies include: Matthew 1:22; 2:5, 15, 17, 23; 3:3; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14, 35; 21:4; 26:56; 27:9. This use of fourteen points to his Davidic roots as discussed in *Come Follow Me #2*, for Matthew 1-2.
8. Only John 12:13 mentions palm branches which may have been brought from the disciple's journey from Jericho. The current thought is that Jerusalem did not grow palm trees, but imported them from either the coast or near the Jordan River for the feast of the Tabernacles in the fall.

9. Marcus, *Mark*, 774.
10. Josephus, *War* 2.119–61.
11. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.230. Josephus records 83 high priests from Aaron to the temple's destruction in AD.
12. Isaiah 5:1; 6:9; 29:13; 53:23; 54:13; 56:7; 61:1–2.
13. Psalms 8:2; 22:1; 31:5; 25:19; 41:9; 69:4; 78:24; 82:6; 110:1; 118:22–23, and 26.
14. Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem at the Time of Jesus* (Göttingen, 1958), 38.
15. John and Jeannie Welch, *The Parables of Jesus: Revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2019), 45.
16. My discussion on this parable is copied from the early commentary for Come Follow Me, Easter Week. The JST adds substantial portions to Matthew 21:33 and 46. The text transitions from one parable to another in the JST by defending John the Baptist again and explaining that the audience is receiving parables because of their unbelief.
17. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, ed. *Allegory of the Olive Tree* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1994), 290-304.
18. *Hillel* consisted of Psalms 113–118. It is chanted at Passover, Feast of the Tabernacles, Hanukah, in synagogue worship, and at many other times and places.
19. Kent Jackson and Robert Millet, *Studies in Scripture: The Gospels* (Salt Lake City, UT: Desert Book, 1974), 380-382.
20. Welch, *The Parables of Jesus*, 145.
21. David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5.892.
22. Judith R. Baskin and Kenneth Seeskin, *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture* (New York City, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 45.
23. *Mishnah, Avoth*, 1:1.
24. Macy Nulman, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 220. By the Middle Ages, prayer shawls incorporated 613 threads for the commandments; “According to the Talmud, wearing *tzitzit* is equal in merit with observing the entire Torah. The numerical value of the word *tzitzit* equals 613, the number of precepts in the Torah.”
25. Albright, *Anchor Bible: Matthew*, 279.
26. Bible Dictionary.
27. Albright, *Anchor Bible: Matthew*, 279.
28. *Ibid.*, 282.
29. Lynne Hilton Wilson, “The Confusing Case of Zacharias,” *Religious Educator*, 14, no. 2 (2013) 107-123. <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/re-14-no-2-2013/confusing-case-zacharias>



JOSEPH SMITH—MATTHEW; MATTHEW 24–25; MARK 12–13; LUKE 21

LAST DAY OF JESUS' PUBLIC MINISTRY

The last day of Jesus' public ministry begins with teaching at the temple and ends with a discussion about the destruction of the temple and His Second Coming. At that time, Jesus Himself did not know when these events would occur, so His prophecies may seem overlapping. The Book of Mormon explains us that Jesus' First and Second Coming are typified and represented throughout covenant history in both the Old and New Testaments.¹ After His last public event, Jesus leaves the temple and retires to a secluded setting on the Mount of Olives to answer His disciples' questions. They ask Him about the timing of His Kingdom. After His explanation, He illuminates His message with four parables.

The Widow's Mite

Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4

Mark 12:41; Luke 21:1 “Jesus sat over against the treasury” As Jesus teaches in the Court of the Women, He can see the “treasury” under a colonnade along the north and south walls of the courtyard. (The Court of the Women was actually for all Israelites, but it was the last courtyard where women and children were allowed to join in temple worship—if they remained in one corner—hence the name.) The temple treasury included thirteen donation boxes placed along the north and south walls, and the two large storage rooms behind them.

The collection containers each had a wooden box base, and a brass funnel opening. The brass portion was in the shape of a trumpet, so they were called trumpets. The brass also amplified the sound of the coins as they were dropped in. Each of the thirteen were labeled for different offerings (e.g. “New Shekel dues,” “Gold for the mercy-seat,” “freewill-offerings,” or “sin-offerings,” etc.). One of the chief priests set the prices for each of the various offerings and the prices changed dramatically at times (suggesting they were not always honest or fair).

Mark 12:42; Luke 21:2 “a certain poor widow” We do not know the widow’s age—she may have been 18 or 80, walking alone, or with young children clinging to her knees. A mite or copper was the smallest monetary denomination. The contrast between the widow’s donation and the “the rich men casting their gifts” was significant financially and emotionally.



The Widow's Mite by James Tissot, 1899.

Mark 12:43–44; Luke 21:3–4 “. . . cast in all the living that she had” No one seems to notice the widow—except Jesus, and He seems to see everything. He points her out to His disciples. The amount of money is not the issue, but her sacrifice and faith in God. The same principle extends to realizing that the Lord does not need our tithes and offerings—the amount doesn’t matter. Yet we need to learn how to selflessly give our all to God.

Jesus Prophecies of the Temple’s Fall

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:1-3; Matthew 24:1-2; Mark 13:1-2; Luke 21:5-6; D&C 45

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:2–3; Matthew 24:1–2; Mark 13:1–2; Luke 21:5–6 “**Master, show us concerning the buildings of the Temple**” (JST). Matthew, Mark, and John record that Jesus and His followers leave the temple courtyards and walk eastward to the Mount of Olives. Looking backwards across the Kidron Valley at the temple and courtyards from that vantage point was spectacular. Even though the outbuildings were still under construction, the temple continued functioning every day for the entire expansion project (between 19 BC and AD 63).

As to not defile the sacred space, Herod trained thousands of priests as stone masons to work on the Sanctuary. Moses revealed that each furnishing and ritual of the temple typified the Messiah or the Anointed One (2 Nephi 11:4; Mosiah 3:15; Alma 13:16; Exodus 29:36–37; 40:10; etc.). But Herod designed the temple’s expansion to be the most beautiful building in the Roman world.²

Josephus served in this temple as a priest and described it. Herod’s construction teams flattened the mountain to make a 33-acre platform for the Sanctuary. The outmost courtyard walls were 16 feet thick. The Sanctuary stood 150 feet, or nine stories high. (As a modern perspective, it stood one-and-a-half times higher than the current Dome on the Rock.) It was covered in gold leaf that glistened in the sunlight. Josephus claims that the doors to enter the Sanctuary were 49 feet high and 24.5 feet wide.³

The outer courtyard allowed all to gather, which gave it the name, “Court of the Gentiles.” This courtyard took up most of the acreage. The space became more holy as one approached the central area. To separate the gentiles, a large surrounding wall framed the Court of the Women and Court of the Priests. On the wall, a warning was written in three languages: No stranger is to enter within the balustrade round the temple and enclosure.

Whoever is caught will be himself responsible for his ensuing death.⁴ Passing through the Court of the Women and of Israel, only priests and Levites entered the exclusive inner courtyard where the temple workers washed daily in the Brazen Sea and served at the enormous brass altar. Just a few chosen priests entered the Sanctuary to the Holy Place to light the incense twice a day, and to restock the twelve loaves of bread and wine once a week. Finally, the most sacred space, the Holy of Holies, was entered only by the one reigning high priest, one day a year, on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16).

The architecture and engineering involved in its construction is mind boggling. The craftsmen maneuvered thousands of 5 to 90-ton blocks into place without needing any mortar between the stones. The enormous stones were meticulously carved with borders around each on the outer facade. The average size was the size of a modern dishwasher, but some were as large and heavy as two loaded airplanes. Those who saw it reported it absolutely breath taking. As the common phrase reported: “He who has not seen Herod’s temple has not seen beauty in all his life.”⁵ Yet, Jesus repeatedly prophesied that it would be destroyed. At that time, it was unfathomable; yet from AD 70 it stood as rubble for nearly 600 years and witnessed of Jesus’ words.

MARK 13:1-2

And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!

And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down

JST MARK 13:1-2

And as Jesus went out of the temple, his disciples came to him saying, Master show us concerning the buildings of the Temple. And he said unto him, Behold ye these stones of the temple, and all this great work, and buildings of the temple? Verily I say unto you, they shall be thrown down and left unto the Jews desolate. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things, and do ye not understand them? Verily I say unto you, there shall be one left there upon this temple, one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And Jesus left them and went upon the mount of Olives.

In Matthew and Mark’s Gospels, the JST changes the disciples’ message from telling Jesus about the temple to asking Him about the future of the temple. (The JST Mark 13, also parallels much of the JST Matthew 24.)

Matthew 24:3; Mark 13:3; Luke 21:7-11 “. . . privately, saying, Tell us, when . . .?” The account in Mark 13:3 has only Peter, Andrew, James and John (two groups of two brothers) asking Jesus about the timing of the future destruction, but the JST removes that sentence and replaces it with “the disciples came.” In either case, Jesus’ audience of believers—either some of the Twelve, or a combination of disciples—gather on the Mt. of Olives, overlooking the temple on Mount Moriah and continue to discuss Jesus’ prophecies.

MOUNT OF OLIVES DISCOURSE

Judgment and Delayed Second Coming

Joseph Smith—Matthew; Matthew 24:4–32; Mark 13:5–33; Luke 21:7–36

Jesus’ disciples want to learn more about the temple’s destruction, so they follow Him up the Mount of Olives and continue to ask more questions: “When shall these things be?” (Matthew 24:4; Luke 21:7). Jesus’ response has become known as His “Olivet Discourse.” Jesus’ revelation must have been a total shock to His apostles who felt that the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven and its King were already there. It was also shocking because Jesus prophesies of three periods of destruction without separating them by time. He included the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem by the Romans (AD 68–70), the destruction preceding His Second Coming, and the destruction at the end of the world. All three horrific events are discussed together. This was confusing to them, not knowing that the Roman War against Judea would be a type of the destruction before Jesus’ Second Coming.

Similar to Jesus’ disciples’ interest in the subject, the saints in Joseph Smith’s day (and the nation at large) were also fascinated by information on the Savior’s Second Coming and millennialism. When Joseph Smith translated Matthew 24, he felt inspired to re-arrange the Olivet Discourse in order to separate past and future events. The JST is 50% larger than Matthew 24, with every verse being changed/corrected, except one verse, Matthew 24:33.

As Joseph Smith and the early saints sought more information, the Lord revealed more answers. In addition to the JST of Matthew 24, the Prophet also received other revelations on Jesus’ Second Coming (e.g. D&C 1; 29; 38; 43; 45; 101; 116; 133, etc.).⁶ In D&C 45:16–45, the Lord repeated approximately 13 verses from the Mount of Olives Discourse.

Here is an outline of the Olivet Discourse as recorded in each of the Synoptic Gospels for your own study. This Come Follow Me guide follows the order and additions from Joseph Smith-Matthew (which is the JST of Matthew 24), now published in *The Pearl of Great Price*.

View of the present-day Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.
Photograph by Nemo via Wikimedia Commons.



OUTLINE OF JESUS' MOUNT OF OLIVES DISCOURSE

Signs of thy Coming and End	Matthew 24:3–8; Mark 13:3–8; Luke 21:7–11
Persecution Foretold	Matthew 24:9–14; Mark 13:9–13; Luke 21:12–19
Abomination of Desolation	Matthew 24:15–22; Mark 14–20; Luke 21:20–24
False Christs and Prophets	Matthew 24:23–28; Mark 13:21–23; Luke 21:25–38

Joseph Smith—Matthew

In 1851, the British mission president, Apostle Franklin D. Richards, wanted to share key passages from the JST and the D&C with the European saints. He compiled some of his favorites into a pamphlet and published it as, “The Pearl of Great Price.” One portion of the JST that he included was Matthew 24. Over time, parts of that collection were canonized. Just as the JST of Genesis 1–7 received a new name, “The Book of Moses,” so too the JST of Matthew 24 became known as, Joseph Smith—Matthew.

The re-arranged order in the Joseph Smith—Matthew is organized below to separate the past and future events:

PAST

JST OR JS—M

24:1

24:2–6

24:7–11

24:12–18

24:19

24:20–21a

KJV MATT 24

24:39

24:1–5

24:9–13

24:15–21

24:8

24:22

FUTURE

JST OR JS—M

21b–22

23, 28

24–27

29

30

33

34–35

36–39

40–54

55

KJV MATT 24

24:23–24

24:6

24:25–28

24:7

24:12

24:29

24:34–35

24:30–33

24:36–51

Signs of Jerusalem’s Impending Destruction

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:4–20

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:4 “What is the sign of thy coming, and the end of the world . . .?” The disciples did not understand what lay ahead in two days, but at this point, they were more interested in the distant future. They asked two questions: first, about the timing of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and second,

about the signs of the Second Coming. The end of the world is defined here, almost as if in a parenthetical, as “the destruction of the wicked.” It is repeated again in Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:31. The earth itself will not be destroyed though. We learn elsewhere that the earth will “receive its paradisiacal glory” and become the Celestial Kingdom. The destruction described can be defined as the end of worldliness and a purification (Article of Faith 10; D&C 88:10).

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:5–10 “Many shall deceive . . . then shall they . . . kill you” Jesus warned His disciples that deception and iniquity will abound. Because of the circulating falsehoods, they will all be persecuted, and many disciples will even suffer martyrdom. We usually honor Stephen as the first Christian martyr, although John the Baptist and Jesus were already martyred. James the son of Zebedee followed Stephen, and each of the other ten apostles also died as a martyr.⁷

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:11 “he that remaineth steadfast . . . shall be saved” Although the desolation to come will be heinous, those who listen to the Lord’s anointed and His Spirit will escape. Just as the destroying angel passed over the homes of those who obeyed the prophet and covered their doorways with the blood of a lamb, so too will the “steadfast” receive eternal protection from the worst destructions of the Last Days. The same was true at the first destruction of Jerusalem because, as prophesied, all Christians who followed the apostolic leadership had left Jerusalem before the worst destruction.

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:12 “. . . see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel” In Daniel 9:27; 11:31; and 12:11 we can read of the tragic destruction of Jerusalem (other prophets also discussed this, such as Hosea 3:4 and Jeremiah 19:4). Even though very few villages had a copy of the book of Daniel, it appears that these prophecies were known.⁸ To avoid this desolating scourge, Jesus tells the disciples to “stand in the holy place.” This is the name of the first room in the Temple Sanctuary reserved for just a handful of priests to light the incense and to clean. But the Lord used similar language to mean more general holy places in D&C 101:22, “it is my will, that all they who call on my name, and worship me according to mine everlasting gospel, should gather together, and stand in holy places.” (This counsel was given at a time of great persecution and destruction in Missouri.)

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:13–19 “in those days shall be great tribulations on the Jews . . . as was not before . . . nor ever shall be” Jesus prophecies of the extreme danger and speed of the upcoming destruction. The horrific massacre resulted due to the Jewish revolt in AD 66 (just thirty-three years after Jesus’ prophesy and death). The Roman Emperor, Nero, sent an army under Vespasian to eradicate the Jews from their land. In the middle of his destruction, Vespasian was called back to Rome to become the next Emperor. His son, Titus entered Jerusalem and desolated everything in his path, including the stone temple.

Signs of Second Coming

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:21–37

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:20 “. . . those days should be shortened . . . for the elect’s sake” Jesus prophesies that His covenants will protect the world from utter destruction. He will not allow his elect to fall. Joseph Smith defined God’s elect as they who choose to be chosen, or those who live their covenants.⁹ Those good people who prayerfully testify of Jesus have blessed many generations of the world—just as a sprinkling of salt and a ray of light.



The Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans Under the Command of Titus, A.D. 70. Painting by David Roberts, 1850. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:21–22 “there shall also arise false Christs and false prophets . . . they shall deceive the very elect” Jesus repeats His warning about false prophets (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:9). Paul also taught of the false prophets deceiving the elect when he spoke of the apostasy in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3; Hebrews 9:26–28; Acts 20:29; as did Peter in 2 Peter 3:3–9. John describes anti-Christ in 1 John 2:18. True prophets can identify false prophets and their falsehoods. One who has the spirit of prophecy is identified by John the Revelator as one who has a testimony of Jesus (Revelation 19:10). In a Springfield, IL court of law, Joseph Smith used this New Testament teaching as his definition and evidence that he was a prophet.¹⁰ In addition to all

those who testify of Jesus, true prophets expose false prophets by exposing their misunderstood philosophies, or cunning counterfeits.

The early Christians expected the end of the world very soon after Jesus’ resurrection.¹¹ Yet, it was not the Second Coming that was imminent, but the apostasy. False teachings were already under way by the time of Paul’s ministry. It was neither passive nor gradual. Jesus foretold of this in Matthew 24:24. Jesus explains that He allows it: “Christ suffereth him to work, until the time is fulfilled that he shall be taken out of the way” (2 Thessalonians 2:7, JST).

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:23—37 “I speak these things . . . for the elect’s sake . . . for the coming of the Son of Man” The Lord outlines twenty signs of the times that will precede and accompany His Second Coming. He does this so that His covenant people will be prepared.

1. Wars and rumors of wars—repeated twice each (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:23; 28)
2. All will see Jesus’ Second Coming, as the sunrise covers the earth (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:26)
3. The elect will gather together (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:27)
4. Nation will rise against nation (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:29—in opposition to the Millennium described in Isaiah 2:4)
5. Famine (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:29)
6. Pestilence (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:29)
7. Earthquakes in divers places (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:29)
8. Iniquity will abound (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:30)
9. People’s love will “wax cold” (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:30)
10. Those who are not overcome will be saved (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:30)
11. The gospel will be preached in all the world (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:31)
12. The wicked will be destroyed (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:31)
13. Daniel’s prophecy of the abomination of desolation will be fulfilled (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:32)
14. The sun and moon will be darkened (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:33)
15. Stars will fall (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:33)
16. In the generation that these are fulfilled, Jesus’ will come again (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:34–36)
17. The tribes of the earth will mourn (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:36)
18. Jesus will come in the clouds “with power and great glory” (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:36)
19. Those who treasure God’s word will not be deceived (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:37)
20. Angels come before Jesus, like a trumpet, to gather the elect in heaven (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:37)

God’s promise to the generation who has to endure his tragic list of destruction, is filled with hope and encouragement if they “treasureth up my word.”

FOUR PARABLES

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:38–54

Still on the Mount of Olives, Jesus then illustrates His teachings with four stories or parables. (*Parabole* means type, figure, and illustration.) The first two are about knowing when these signs will happen, and the next two describe what disciples need to do. (I will continue with the Joseph Smith —Matthew text as it is much richer)

1. The Parable of the Fig Tree

Matthew 24:32–42; Mark 13:28–37; Luke 21:29–36

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:38–39 “you know that summer is nigh . . . but of that day . . . no one knoweth . . .

. **but my Father only**” By studying the law of the harvest, one can estimate when fruit is ripe. Jesus encourages us to watch in the same way that as we prepare for His coming. His final restraint is a surprising revelation that even He did not know when He would return.



Image by Luisella Planeta Leoni via Pixabay

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:41–43 “as it was in the days of Noah, so . . . at the coming of the Son of Man” With God directing mortality, the world’s history (especially divinely-directed history) repeats itself. In spite of all the destruction and calamities that will precede Jesus’ Second Coming, people will continue to go about their lives as they did before the great flood in Noah’s day.¹² I’m sure those people initially saw the extra heavy rain as only an annoyance, and not as something life-threatening. In 2004, President Gordon B. Hinckley equated our times with the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah.¹³ We also have received an apostolic warning as recently as April 2019 General Conference, “Let us be about building up Zion to hasten that day.”¹⁴

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:46–48 “What I say unto one, I say unto all . . . watch . . . in such an hour, ye think not” Jesus repeatedly instructs His disciples to watch until the end (Matthew 28:19–20; Luke 21:32; Acts 2:16). Many met *their end* at the *end of their lives*, not the final destruction of the wicked. In that case, they will be those angels who join the Lord at His glorious coming (Revelation 6:12, 18). Whenever we meet the Lord, the counsel “to watch” calls for active engagement. Rather than passively wait for His timing, the Lord asks disciples to actively wait by becoming spiritually stronger. Our preparation is affecting God’s timing. The righteous saints can help shorten the destruction (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:20–21).

2. The Parable of the Servants

Matthew 24:43–51; Mark 13:34

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:49–50 “a faithful and wise servant . . . shall find so doing” To be ready for the Lord, we must be serving God. The “wise” in the scripture are those men who traveled far and sacrificed much to worship the toddler Jesus. The wise are also described as those who build their foundation on the rock of our Redeemer (Helaman 5:12). Now the wise servants are those who are faithful and who are doing the Lord’s work.

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:51–54 “that evil servant shall say . . . My lord delayeth his coming . . . appoint him his portion with the hypocrites . . .” This group are still “servants” or disciples of God. People who have

feigned allegiance to serve God, but have not maintained His image in their countenance, mind, and heart. If we lose faith in God's plan, do not see His hand in the unfolding of the world, or become self-centered—eating and drinking without attention to God's plan—then we may fall into this category. The Lord warns that frivolity and pleasure now will be met with weeping at the Judgement.

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:55 “thus cometh the end of the wicked . . . not yet, but by and by” Although Jesus just admitted that He did not know the exact timing of His return, He did know, like the ripening fig, that it was not time for the harvest yet. However, we live in a day when our prophet has warned us that the time is short. “As President of His Church, I plead with you . . . [to] do the spiritual work to find out for yourselves, and please do it now. Time is running out.”¹⁵

3. Parable of the Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13; also referenced in D&C 33; 45; 63; 88; 132:62-63; 133

Jesus wants to emphasize that His disciples will need to prepare as they wait for His Second Coming, so He illustrates it with two powerful parables: The Ten Virgins and The Talents. In the Doctrine and Covenants, there are two revelations that reference the parable of The Talents (D&C 60:2, 13; 80:18), and six revelations that cite the Ten Virgins (D&C 33:16-17; 45:56-57; 63:54). This is more than any other parable. It confirms the modern need to understand the parable of the Ten Virgins as we prepare for Jesus' great Second Coming.

Matthew 25:1 “the kingdom of heaven” In the NT, this three-word phrase is exclusive to Matthew, who uses it 32 times. The phrase “Kingdom of Heaven” is found in the Book of Mormon and the D&C, but no other author uses it in the Bible. The other Gospels all use the phrase, “Kingdom of God,” when introducing other parables or teachings. It appears that Matthew does not want to not overuse the name “God.”

“ . . . likened unto ten virgins . . . to meet the bridegroom”¹⁶ The main character of this parable is the bridegroom; symbolically, He is the Son of God. When we look at the parable symbolically, the ten virgins and bride represent the church or God's chosen, covenant people. In the Old Testament, Zion and Jerusalem represented the bride of Jehovah. This symbolism stemmed from Isaiah 62:5, “As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.” This image of marriage was carried further, so that whenever the Israelites broke their covenant with God for idolatry or sins, the Old Testament referred to it as “adultery.” (See also Isaiah 50:1; 62:5; Jeremiah 3:8; Hosea 2:2-5.) A “bill of divorcement” was spoken of when God's people broke their covenant (Isaiah 50:1; Jeremiah 3:8).

Jesus' parable incorporates part of the wedding festivities that occurred at that time. After the wedding was arranged, the families held a betrothal ceremony. Then about a year later, family and friends gathered the final wedding ceremony. A week of feasting usually took place at the home of the groom. After everything was pre-

pared, his family and friends formed a processional to escort the bride from her home to his. The procession of townspeople sang, danced, and carried torches, as they paraded to and from the bride's home.

In the meantime, the young bride's closest companions (usually between 12 and 15 years of age) prepared her by helping her bathe, dress, put on perfume, and prepare her hair. This was the only public exposure of her hair for the rest of her life. After her wedding, she must always wear a veil over her head and face in public.¹⁷ Both the bride and groom wore a wreath or gold headdress.

Once the processional returned to the groom's home, the final ceremony began. The groom gave his bride a ring and completed their wedding vows: "You will be my wife according to the law of Moses."¹⁸ After the ceremony, the bride moved into the groom's family home for a few years until they were old enough to financially live on their own.¹⁹

Matthew 25:2 "five . . . wise, and five . . . foolish" Jesus' story-telling grabs attention immediately. His simple well-known images have an unusual or new twist that draws in the reader to listen more closely. His labels



The Parable of Wise and Foolish Virgins (unfinished) by Peter von Cornelius, 1813. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

immediately engage the listeners to wonder what makes one wise and another foolish. Elder Dallin Oaks used this parable in General Conference to encourage us to prepare for the Second Coming.²⁰

Elder Marvin J. Ashton taught, “They were not pagans, heathens, or gentiles, nor were they known as corrupt or lost, but rather they were informed people who had the saving exalting gospel in their possession but had not made it the center of their lives. They knew the way, but they were foolishly unprepared for the coming of the bridegroom . . . They have been warned their entire lives.’ . . . These are cautionary tales to all disciples: look to your own life and behaviors.”²¹

Matthew 25:3–4 “foolish took their lamps and took no oil . . . the wise took oil” When going out at night, the cultural practice of the day required one to bring a small, clay lamp full of oil, and prudent people kept another small flask or vessel of extra oil.

“vessels” The KJV uses a vessel of oil, others translate it as flask, jar, or container (ESV, NIV, GNT). John W. Welch points out that the Greek word, *aggeiois*, is also used for blood vessels.²² Taking this image a step further, like the blood vessels, the vessels of oil can represent our need to internalize the oil of the Spirit, so that it can run through our whole being to give us light and direction.

“oil” The oil is identified as the Holy Ghost in D&C 45:56–57; “They are wise and have received of the truth and have taken the Holy Spirit as their guide and have not been deceived—verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day” (also see 1 Samuel 16:13, the anointing of David).

Olive oil was a basic staple of life in Israel at the time of Jesus. The first pressings of oil were used in temple sacrifices and ritual purification. Moses and his predecessors made consecrated or “Holy oil” for anointing the Tabernacle, priests, kings, prophets, alters, and in preparing the Passover lambs. As mentioned previously, Jesus’ title, “Christ” is translated into English as the “Anointed One,” or as “Messiah” in Hebrew. Jesus is the agent of the at-one-ment, but the Holy Ghost is the medium of the atonement. In early Christianity, olive oil symbolized the Spirit (Acts 10:38; 1 John 2:20).

Matthew 25:5–6 “the bridegroom tarried, they . . . slept. And at midnight . . .” The bridegroom is so much later than expected that everyone falls asleep. Allegorically, the Savior’s Second Coming has been expected by diverse groups of Christians for nearly two thousand years. Even though Jesus did not know when His Second Coming would happen (Mark 13:32), the parable teaches that it would be later than expected. Each generation, though, will go to see their maker, so Jesus warned that all need to “take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is” (Mark 13:33).

Matthew 25:7 “. . . arose, and trimmed their lamps” This verse is referenced and elaborated in D&C 33:16–17; “The power of my Spirit quickeneth all things wherefore be faithful, praying always having your lamps trimmed and burning and oil with you that you may be ready at the coming of the bridegroom.” Living the Gospel of Jesus is more than not *doing wrong*, it is actively doing those things that fill us with the Spirit of God. It is the anointing of the Spirit which brings us to Christ through the power of the at-one-ment.

Matthew 25:8 “Give us your oil” This verse can be confusing. As a people who try to share our goods and give to those in need, this may sound selfish or startling. I have asked myself, “Why not share a little oil, even if you only have an ounce or two? That is what the widow of Nain did for Elijah, right?” But Jesus’ oil is not the same. What the Lord is talking about cannot be shared. President Spencer Kimball explained:

The kind of oil which is needed to illuminate the way, light up the darkness is not shareable. How can one share a tithing receipt; a peace of mind from righteous living; an accumulation of knowledge? How can one share faith or testimony? How can one share attitudes or chastity, or a mission? How can one share temple privileges and security? Each one must obtain that kind of oil for himself.²³

This oil or spirituality must be experienced and developed individually (D&C 122:7). We must cultivate our



The Parable of The Talents by Willem de Poorter. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

own level of faith and testimony. In this sense, to carry an empty vessel is to have church membership without covenants, obedience, or the Spirit. We deceive ourselves if we think we are complete when our spiritual vessels are empty.

Matthew 25:9 “buy for yourselves” Olive oil was readily available as a basic staple—it was used in the temples, as food, for light, and as body oils. The problem with availability is the hour of the night.

Matthew 25:10 “while they went to buy, the bridegroom came” The lamps (symbolic of one’s covenants, or the testimony of church members) may at one time have been able to give light, but without the oil or Spirit, they could not be rekindled. The Greek word used for “shut/*kleio*” is the same word Josephus used to describe the state of mind of the Jews who came to Jerusalem for the Passover and for refuge two years before the city was destroyed. Thereby showing that...

Matthew 25:12 “Ye know me not” (JST) The JST makes a substantial change in the message. The difference is understanding the character of the God we worship. Our God *always* knows us: it is we who do not know Him (also see D&C 6:14, 20–22; D&C 121–122:7; Romans 5:4; 8:37–39; etc.).

4. Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25:14–30

Matthew 25:14 “. . . called his own servants and delivered unto them . . .” This parable continues with the same theme phrase as many past parables that refer to the Judgment and Second Coming of the Lord. However, it is *italicized* which means it is not in the Greek text, but rather is assumed to follow the earlier well-established pattern. Jesus begins with a man traveling to a far country referring to the second estate (i.e. mortal life) of God’s plan of salvation for His children. Jesus will no longer live among His people but will delegate to others. He asks His servants to do as he did and minister to others.

Matthew 25:15 “five talents, to another two, and to another one” A talent was the most expensive quantity of money, a monetary weight or coin (the modern word definition did not gain its meaning of “abilities” until the Middle Ages—perhaps from this parable). Historians surmise different values for the monies. One estimate is that one talent was worth fifteen years of labor for a servant/slave. Another suggests that one talent was worth 6,000 denarii, with one *denari* worth a day’s wages. Also, two denarii provided a man and his family one day’s living.

Thus, 1 talent provided 3,000 days of living for an entire family, or nearly a decade. Remember in the Greco-Roman world, household slaves were often given money at the end of their service to start up on their own. These different amounts may have represented the different amount of years each slave worked.

Matthew 25:16 “traded . . . and gained other five” (JST) Those who are able to use these blessings are able to double their worth for the kingdom. In D&C 82:18–21 the Lord declared that improving our talents is directly related to how we conduct ourselves in our stewardship responsibilities.

Matthew 25:21, 23, “well done good and faithful servant” God’s love will bless the Judgement with mercy, but His judgments will reflect how well we have carried out our stewardships. It is difficult in the modern western culture to really understand the master-servant relationship. By using some creative thinking though, we should be able to realize that it means to be a steward and servant. We have the Lord’s example as He took on the role of a slave to wash other’s feet, heal, feed, clothe, and comfort everyone who asked for help; we should do likewise.

Matthew 25:26, 30 “slothful servant . . . outer darkness ... weeping and gnashing of teeth” represents a place for the un-repentant. (See D&C 76:44, 103,109; 85:9, 101:81–91.) The story begs an application of stewardship responsibilities. It also speaks of repentance.

Jesus will Judge the World

Matthew 25:31–46

Matthew 25:31–33 “as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats” Jesus associates His judgement with a pastoral scene of a shepherd in the field separating his animals, not a cold, foreign room where an austere figure demands respect and silence. He will also have His closest friends helping with the task of making sure everyone goes where they desire.

Matthew 25:34–40 “as ye have done it unto one of the last of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” The blessing of serving those around us is doubly magnified on God’s judgement day. In addition to helping the stranger, naked, hungry, and prisoners, we have also helped our God. His work is to redeem, feed and clothe, so even without realizing it, those who offer loving service on any level, are serving God. His work and glory become ours.

Header Image: The Prophecy of the Destruction of the Temple by James Tissot, 1899.

ENDNOTES

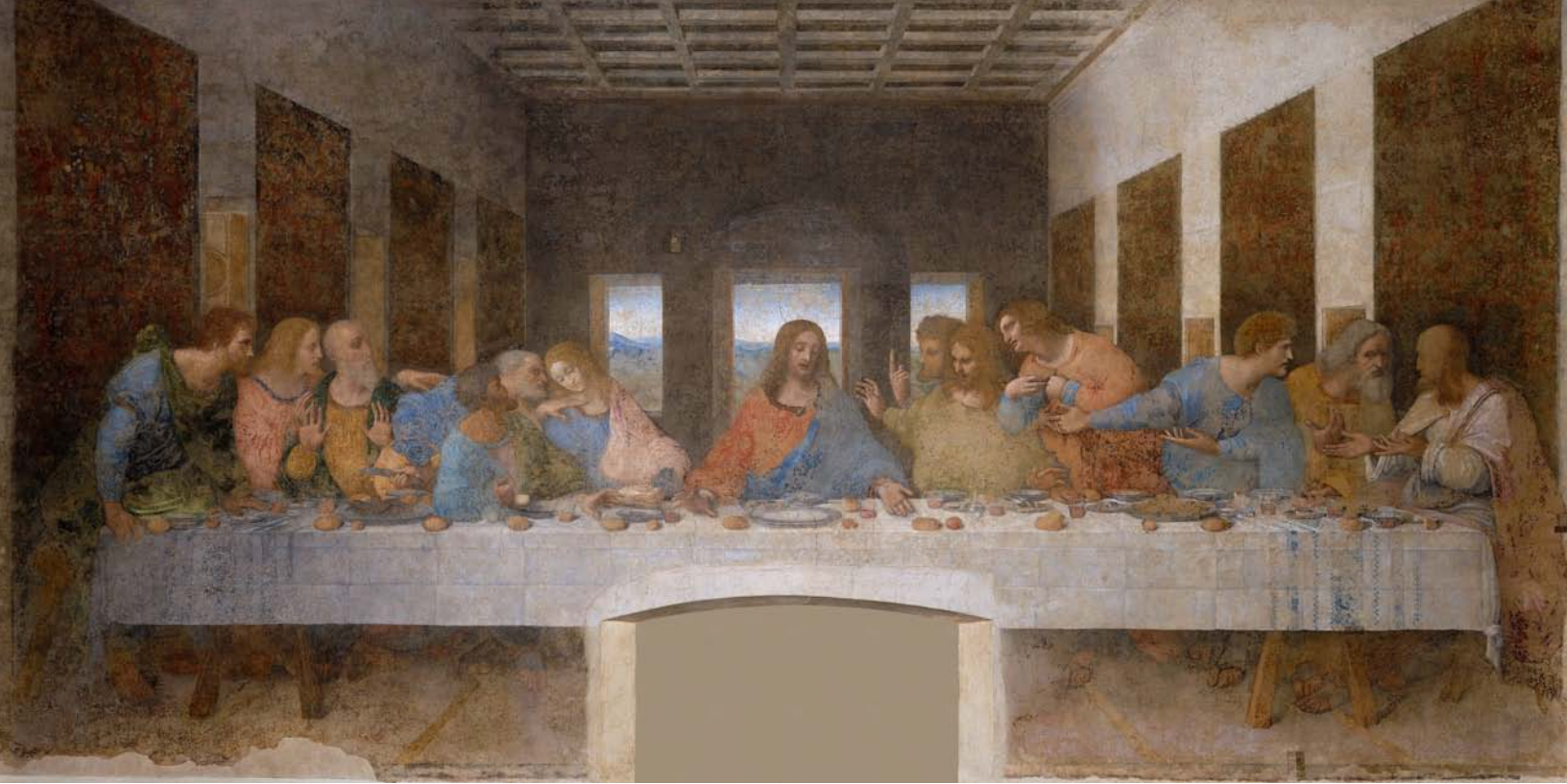
1. 2 Nephi 11:4; 25:20; Mosiah 3:15; 13:30-33; 16:13; Alma 25:15; 33:19-21; 34:14; 37:38-40; Ether 13:6; etc.
2. Cyrus Adler, ed., *Jewish Encyclopedia* (NYC, NY: Funk and Wagnalls, 1906), George A. Barton, “Temple of Herod.” “The Jews were loath to have their Temple pulled down, fearing lest it might not be rebuilt. To demonstrate his good faith, Herod accumulated the materials for the new building before the old one was taken down. The new Temple was rebuilt as rapidly as possible, being finished in a year and a half, although work was in progress on the out-buildings and courts for eighty years.”
3. Josephus, *Jewish War*, V.5.1; VI.1.3; VI.2.6; and *Antiquities of the Jews*, XV.11.3, 5; and *Bellum Judaicum*, v. 5, 5; etc.
4. Adler, ed., *Jewish Encyclopedia*, “Temple of Herod.” It is known as the Soreg inscription. A portion of it is found in the Istanbul Archaeology Museum.
5. Talmud—*Bava Basra* 4.
6. Several verses address the Lord’s Second Coming, including: D&C 19:11; 29:14-21; 45; 49:7, 22; 76:63; 88:87-91; 88:95, 99,104; 128:24; 130:1; 14; 133:2, 20, 46, 125; Isaiah 13:9-11; 40:3-5; 45:23; 49:11; 52:10; 60:2; 63:1; Daniel 7:13; Joel 3:16; Micah 1:3; Zechariah 12:10; 13:6; 13:6; 14:4; Malachi 3:2; Matthew 24; Jude 1:14; Revelation 1:7; 3:11; 6:12, 17-18; 8:1; and LDS scriptures’ Topical Guide.
7. Peter: Crucified upside-down in Rome, ca. AD 64; James son of Zebedee: beheaded ca. AD 44; Andrew: crucified; Philip: crucified ca. AD 54; Bartholomew: crucified; Matthew: halberd ca. AD 60; Thomas: spear; James son of Alphaeus: beaten by club, after crucified and stoned; Jude: crucified; Simon the Zealot: crucified ca. AD 7.
8. Large cities had synagogues with multiple scrolls, but smaller towns could only afford the first five books of Moses and the Psalms. After those six the next most common biblical scroll available at the time of Jesus was Isaiah.
9. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, Reprint 1844, 1980), 4.266. The Prophet Joseph Smith endorsed and published the following address by Brigham Young on the subject: “This is the election that we believe in . . . in the words of the beloved Peter and Paul, we would exhort you to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12, 13); ‘Giving all diligence to make your calling and election sure’ (2 Peter 1:10); for this is that sealing power spoken of in Ephesians (1:13, 14)—“in whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth; the gospel of your salvation, in whom also, after that ye believed ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of Promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, until the praise of His glory” (2 Peter 1:11); “For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Also see another sermon by Joseph on the subject in: Andrew Ehat and Lindon Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990), 334
10. Smith, *History*, 5.215–216. “If any person should ask me if I were a prophet, I should not deny it, as that would give me the lie; for, according to John, the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy; therefore if I profess to be a witness

or teacher, and have not the spirit of prophecy, which is the testimony of Jesus, I must be a false witness; but if I be a true teacher and witness, I must possess the spirit of prophecy, and that constitutes a prophet”

11. Early American Christians from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also expected an eminent Second Coming (especially the 20,000 Millerites who gathered for the event in 1844, only to be very disappointed).
12. President Thomas S. Monson, General Conference, October 2011, quoted Pres. Benson as saying, “While this generation will be comparable in wickedness to the days of Noah, when the Lord cleansed the earth by flood, there is a major difference this time: [it is that] God has saved for the final inning some of His strongest . . . children, who will help bear off the kingdom triumphantly.” Two and a half decades ago, at April 1993 General Conference, Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, “Just as foretold, our days actually are fast resembling the days of Noah, especially notable for their pattern of corruption and violence.”
13. President Gordon B. Hinckley, *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, 10 Jan. 2004, 20. “I do not know that things were worse in the times of Sodom and Gomorrah. . . . We see similar conditions today. They prevail all across the world. I think our Father must weep as He looks down upon His wayward sons and daughters.”
14. D. Todd Christofferson, General Conference, April 2019. “The Spirit made clear to me that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is uniquely empowered and commissioned to accomplish the necessary preparations for the Lord’s Second Coming; indeed, it was restored for that purpose. Can you find anywhere else a people who embrace the present era as the prophesied ‘dispensation of the fulness of times,’ in which God has purposed to ‘gather together in one all things in Christ’? . . . This great and last dispensation is building steadily to its climax—Zion on earth being joined with Zion from above at the Savior’s glorious return. The Church of Jesus Christ is commissioned to prepare—and is preparing—the world for that day.”
15. Russell M. Nelson, General Conference, April 2019.
16. In the Aramaic manuscript of this chapter it ends with “went to meet the groom and the bride” (ABPE), but most only include meeting the groom
17. *Mishnah, Ketuboth* 2.1; “She went forth [to the marriage] in a litter and with hair unbound . . .” (brackets in Danby’s translation). Skolnik, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 13.565; “Until the destruction of the temple both the bride and groom wore distinctive headdresses, sometimes of gold.”
18. Ken Campbell, ed., *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 190, 206. A typical marriage contract or *ketubah* read as follows: “This *ketubah* before God and man that on this . . . day . . . the holy covenant of marriage was entered between bride-groom and his bride, at . . . Duly conscious of the solemn obligation of marriage the bridegroom consecrated to me as my wife according to the laws and traditions of Moses and Israel. I will love, honor, and cherish you; I will protect and support you; and I will faithfully care for your needs, as prescribed by Jewish law and tradition.” The bride made the following declaration to the groom: “In accepting the wedding ring I pledge you all my love and devotion and I take upon myself the fulfillment of all the duties incumbent upon a Jewish wife.” Neusner, ed, *Judaism in the Biblical Period*, 411. Wednesdays were chosen as the day for a virgin’s wedding. “This is explained in the Babylonian Talmud by the fact that the court sat on Thursdays and thus if the groom claimed that the bride had not been a virgin he could immediately complain to the court.” Thursday was the wedding

day for a widow so that her husband could devote three days to her before he returned to work. Skolnik, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 13.566.

19. For more see, Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: GP, 2015), chapter 4.
20. Dallin Oaks, "Preparation for the Second Coming," *General Conference*, April 2004.
21. John W. and Jeannie Welch, *The Parables of Jesus: Revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2019), 143.
22. Welch, *The Parables of Jesus*, 142. "From it we get the English word angiogram, an X-ray procedure for the detection of blockages in blood vessels."
23. Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1972), 253–256.



JOHN 13–17

JESUS' LAST SUPPER

WASHING OF FEET THROUGH INTERCESSORY PRAYER

INTRODUCTION

John chapters 13–17, takes place during Jesus' last night of mortality. It begins with a private gathering in a room upstairs or in the upper part of Jerusalem and then ends on the Mount of Olives. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, John does not include the Passover at the Lord's Last Supper, nor the sacrament (which we will look at next week). John included the sacrament symbols in Jesus' "Bread of Life Sermon," but does not repeat them here.

Traditionally, Jews from around the Roman Empire came to Jerusalem for one of the three major pilgrimage feasts (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles). At each feast, the city swelled from ten to a hundred times its size. The permanent residence of ancient Jerusalem is estimated between 20,000 and 35,000 people, but Josephus' claims at Passover the city held two million (most assume Josephus' numbers are exaggerated).¹ The Passover is

followed by a week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread. It recalls the Children of Israel's exodus from Egypt (Leviticus 23, Exodus 12, and Numbers 28:16–25). The ritualized meal, or Seder, includes many symbolic details that looked backward to their miraculous redemption from slavery, and forward to their redeeming promised Messiah. Even the manner of seating was symbolic. Each person reclined on pillows or sofas, positioned on their left sides, with their head propped on an elbow, facing the table, and their feet stretching out. Unlike Leonardo DaVinci's painting of chairs around a table, this feast celebrated the Israelites freedom to recline, no longer obligated to stand as a slave.

John's account only mentions Jesus and the Twelve in attendance at the Last Supper. However, every meal would have required several other people present to help in with the meal. Kent Brown posits that the seven-plus women who had been traveling with Jesus to Jerusalem (Mary the mother of Jesus, her unnamed sister, Joanna, Susanna, Mary of Magdala, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and the "other women") were probably in the room as contributors to the meal (Luke 24:10).² As further evidence, they also knew exactly where to find the apostles, and "all the rest," on Sunday morning (Luke 8:1–3; 23:49; 24:9). If the female disciples were in the same room, it also explains why the apostles would go outside in the dark to find a place to sleep under the stars rather than stay in their rented room.

LAST SUPPER

John 13:1 "before the feast of the Passover" The Passover is the climax of the scene (John 11:51 and 12:1). John explains that Jesus knew "that his hour was come that he should depart." The symbols and timing here align beautifully with the sign of His sacrifice for the sins of the world as the "Passover lamb" (1 Corinthians 5:7; NIV). (I will discuss these symbols next week as the meal and suffering are elaborated in the Synoptic Gospels.) The miracle of God's timing is perfectly precise.

The timing of events in John's Gospel is also different than tradition. The Gospel of John places Jesus' Last Supper on Wednesday beginning in the late afternoon or evening (John 13:30).³ The Jewish calendar included three special days as part of the Passover celebrations. The first three days at the beginning of this of celebration were holy days: Nisan 14th (the Passover), the 15th (which is the first of seven days of unleavened bread), and the 16th (when they offered the first fruits). Each is mentioned in the New Testament. The Passover, as well as the last day of Unleavened bread, were treated as additional "sabbaths" (Leviticus 23:7–8). The Old Testament also defines a day to select the Passover lambs. The table below includes the scripture and calendar.

“. . . He loved them unto the end.” In his commentary in this verse preceding the Last Supper, John introduces one of the themes that Jesus will expound in the next three chapters: Jesus' perfect example of love.

SATURDAY

Nisan 10th, 11th,
12th

Select Lambs

John 12:12–13
John 21

Exodus 12:3

Triumphal Entry

Nisan 13th

Preparation

John 13:1,29;
19:14

Numbers 9:3,
5, 11

Last Supper–
Cross

Nisan 14th

Passover

John 18:28, 39

Leviticus 23:5;
33:3

Burial

Nisan 15th

1st Day
Unleavened

Mark 14:1; Luke
22:7

Exodus 12:15–
17; Leviticus 23:6

Tomb

Nisan 16th

Sabbath + First fruit Offering⁴

1 Corinthians
5:20, 23

Leviticus 2:1–3;
23:7–15

Tomb

SUNDAY

Nisan 17th

John 21

Leviticus 23:11

Resurrection

John 13:2 “The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas . . . to betray Jesus” (NIV). Unlike the KJV, the underlying Greek says that Judas had already started his plan, and was just now going to complete it. “Betray” in Greek means “to give into the hands of” or “hand him over.” Some theologians have debated the possibility that Jesus directed Judas to deny Him. This false idea comes from a gnostic attempt to honor Judas for putting in motion the Savior’s salvation. John describes Judas as greedy, a thief, a devil, and as the son of perdition (John 6:70–71; 12:6; 17:12). This idea of Judas and the other apostle’s infallibility is a false doctrine. It can be traced from Augustine and Calvin trickling down through nineteenth and twentieth-century theologians.⁵ Elder James Talmage penned, “Before Judas sold Christ to the Jews, he had sold himself to the devil; he had become Satan’s serf, and did his master’s bidding.”⁶

John 13:3 “He was come from God and went to God” This verse synthesizes the cycle of Jesus’ life. It echoes the message in John’s Gospel introduction in John 1:1–4.

Jesus Washes the Apostle’s Feet

John 13:4–5 “took a towel and girded himself . . . He began to wash the disciples’ feet” In the middle of the meal, Jesus stands and did something quite appalling. He laid aside His outer cloak (probably similar to a wrap like a toga) and tied a towel around His waist, like the apron of a servant. He also would have gathered a water container and some sort of clothe as He performed a slave’s task of washing the men’s feet. Over the past three years, He regularly shocked His followers with the things He said and did (i.e. talking to women, healing on the Sabbath, walking through Samaria, telling them to eat his flesh, etc.). Jesus had already taught them: “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,” and “If any man desire to be first, the same shall be... servant of all” (Mark 10:45; 9:45). Yet, they were still stunned when He took on the role of a slave or child and began to wash their feet.

The Jewish tradition of washing hands and feet was not new. The Law of Moses included the need for personal cleanliness (Leviticus 15:11; Deuteronomy 23:12–14). Priests also washed their bodies before temple service, and then hands and feet periodically during the service (Exodus 30:18–21; 40:31). Even after the return from Babylon in the Second Temple period, rabbis added many elaborate ritual washings to their daily life: they washed before meals, worship, and other events. Each different occasion had detailed instructions on how to wash, from simple hand washings to complete immersions in a mikveh.⁷ It was a child or servant’s job to help the head of the house with their washing, dressing, and eating.

Washing one’s begrimed feet before entering a home was needed after traveling in sandals on dusty roads and thorny pathways. The task of washing someone else’s feet was so revolting that even male Jewish slaves did not have to do it (Leviticus 25:39).⁸ The repugnant job usually fell to a non-Jewish slave, a woman, child, or oneself. If a hospitable host invited guests to his home, he would either assign a slave to help his guests wash their feet, or at least provide water for them to wash their own feet (Luke 7:44).

BACKGROUND: SERVITUDE

To understand what it meant for Jesus to take on this role as the slave child, it helps to understand the culture of indentured servants at the time. In the Judeo-Greco-Roman world, social hierarchy delineated every aspect of life. The lowest social class was made up of “slaves, women and children.”⁹ In AD 47, a census across the Roman Empire documented that one-third of the population was enslaved or worked as servants. That number rose significantly in cities like Jerusalem where half of the population was indentured servants.¹⁰ A normal middle-class citizen owned eight slaves,¹¹ though that number was less in poorer villages scattered across the Palestine countryside.¹² Because many impoverished families did not have enough servants to keep up with the work, they recruited their wives and children to take over the same workload. Even in cities, the head of Pharisaic homes considered women and children servants. Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish contemporary of Jesus recorded that women lived “in the rank of a servant.”¹³ Consistent with this protocol, in Jewish homes that followed rabbinic oral laws, children and wives called their fathers and husbands, “master.”¹⁴

Servitude took on a unique twist in an educational setting. In the student-teacher relationship (often referred to as disciple-master-teacher), if a student wanted to spend more time with his master teacher, he could volunteer to take over the servant’s job and feed, wash, or dress his master teacher.¹⁵ One rabbinical axiom interestingly includes one exclusion: “A disciple might offer any service to his teacher which a slave did for his master, *except that of unfastening his shoes*, which was counted as a menial’s duty.”¹⁶ Other historical writings claim that loved ones could wash their master’s feet out of respect.¹⁷ In either case, Jesus actions are startling to His disciples. He turned their social structure upside down.

Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet by William Hole, 1905.



John 13:7 “**You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will**” (NIV). When Jesus attempts to wash the disciples’ feet, they do not realize that He is introducing an ordinance. It is not until December 27/28, 1832 when the Prophet Joseph Smith received D&C 88:138–141 that he learned the “washing of feet” cleansed one from the blood and sins of their generation. A few weeks later, on January 23, 1833, in Kirtland Ohio, the Prophet Joseph restored the ordinance at a conference:

“We again assembled in conference, when, after much speaking, singing, praying, and praising God, all in tongues, we proceeded to the washing of feet (according to the practice recorded in the 13th chapter of John’s Gospel), as commanded of the Lord. Each Elder washed his own feet first, after which I girded myself with a towel and washed the feet of all of them, wiping them with the towel with which I was girded. . . . At the close of the scene, Brother Frederick G. Williams, being moved upon by the Holy Ghost, washed my feet in token of his fixed determination to be with me in suffering, or in journeying, in life or in death, and to be continually on my right hand; in which I accepted him in the name of the Lord.”¹⁸

We also have a record of the ordinance in the original hymn sung at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple. The original fourth verse to “The Spirit of God,” reads:

“We’ll wash, and be wash’d, and with oil be anointed
Withal not omitting the washing of feet;
For he that receiveth his Penny appointed,
Must surely be clean at the harvest of wheat.”

John 13:8 “**Thou shalt never wash my feet!**” Understanding that foot washing in this culture is for the lowest of the low, Peter adamantly refuses to have the Lord serve him as a slave. I can almost hear Peter raising his voice emphatically, “Never! Never! Will you wash my feet!” Peter’s spontaneous nature shows the goodness of his heart. He wants to serve the Lord, not the other way around. But I assume he would have been on the verge of tears as the Lord corrected him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” (ESV). In the preceding verse, Jesus had already warned Peter that he would not understand it until “hereafter” (John 13:7).

John 13:9 “**not my feet only but my hands and my head**” Peter changes his heart and mind immediately to align his will with Jesus. Peter’s confusion crumbled into humility. This may not be a saving ordinance like baptism, but the washing of feet is administered by modern prophets in temples. The Prophet Joseph administered it to 300 “official members” in conjunction with the sacrament.¹⁹

John 13:10–11 “he that is washed . . . is clean every whit . . . but not all” Jesus’ reference to “washing” speaks of inner cleanliness through repentance. Jesus symbolically washes their feet, but as He mentions it does not spiritually clean one if they have not repented. I wonder how Judas felt when Jesus washed his feet. The Lord already knew Judas had arranged to betray Him, and yet Jesus choose to minister to him. I’ve puzzled over why the Lord introduced the washing of feet while Judas was still there. After Judas left Jesus introduced the new commandment as well as the sacrament. Perhaps this sealed Judas’ fate “over unto the buffetings of Satan until the day of redemption.”²⁰ After the washing, Jesus refers to Judas as the son of prediction (John 17:12).



Jesus Washing Peter's Feet by Ford Madox Brown, ca. 1852. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

John 13:12–15 “ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example” Jesus teaches masters how to serve, but this runs counter to the natural man, as well as society’s view of hierarchy. Internalizing His example requires a huge paradigm shift. If we really understood this, we would jump at every opportunity to serve, work in the nursery, clean the bathroom, and take out the garbage.

John 13:16 “he that is sent is greater than he that sent him” This takes on even more meaning in Greek when the word “sent” is, “*apostolos*” the same word for apostle: “Neither he that is *apostolos* / sent greater than He that *pempo* / sent him.” An apostle is one sent by God to witness of Him. The Catholic scholar, John Perry, defined an apostle, as “one who has seen the resurrected Lord and been sent by Him to witness.”²¹

John 12:17 “If you know . . . do them” Doing what we know to be true requires discipline. Yet even though it is harder than expected, living up to what we believe does engender more happiness. There are always undulations in life and we need not beat ourselves emotionally into discouragement when we fall short. But Jesus’ precept affects not only our spirituality, but also plays a role in our psychology, psychiatry, and physiology. When we do what God asks of us, He rewards us with a gift of the Spirit to feel “happy” (KJV) or “blessed” (ASV, ESV, NIV, etc.). He send a peace of consciousness. The opposite is also true when we choose to act against what we know.

John 13:18 “. . . eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me” Here Jesus fulfills Psalms 41:9. Mark also quotes this verse in his Passion narrative. It is the first of only four verses they have in common. (John

cites nine Old Testament scriptures that are fulfilled in Jesus' passion, while Mark cites seventeen.) This verse describes an ancient insult: "To show the bottom of one's foot to someone in the Near East is a mark of contempt. Such an action was especially grave on the part of a friend who had shared one's table."²²

The "lifting up the heel" also evokes the curse given to the serpent in the Garden of Eden: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). Judas takes on Satan's role to bruise the Lord's heel, as Jesus is the only one born of the "seed of woman." He will crush Satan's head through His atonement, life, and death.

John 13:19 "I tell you before, that . . . ye may believe" Jesus' prophecy was fulfilled that very night. Jesus explained that He wants us to recognize the fulfillment when it comes. We too can see prophecies fulfilled as we look for them in our scripture, which will in turn strengthen our faith.

John 13:20 "whoever receives the one I send, receives Me, and . . . the One who sent Me" This verse ties back to verse 16 thematically, "one sent." The reciprocal message is synergistic, and receives a second witness in D&C 1:38, "whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants the prophets it is the same."

Betrayer Announced

John 13:21–22 "He was troubled in spirit . . . one of you shall betray me" Jesus' announcement shocked this close group of friends. I'm sure they could sense, to some degree at least, the affect it had on Jesus too. The KJV use of "*troubled*" meant: "to strike one's spirit with fear and dread; to render anxious or distressed." Jesus not only losing a friend, but He probably knows the consequences that lay before Judas.

John 13:23 "leaning on Jesus' bosom one . . . whom Jesus loved" This verse becomes important in identifying the authorship of this Gospel. John the Beloved did not mention his name in the text of his Gospel (similar to his not referencing the name of Jesus' mother, Mary, either). Instead, he refers to himself as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" at least six times. At the very end of his Gospel, in John 21:20, he identifies himself as the one who leaned on the bosom of Jesus. John's Gospel begins with Jesus being in the bosom of the Father (1:18). Now John represents himself similarly, tying these two together. In this scene, John the Beloved appears as the antithesis of Judas Iscariot, who has just been announced as the betrayer.

John 13:24–25 "Peter . . . beckoned to him . . . who is it?" Peter nodded or somehow signaled to get John's attention. Peter must have been sitting further away from Jesus and didn't want to interrupt. Especially after his misunderstanding of the washing of feet, he may have been reticent to question the Lord again. Those who study ancient Jewish table arrangements see the text as describing three couches placed in a squared horse shoe figure, probably arranged around a central table. John sat in the place of honor to Jesus' right with Judas not too far away

(perhaps on his left). Did Judas feel the treasurer required a place of importance?

John 13:26 “Sop” means morsel. Jews felt it a great honor for two friends to dip from the same dish, and an even greater show of respect to dip for one’s friend and present it to him as Jesus did for Judas. By offering the sop, Jesus extended friendship and love to Judas, knowing full well what will happen. Judas feigned his false loyalty by receiving the shared sop—and yet he later rejected Jesus to follow Satan’s leadership. (*Do we ever do the same?*) John alone shares this detail, so I wonder if he alone heard it.

John 13:27 “my peace I give to you” Jesus reads our hearts and minds both in heaven and on earth. Multiple times during his mortal ministry, he read people’s thoughts. He also controlled His own destiny, not Judas. Literally in Greek, Jesus said, “What you do” do quickly.

John 13:29 “Judas had the bag” The “bag” was the money bag/box that Judas held as treasurer for the Apostles. John includes that the Apostles did not realize what was happening, because they briefly thought that Jesus’ instructed Judas to go shopping for the Passover feast or for needed supplies for the long weekend. Also, Jews customarily gave something to the poor on Passover night.²³ We do not know what the apostles thought.

John 13:30 “He . . . went immediately out: and it was night” The main meal was normally eaten in the afternoon, but this meal appears to be at night (as the Passover Seder would be the following night). John intentionally added the time of day as he often juxtaposed light and dark (John 1, 2, and 3). The night symbolizes the darkness or the hour of Satan. His darkness is about to close in on the light through Judas, but only with Jesus’ permission.²⁴

With Judas dismissed, Jesus could move on and teach more freely. In most meetings, classrooms, or group discussions, everyone present has an impact on the spirit of the room, what is taught, what is felt, and how much inspiration is received. Notice that John no longer records anything about Jesus feeling “troubled,” but is only filled with the Spirit, wisdom, and love.

The New Commandment

To Love as Jesus Loves

Jesus begins His last discourse. It is the most masterful discourse recorded in the Bible. “The last Discourse is best understood when it is the subject of prayerful meditation. . . . It is the greatest composition in religious literature. The one who speaks here speaks as no man has spoken.”²⁵

John 13:31–32 “Now is the Son of man glorified” Jesus continued to rise in glory as He prepared the way to glorify God and all mankind. I interpret these two verses through the perspective of Moses 1:39, “This is my work

and my glory to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” This means that through Jesus’ work (the atonement), God is glorified. God’s glory is revealed through Jesus. Everyone can obtain more Glory, through Jesus’ great and last sacrifice.

John 13:33 “Little children, yet a little while I am with you” Jesus’ phrase, “little children” becomes a favorite for John as we find it seven times in his first epistle. Jesus refers to the eleven apostles (and probably the women in the room) as meek and mild little children. They were also, in a sense, ignorant as children about what was about to take place. Jesus referred to His sacrifice and death, but they had no idea where He was going. Jesus spoke of His great sacrifice right before He introduced the concept of Christ-like love. By putting these two ideas in close proximity He taught that the purest expression of love is sacrifice.



The Last Supper by Juan de Juanes, ca. 1562. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

John 13:34 “A new commandment I give unto you” Jesus’ farewell gift to His Disciples was the new commandment. As His disciples can’t follow Him, Jesus gave them a means whereby they could feel His Spirit in His absence. In John’s record of Jesus’ last discourse, he included seven references to “commandments” (his favorite number!). Throughout his Gospel and epistles, he discusses “commandments” 29 times. By using the word “new” Jesus pointed out that this law was different than the lower law given to Moses to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). For our Lord, the new commandment of *love* and *obedience* go together.

“Love one another; as I have loved you” Jesus asks His disciples to now love others more than we love ourselves—or at least how we loved ourselves in the past—because now we must also learn to love ourselves as Christ loves us. We must try to love as He loves. Jesus’ love is unconditional. Unconditional human love reflects Divine Love as the moon reflects the sun. Jesus’ life and sacrifice became “the pure prism through which the Father” reflected His love.²⁶ As all have the potential to change our hearts and permit the Spirit of God to magnify our capacities, we can grow toward receiving Christ-like love.

Christ-like love becomes a gift of the Spirit that is taught in all four Standard Works (1 Corinthians 12; Moroni 10; D&C 46; Article of Faith 7). It is a gift that we must work for. Whenever John refers to Christ-like love, he uses the Greek word, *agapao*, just as Jesus does here. Elsewhere in the KJV Bible, it is called, charity. Disciples can develop charity by asking God to help us see people as He does, by treating others as we would treat Jesus. Jesus wants us feel His love so that we too can love unconditionally.

John 13:35 “... men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love” The greatest *evidence* of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world is not its logic, but the inspired love that church members have. How can we express that? Perhaps this is one reason why we have recently been asked to invite our neighbors to “serve” with us. How can we better communicate that love to the world? 1 John 4:12 reads: “If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.” If we fill our lives with perfect love, we are filled with God (1 John 4:12). One way Christ loves us unconditionally is by knowing us well. Ministering to our fellow men allows us to get to know them better.

Prophecy that Peter Will Deny Jesus

John 13:36–37 “Lord, why cannot I follow thee now?” Peter does not understand the Lord’s future (v. 33) and was frustrated at the prospects of not being with Him. Peter expressed his earnest desires by volunteering to the extent of laying down his life for the Lord. One certainly can’t fault Peter for enthusiasm!

John 13:38 “the cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice” Jesus reigned in Peter’s eagerness with a healthy dose of reality. It appears that Jesus knew the future of his next few hours in great detail. His foreknowledge did not change Peter’s agency though. In John’s Gospel, Peter was *not* directed by Jesus to deny him, nor did he understand Jesus’ warning.²⁷

All four Gospels include Jesus’ warning to Peter and Peter’s denial a few hours later, each with a slight variation. There are very few items that all four Gospels share, and each is very significant to the history of Christianity.²⁸ I ask myself, “Why did the Apostolic Church carefully record this?” We can see a mighty change in Peter between this night and in the Book of Acts. Also, Peter’s example reminds all disciples, no matter how committed, that we must be aware and not fall into a time denial. Better still, this may be the strongest example in the New Testa-

ment on repentance and forgiveness. It illustrates the atonement beautifully, and the irony of its timing makes it even more significant. It offers great hope for those times, both unintentionally and intentionally, when disciples deny the Lord. It also begs the reader to ask, “In what ways do I deny our Lord?”

Jesus Answers the Questions Raised by His Announcement of Departure during Last Supper

John 14:1-3

John 14:1 “Do not let your hearts be distressed” (NET) Jesus comforted His disciples by giving them something to think about in times of trouble. Just a few verses earlier Jesus “was troubled in spirit” by thinking about His betrayer (John 13:21). He also felt “troubled” with the mourners at the death of Lazarus: “Jesus therefore saw her weeping . . . and was troubled” (John 11:33). Yet now, He announced a solution for the disciples during times of turmoil: “believe in God, believe also in me.” This is a powerful principle to help us overcome doubt, fear, and anxiousness.

The Bible links the heart with the intellect, not with emotion. We read of the “heart” as the seat of decision making, inner life, and the motivator for all that one did or thought:

- “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7),
- “. . . the thoughts of his heart” (Psalms 33:11),
- “The fool hath said in his heart, ‘There is no God,’” (Psalms 53:1),
- “. . . the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding” (Psalms 49:3), and
- “. . . thoughts and intents of the heart.”

The KJV Bible uses “bowels,” or “belly” for emotion. “bowels of compassion” (1 John 3:17; also see Philip 2:1, Colossians 3:12; Genesis 43:30; etc.).

John 14:2 “In my father’s house are many mansions . . . I go to prepare a place for you” The early Christian Fathers quoted this first passage in the plural, “*with my Fathers.*” The word “*mansions*” is from Tyndale’s Old English; the Greek word meant: “*a staying, abiding, dwelling, abode.*” In AD 202, the early theologian Irenaeus used “*dwelling place.*” Another early Church Father from the third century, Origen, understood it as *stations* on the road to God. Origen sounds as though he is describing Eternal Progression, especially as he spoke of a pre-mortal life. Other early Christians discussed it as “places (or situations) where the disciples can dwell in peace” with the Father.²⁹ It had no connotation of a stopping place. Moving forward to the restoration, in an extemporaneous sermon in Nauvoo, the prophet Joseph purported that “*mansions*” should be translated as “kingdoms.”

“My text is on the resurrection of the dead, which you will find in the 14th chapter of John: “In my

Father's house are many mansions." It should be: "In my Father's kingdom are many kingdoms," in order that ye may be heirs of God and joint-heirs with me. I do not believe the Methodist doctrine of sending honest men and noble-minded men to hell, along with the murderer and the adulterer. . . . I have an order of things to save the poor fellows at any rate, and get them saved; for I will send men to preach to them in prison and save them if I can."³⁰

Similar doctrine is found in D&C 76:20 and 84:37–38. We also find further insights in Joseph F. Smith's revelation recorded in D&C 138:18, 29–31.

John 14:3 “*And when I go, I will prepare a place for you, and come again...*” (JST) Jesus’ promise to come again will be fulfilled both in the millennium and was to be fulfilled during His visitations to the apostles and disciples during their forty-day ministry and to the present time. Jesus’ prophecy to come again, “and receive you unto myself” extended to disciples beyond the Twelve. Paul numerated, “He rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And . . . was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once.” (1 Corinthians 15:4–6; also see Acts 1:1–10).

The emphasis here is on the *future* labor that Jesus will do. Everything the apostles saw Jesus do so far in His ministry paled in comparison to the work that lay ahead of Him. The preparations for the righteous and wicked all awaited the Lord's death and resurrection. We have a description of Jesus' ministry to some of the lost tribes in 3 Nephi 11–26 nearly a year after His resurrection.³¹ We also believe that Christ instructed His disciples in the vicarious ordinances that allow more to enter into kingdoms of glory. We also believe He regularly taught the Prophet Joseph Smith as He unfolded His restoration of the fullness of times. We have records of the Savior visiting Joseph Smith in ten separate experiences.³²

Even in heaven the Lord (and His servants) have much work “to prepare a place for you.” During one of his glimpses into the spirit world, Wilford Woodruff was surprised to find the Prophet Joseph Smith in a hurry. It really bothered Elder Woodruff that in heaven one would still feel rushed, “I expected my hurry would be over when I got [to the Spirit world].” So, Wilford asked Joseph why he hurried and the Prophet explained: “We are the last dispensation and so much work has to be done [to prepare to go to earth with the Savior], and we need to be in a hurry in order to accomplish it.”³³

Jesus Is the Way

John 14:4–11

John 14:4 “**the way ye know**” There are many levels of interpreting *the way*, I will share four. During Jesus’ mortal ministry, He imparted His gospel plan for disciples to navigate the way to follow Him in the gospel path to the Father’s presence and exaltation. *The way* also refers to Jesus Himself. He alone is *the way* to the Father. I

appreciate Hugh Nibley's elaboration on both of these uses of *the way* in Jesus' conversation with His disciples,

"I shall return again, and I shall guide you through the processes that will lead you to myself, so that where I am you can be also. But where I am going you couldn't go by yourselves . . . You cannot possibly get back to the Father except you do it through me. I'll help you get there. I'll get you back there where I am. I want you to be where I am, but I'm the only one who can guide you there—nobody else can. I know the way, and I'll teach you what you must do."³⁴

John the Baptist's mission was to "Prepare the way for the Lord" (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 1:76, 3:4; John 1:23).

Third, "the Way" became a title for the earliest church before it was called Christianity. Saul/Paul referred to Jesus' disciples in Acts 9:2, ". . . if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them" (NIV; also see Acts 18:26; 2 Peter 2:2, 21).

Fourth, *the way* is also mentioned in the biblical account of the Garden of Eden: "the way of the tree of life" (Genesis 3:24). In this regard, Jesus is *the way* back to the tree of life. The way to the tree of life is the way back to the Father's presence. That way is outlined in the high priest's path through the Mosaic tabernacle. The way begins as he is washed, anointed, clothed, and cleansed by the vicarious sacrifices at the altar. Then he passes through the Sanctuary to the Holy Place, which was a large room with two small tables: 1) symbolizing continual prayers with incense, and 2) symbolizing covenant Israel with 12 loaves of bread and wine. As the high priest then proceeded to the veil at the end of the room, he passed by the menorah, a representation of "the tree of life" in a tree of light. "The way of the tree of life" refers to returning back to God's presence, *without* sin (Leviticus 16).

The tree illuminated the holy veil that led to the Holy of Holies. Only on the Day of Atonement, the one reigning high priest, after his ritual purification, passed by the tree of light, communed with God at the veil, and at last entered into the throne room that symbolized His Presence. The Throne was the ark and the covenant and its lid was known as the mercy seat. *The way*, as outlined in this Mosaic rite, speaks of the path Jesus trod. Jesus represents the altar, the sacrifice, the veil, and He is *the way* back to the tree of life (Hebrews 10:20; 9:8–11). Only Jesus could open *that way* again, as the veil will be rent at his death, allowing humanity to follow Him. Jesus' atonement is *the way* it all works.

John 14:5 "how can we know the way?" Thomas (meaning twin) has a hard time taking a leap of faith. Without knowing where Jesus is going, he wants some proof to know *the way*. The path of *the way* is often described as "strait" and narrow, meaning a difficult channel to navigate, like the Straits of Gibraltar (Matthew 7:13–14). In modern revelation we further learn about the difficult nature of this way: "For strait is the gate, and narrow the

way that leadeth unto the exaltation and continuation of the lives, and few there be that find it, because ye receive me not in the world neither do ye know me” (D&C 132:22).

John 14:6 “**I am the way, the truth, and the life . . .**” Jesus’ uses the sacred name of God again, paralleling His’ identifying Himself to Moses on the mountain. This is the sixth of seven, “I am the . . .” statements found in the Gospel of John.³⁵ Jesus is the only way back to our Heavenly Father: the path and the door. The only way to reach our goal of being with the Father is through the at-one-ment of Jesus Christ. His example and teachings are the complete path that all must follow. The early Christian Latin Fathers “understood that the way leads to both the truth and the life;” if believers live the truth, they “belong to the truth.”³⁶ When anyone comes to Jesus to learn more truth, they are not really learning truth unless they live it; John describes acting in the truth, or truth in the sphere of action.

The early Christians also regularly referred to a doctrine of the “**two ways.**” It is simply Christ’s way or every other way. Hugh Nibley, described it:

The Two Ways, depict life as a time of probation, a constant confrontation with good and evil and the obligation to choose between them. This is conceived as part of a plan laid down ‘in the presence of the first angels’ at the creation of the world, according to which through Adam’s fall the human race would



The Last Supper by Giacomo Raffaelli. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

be placed in the position, envied by the angels, of being perfectly free to choose good or evil and thereby fully merit whatever rewards would follow. Satan rebelled against the plan, refused obeisance to Adam, and was cast down upon the earth with his cohorts, to fulfill divine purpose by providing, as ‘the serpent,’ the temptation necessary for an effectual testing of human beings.³⁷

John 14:7 “If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also” As the Son of the Father, Jesus is the living representative of the Father. The verse also correlates knowing and seeing. Jesus is the living revelation of His Father, as He reveals the Father. This unity has been mentioned already in John 5:19 and 8:28). “One of the tasks that Jesus was to accomplish during his mortal ministry was to reveal the power, attributes, and character of God . . . Men beheld God through Christ. But it was a mediated vision, coming via the Lord through faith.”³⁸

John 14:8–11 “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father” In the Lectures on Faith (which Joseph Smith did not write, but approved), we learn the Father and the Son are identical physically.³⁹ This section of verses can be interpreted as either describing Jesus’ unity with the Father in purpose and glory, or Jesus as physically the same being as the Father in a trinity, three in one. Looking at this section in its entirety, especially verse 20 (and the rest of the New Testament at large), there is more continuity with the first interpretation. When we look at the teachings in the restoration from Joseph Smith’s First Vision through D&C 130, our understanding of the Godhead is even clearer. Here, Jesus explains that His words and works are not His, but His Father’s.

The Power of Belief in Jesus

John 14:12–14

John 14:12 “whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these” (NIV) This is an amazing promise! Does this mean that Jesus’ work in heaven will enable mortals to do more? Or perhaps that the influence through the Spirit will give us greater witness or power? In any case, the Spirit guides believers in an energetic manner. This idea acts as a transition of Jesus’ message from the *belief* in God’s word, to *receiving God’s help*. This powerfully unifies humans with God.

John 14:13–14 “ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” In Greek “ask/*aiteo*” is also translated into: to beg, call for, crave, desire, require. This type of sincere seeking or asking is mentioned throughout scripture, but rarely with such a great promise. The promise is repeated during the Last Supper (John 15:7, 26; 26:23, 24), “I will do it.” Although His promise is specifically to the disciples gathered in the upper room, I believe that whatever a humble disciple seeks, what is right or best in God’s perspective, will be granted at some time according to the Lord’s repeated promise. Elsewhere the promise includes two important qualifications—it has to be right or good, and with faith: “Whatsoever thing ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is good, in faith believing that ye shall receive, behold, it shall be done unto you” (Moroni 7:26).

The Other Comforter

John 14:15–25

John 14:15 “If you love me, keep my commands” Our motivation to obey the Lord’s commandments should come from our love for Him. This is the second time we find this theme of “commandments” during the Last Supper discourse. And as we saw in Jesus’ new commandment, obedience to the commandments and love go together.

John 14:16–17 “he shall give you another Comforter . . . the Spirit of truth” Unlike the “first comforter” (or the Holy Spirit), which can simultaneously be enjoyed by every qualified person, the Second Comforter can only be experienced at a given place, at a given time, by a given person. Just before the Prophet Joseph Smith’s death, he elaborated on what the “first comforter” was in an extemporaneous sermon in Nauvoo: “the Holy Ghost, the same as given on the day of Pentecost, and that all Saints receive after faith, repentance, and baptism. This first Comforter or Holy Ghost has no other effect than pure intelligence.”⁴⁰ Next Joseph moved onto explain the role of the “other” or second comforter.

The **other Comforter** spoken of is a subject of great interest, and perhaps understood by few of this generation. After a person has faith in Christ, repents of his sins, and is baptized for the remission of his sins and receives the Holy Ghost (by the laying on of hands), which is the first Comforter, then let him continue to humble himself before God, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and living by every word of God, and the Lord will soon say unto him, Son thou shalt be exalted. When the Lord has thoroughly proved him, and finds that the man is determined to serve Him at all hazards, then the man will find his calling and his election made sure, then it will be his privilege to receive the **other Comforter**, which the Lord hath promised the Saints, as is recorded in the testimony of St. John in the 14th chapter, from the 12th to the 27th verses. . . Now what is this **other Comforter**? It is no more nor less than the Lord Jesus Christ himself; and this is the sum and substance of the whole matter; that when any man obtains this last Comforter, he will have the personage of Jesus Christ to attend him, or appear unto him from time to time, and even he will manifest the Father unto him, and they will take up their abode with him, and the visions of the heavens will be opened unto him, and the Lord will teach him face to face, and he may have a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of God; and this is the state and place the ancient Saints arrived at when they had such glorious visions—Isaiah, Ezekiel, John upon the Isle of Patmos, Paul in the three heavens, and all the Saints who held communion with the general assembly and Church of the First Born.⁴¹

Some of the ideas included in Joseph’s sermon on the “other Comforter” as a personal appearance of the Savior to those faithful saints after they have made their calling and election is also found in 2 Peter 1 and a dozen other scriptures.⁴² The Lord restored and clarified this doctrine in D&C 88:3, “I now send upon you *another*



Image of Jesus Christ via Pixabay.

Comforter, even upon you my friends, that it may abide in your hearts, even the Holy Spirit of promise; which other Comforter is the same that I promised unto my disciples, as is recorded in the testimony of John” (also see D&C 132:19–20).

John 14:18–19 “I will not leave you comfortless” This can include the coming Gift of the Holy Ghost, Jesus’ post resurrection visits, and the promise of the Second Comforter just discussed. It is another fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14, “Immanuel” or “God with us” coming in the flesh and staying with humanity.

John 14:20–21 “at that day” Often in scripture this phrase describes the time of God’s final intervention with the world—either the restoration, the judgment, or the Second Coming. Whenever that day occurs, the close relationship between the Father and Son will be shared by those worthy of their presence, “ye in me, and I in you.” This verse acts like a prelude to the ideas shared in the intercessory prayer in John 17. It sounds as though the indwelling of the Lord (and in verse 23, the Father), is different than the presence of the Spirit.

John 14:22 “Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot . . .” This Apostle is also referred to as Jude in Luke. We also have another Jude, the brother of the Lord, who is the traditionally held author of the epistle of Jude.

John 14:23–24 “we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” Judas’ question opens the door for Jesus to teach the reason why the world cannot receive God. Simply stated, they do not love and obey the Father. Those who refuse Jesus will not see the Father. (Note, the verse says, “we” will come.) I see this as one of the steps involved in couples receiving their callings and elections made sure (D&C 132:18–19, 26).

The Spirit or First Comforter

John 14:26–31

John 14:26 “the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name . . .” Coming in the Lord’s name implies great unity between the Spirit and Jesus. The Spirit will take on a stronger role when the Savior dies. The Spirit becomes Jesus’ successor. The Apostles are not Jesus’ successors. “There is only one successor to the Lord mentioned in the Bible and that is the Holy Ghost... A successor is one who comes after and takes the place of another . . . one must hold his identical office . . . the scriptures never call the apostles Christ’s successors.”⁴³

Jesus' gift of the Spirit harkens back to John the Baptist's prophecy of the Messiah. When John the Baptist described the Messiah's mission he described Him as, "he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost" (John 1:33). Jesus was about to fulfill that prophecy.

"the Holy Ghost, . . . shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance" The apostles were able to write the Lord's words, "everything I have said to you," through the inspiration of the Spirit. The same promise can apply to others who seek to testify and remember their promptings. The Prophet Joseph taught, "No man can receive the Holy Ghost without revelation."⁴⁴ If you feel the Spirit now, you are on the right road!

John 14:27 "my peace I give unto you" The Lord bequeathed peace/*shalom* in mortality not just in heaven. When we are freed from sin and united with God, we have the most important freedom. When we can receive Jesus' peace through the Spirit, we are not "afraid" or "troubled" (which ties back to Jesus' beginning thoughts in John 14:1). To receive His gift, we must want it more than the cares of the world that overpower us and cause us to sin.

John 14:28 "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father" The apostles' understanding of love at this point was more possessive than generous, more selfish than selfless. If they really understood God's plan, we would be rejoicing. The glorification of Jesus results in the same for mankind. (This verse clarifies the separate nature of the Godhead from John 13:8–11).

John 14:29 "I have told you before . . . that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe" Knowing the Lord's prophecies will allow us increase our belief when we see their fulfillment. Before we see the Lord's hand though, we as disciples must walk by faith.

Apostles Leave the Upper Room

John 14:30 " . . . for the prince of darkness, who is of this world cometh, but hath no power over me, but he hath power over you. And I tell you these things, that ye may know that I love the Father. . ." (JST) The next several hours of Jesus' life involved combat with Satan. As we read in John 4:34, Jesus' only desire is to do the will of His Father. John's Gospel continues to return to the theme of light and darkness.

John 14:31 "Arise, let us go hence" This stopping point is not the conclusion of Jesus' discourse; there are three more chapters separating the passion. Textual scholars see this as evidence of an editor's drafts. I wonder though, if the group, or at least the men who would sleep outside, actually "arose" and went outside. The following text sounds as if Jesus were looking at things on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, staring with vines.

Jesus Breaks Bread and Gives the Cup by William Hole, 1905.



Intimate Relationship between Jesus and His Followers

John 15:1-17

John 15:1 “I am the true vine” This is Jesus’ last “I am . . .” example that John included in his Gospel. Jesus referred to His Father as the gardener and Himself as the vine, with the disciples as the branches. References to “the vine”/ *ampelos* (Greek) / *gephen* (Hebrew), are found in 65 verses throughout scripture. Jesus used the same symbolism here that we find in many OT stories, including Psalms 80:8-6; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 2:21; and Ezekiel 15-19:10.

The “vine” is also mentioned in the father’s blessing that Jacob gave his son Judah. Jacob prophesied that a righteous ruler would come through Judah’s lineage: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass’s colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grape” (Genesis 49:10-11).

In the Book of Mormon, the best analogy of the vine is in the agricultural masterpiece, Jacob 5, Zenos’ Allegory of the Olive Tree.⁴⁵ The phrase, “true vine” is only found twice elsewhere, both in the Book of Mormon, and both refer to the Lord.

1 NEPHI 15:15

And then at that day will they not rejoice and give praise unto their everlasting God, their rock and their salvation? Yea, at that day, will they not receive the strength and nourishment from the **true vine**? Yea, will they not come unto the true fold of God?

ALMA 16:17

That they might not be hardened against the word, that they might not be unbelieving, and go on to destruction, but that they might receive the word with joy, and as a branch be grafted into the **true vine**, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord their God.

John 15:2 “every branch that does bear fruit, He prunes to make it even more fruitful” (BSB) The purpose of the vine is to bear fruit. If the branch is correctly nourished and pruned, it can give more fruit. Symbolically, God’s pruning gives evidence His knowledge of the branches’ potential. When we feel God’s pruning, we can hope to grow more of His fruit.

John 15:3 “Ye are clean through the word” We become cleansed through the WORD / *logos*—which, as we read in John 1:1, refers to the Lord—invoking the Savior’s atonement. Words from a text, are not what make



Jesus is the true vine. Image via Pixabay.

us clean. But Jesus' words become a vehicle moving our thoughts and lives to God's Word, Jesus Christ.

John 15:4–6 “Abide in me” Jesus' charge can be each disciple's goal. It is not enough just to be tied to the vine; we actually must become part of it. We can do nothing on our own, only in and through the power of Jesus. Jesus emphasizes the link between the vine, the branches, and the fruit. To “abide” with someone refers to living with them—submitting to house rules, helping with house work, etc. Additionally, nourishment only comes from the vine, so disciples must not let go. If we are not part of the true vine, our spirits die and we are cast off as dead firewood.

John 15:7 “If ye abide in me . . . ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done” Jesus mentioned this earlier (John 14:14), but He explains it in more detail here. We won't ask amiss if we are in tune with the Spirit or if we are abiding in Him. This conditional makes all the difference in our prayers. Before we ask, we need to determine if we are in tune with the Spirit and if our request is the Lord's will.

John 15:8 “. . . my Father [is] glorified, [if] ye bear much fruit” God's glory comes when His children are fruitful. This verse is as close as the Bible gets to teachings Moses 1:39, “This is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” When one bears fruit, they demonstrate their discipleship. “Becoming or being a disciple is the same of being or remaining in Jesus.”⁴⁶

John 15:9 “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you” This same theme is picked up in John's first epistle: “If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:12). This teaches that disciples can feel God's love more often by loving others unconditionally. John's uses the Greek word *agape* here—the same word Paul uses for charity (1 Corinthians 13). Here, it is used in the present tense or “continuous character,” *agapan*, which gives “the connotation of love made manifest.”⁴⁷

John 15:10 “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love” If we love God, obedience and service follow as an expression of that love. The second half of this verse changes Jesus' earlier statement in the present tense (describing how Jesus enjoys His Father's companionship, “I do always those things that please him,” see John 8:29), to now being in the past tense, at the end of His mission: “I have kept my Father's commandments.”

John 15:11 “my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” Living these principles creates a synergistic relationship—with both the Lord’s joy and the disciples’ joy being full as a result.

John 15:12–13 “. . . Greater love . . . a man lay down his life for his friends” Jesus repeats the “new commandment” and then offers His death as a sign of His love (John 13:34). Jesus “juxtapos[es] the principles of sacrifice and love.”⁴⁸ This powerful foreshadow of Jesus’ death was repeated by John in his first epistle (1 John 4:10). The word for “friends” / *philos* is also to describe Lazarus’ relation to the Lord in 11:11.

John 15:14–15 “my friends . . . do whatsoever I command” Now the disciples are following the Lord’s directions, and Jesus elevates them to *philos*, friends and confidants. The Lord called Abraham His friend, He called Joseph His friend, and here we learn *all those who obey* are His friends. President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “He is my friend, my Savior, my Lord, my God . . . You will come to know your Redeemer is your greatest friend in time or eternity.”⁴⁹

John 15:16 “I have . . . ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit” The Lord gave His apostles (and possibly all saints who chose to obey the Lord) the blessings or “ordinations” in His kingdom if they / we will work to bring forth good fruit. In the Greek Septuagint, the word “ordained / *tithemi* / to set, fix establish” is often associated with the laying on of hands. For example, Moses commissioned Joshua by the laying on of hands (Numbers 27:18, LXX). The Twelve have a uniquely special commission. Jesus again commands His disciples to ask in His name and promises that Heavenly Father will provide.

John 15:17 “I command you, that ye love . . .” This is the seventh time in this sermon (chapters 13–17) where the disciples are *commanded to love*, and the eleventh time “love” is mentioned at the Last Supper. We learn to *really* love by the Lord’s example and direction. Jesus commands His disciples to follow, or to do the things He commands, so that they learn to love one another.

The World Hates Jesus’ Followers

John 15:18–27

John 15:18 “the world . . . hated me before it hated you” The call to serve the Lord also opens the doorway for persecution: “the mission of the disciples . . . arouses the hatred of the world.”⁵⁰ That hatred is not a passing thing, but comes from worldliness, just as love comes from Godliness. As special witnesses of God, the Apostles stand in opposition to all wickedness.

John 15:19 “If ye were of the world, the world would love . . . you” This a great message to internalize and remember when you feel persecuted. The “world” personifies Satan and his false teachings, in the “well-known maxim, ‘you can buy anything in the world for money.’”⁵¹ The devil always counterfeits the Lord. He asks us to

disobey God, worry about ourselves more than others, hide, and deceive. To serve and love God more, we avoid things of the world and value the things of God.

John 15:20 “If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you” Those who are persecuted for the Lord’s sake are walking in the same footsteps He trod. Going against the world’s standards of immodesty, immorality, irreverence, and dishonesty takes courage and loving the Lord more than social acceptance.

John 15:21–24 “now they have no cloak for their sin” Jesus turns to the world’s guilt and sin. Those who have seen God’s hand and heard His teachings will be held accountable for that opportunity and knowledge. Jesus assures His followers that those who fight against them also fight against Him and His Father. Denying truth is denying God.

John 15:25 “They hated me without a cause” Jesus quotes Psalms 35:19. Besides the Torah (first five books of Moses), scrolls of the Psalms were the next most available scripture to Jews across the Roman Empire. The very books that the Jewish leaders studied and held as their favorites convicted them of hating (and soon killing) their Messiah. Their rejection of Jesus also fulfilled several other prophecies. Interestingly, a century or more before Jesus’ birth, the Jews carefully combed through their sacred texts to find verses that prophesied of their coming Messiah and included them in a text known as “The Psalms of Solomon.” In their collection, however, there are no verses taken from Isaiah’s “suffering servant passages” (i.e. Isaiah 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12). They were not looking for a persecuted Messiah.

John 15:26 “the Spirit of truth . . . shall testify of me” Jesus returns to the promised Comforter, who will provide comfort to those who are persecuted by testifying of truth. This is a significant boost: even with persecution, disciples will be able to withstand through the witness of the Spirit. Jesus promises the Spirit to those who believe on Him (D&C 5:16). When believers are persecuted, they can give voice to the Spirit’s witness of Jesus. It is also through the indwelling of the Spirit that apostles can speak and represent the Lord.

John 15:27 “You also must testify” (NIV) With the witness of the Spirit comes the responsibility to testify as well. Acts 1:8 explains, “you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses.” The verse speaks to the apostles who have a more acute charge to witness of Jesus as special witnesses.

The verse also has a broad application, as Jesus calls all witnesses to testify.

CHAPTER 16

In chapter 16, Jesus continued to prepare the disciples for the persecution that awaited them. In chapter 15, He contrasted the difference between His love for them and the world's hatred. He now developed His thoughts on the Spirit's protection against persecution and sorrow.

John 16:1 “I have told you so that you will not fall away” (NIV), “stumble” (WEB), “be offended” (KJV). Jesus explained that the *reason* why He has warned them ahead of time is so that their faith will not falter when they are persecuted. Otherwise, persecution can turn to fear, and fear is of the devil. The same applies to our generation when persecutions arise, when we feel offended by the Lord's church, or fear the disasters of the Last Days. Jesus' warnings encourage us to patiently seek the Spirit for protection—spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Jesus warned followers to look beyond the short-term calamity and rely on the Spirit's gift of faith to “be still and know that I am God” (D&C 101:16; Psalm 46:10).

John 16:2–4 “whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service” Jesus prophesied the apostles—like their master—would be hated, persecuted, and killed. Persecutions come because the enemies of righteousness don't know God. It is misplaced zeal. The apostles and early Jewish Christians were excommunicated and within two decades were forced out of their homes in Jerusalem. (This became a blessing as they were all gone before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans from AD 68–70.) We saw similar persecution in the early history of the restoration. History records the evangelists' and apostles' martyrdoms as follows:

1. **Peter** was crucified upside down because he felt unworthy to die in the same way that his Master died;
2. **James** of Zebedee, was beheaded at Jerusalem—the first of the 12 martyred;
3. **Andrew** was whipped severely by seven soldiers in Patras Greece and then tied to an “X” shaped cross with cords to prolong his agony. Supposedly, Andrew continued to preach to his tormentors for two days: “I have long desired and expected this happy hour. The cross has been consecrated by the body of Christ hanging on it.”
4. **Bartholomew/Nathanael**, was flayed to death by a whip in Armenia;
5. **Thomas** was stabbed with a spear in India;
6. **Matthew / Levi** was martyred by a sword wound in Ethiopia;
7. **Phillip** died by crucifixion;
8. **Simon the Zealot** was killed in Persia;
9. **Judas Thaddaeus** was killed in ancient Syria (though modern Beirut) with club or ax;
10. **Matthias** (the apostle chosen to replace Judas Iscariot), was stoned and then beheaded;
11. **Barnabas** was stoned to death at Salonica;

12. **James** the brother of Jesus, was thrown from the 100' pinnacle on the southeast side of the Temple and then beaten with a fuller's club;
13. **Jude** the brother of Jesus, was killed with arrows;
14. **Paul** was tortured and beheaded in Rome;
15. **Mark** was dragged by horses through the streets of in Alexandria, Egypt until he was dead;
16. **Luke** was hanged after preaching in Greece.

John 16:5–6 “I go my way to him that sent me” Jesus explains again, as a third witness, that He is going to die and return to His Father. In the next breath, even before the disciples verbalize it, He acknowledged their sorrow, and immediately encouraged them with a cause of happiness: the forthcoming promise of the Holy Spirit. Repeatedly, He referred to sorrow followed by the future joy (i.e. John 16:20–22).



Dove of the Holy Spirit, stained glass ca. 1660 by Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Photo by Dnlor 01. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

The Holy Ghost as a Shield and Guide in the World

John 16:7 “It is expedient . . . if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you” Apparently, the ministry of Christ had to end before the Comforter could come. Before Jesus was on earth the Spirit functioned on earth, but it appears that at some level at least, the Comforter did not function during Jesus’ ministry. (Was this referring to the lack of the *gift of the Holy Ghost*, or Second Comforter?) I wonder exactly to which aspect of the Spirit the Lord was referring.

The Spirit of truth and the Light of Christ were active (John 4:23; 1 John 5:6; Moroni 7:18–19). Many of the fruits and gifts of the Spirit were in full force (patience, kindness, visions, healings, etc.). Even the Holy Spirit of Promise worked to ratify John the Baptist’s baptisms and other ordinances.⁵² Yet, these evidences of the Holy Spirit are not what Jesus was talking about. Interestingly, when Peter testified of Jesus’ Divinity, the Lord responded, “flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my *Father* which is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17). He gave no credit to the Spirit, but rather to Heavenly Father. When Martha bore an even stronger testimony before Lazarus’ raising, neither the Father nor the Spirit was acknowledged (John 11:27).

The word “Comforter” comes from the Greek, “*paraclete*” (used four times, and once as advocate). Literally, this word means: “an advocate or intercessor summoned to aid.” Jesus cannot become our advocate, nor can the

Spirit become our cleansing agent without His at-one-ment. Perhaps the Spirit could not function at the fullest power without the Lord's death and resurrection. Likewise, after His departure, the "other Comforter," or the glorified presence of Jesus and His indwelling, could not come (see earlier notes on John 14:16–17).

John 16:8–11 “. . . he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” The Comforter's role is outlined in three points and then explained in the next three verses. The Spirit will:

1. Reprove (also means “*convict*” as our conscious) the world of sin for not accepting Jesus;
2. Witness of the righteousness of Jesus, and validity of His death and resurrection;
3. Judge wicked influences as evil, and teach disciples how to judge between good and evil.

By fulfilling these three functions—the Spirit brings women and men to repentance.

John 16:12 “**I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear**” (NIV). This verse is the promise of future revelation. It is also a good reminder that sometimes we do not receive more revelation (both personal and church wide), because we are not prepared. Jesus' earthly mission may have been nearing completion (John 15:15), but He had more to teach after His death when His followers were ready. Disciples are only taught as we have the spiritual aptitude to bear it—just as our challenges are not greater than we can bear.

When Jesus visited the Nephites at their temple in Bountiful, He also told them that they were not ready to hear more. Yet, in that setting, they yearned for more, and He gave them more by extending His visit significantly (see 3 Nephi 17:2–6).

John 16:13 “**He shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak**” The Spirit speaks what he hears from God. Jesus wanted to share more with His disciples, but they will be revealed by the Spirit (also taught in John 14:26). The most important questions we can ask the Father deal with whether He exists, whether He is our Savior, and what our place is in His plan here and in the future.

“**He will shew you things to come**” This phrase is interesting in light of John's account of the Samaritan woman at the well as she claims: “when [the Messiah] is come, he will tell us all things” (John 4:25). Now that role was going to be transferred from Christ's charge to the Holy Spirit.

John 16:14 “**He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine**” The Spirit will take over giving directions to the apostles. He glorifies the Son by testifying of Him. In addition, with respect to relaying messages for the Lord, the

Spirit will also receive charge over those who are His disciples, or those who have covenanted to serve Him. Jesus glorified the Father by revealing the Father to humans (John 17:4). In the near future, the Spirit will glorify the Son by witnessing of the Son to humanity. Both the Son and the Spirit work to bring humanity back to the Father.

John 16:15 “All things that the Father hath are mine” The Son understands that He is the heir of the Father (whatever that means in the eternities is yet to be revealed). Restored scripture reconfirms this doctrine that Jesus will inherit all that His Father has. (D&C 93:5–17 describes all power, wisdom, goodness; the fullness of truth and knowledge, and all good attributes.)

Jesus’ Farewell and Promise of a Joyful Reunion

John 16:16–33

Verses 16–33 form a typical Johannine chiastic structure⁵³ (although not a tight chiasmus’ like Alma 36 or Philimon).

- A **16:16** Jesus began and ended by predicting the disciples’ trials and eventual comfort come: “ye shall not see me . . . ye shall see me”
- B **16:17–19** The disciples’ intervening remarks: “said some of His disciples among themselves . . . What is this . . . Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask Him”
 - C **16:20–23a** Disciples promised blessings: “. . . your sorrow shall be turned into joy.”
 - D **16:23b** Ask the Father in my name: “Ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.”
 - D’ **16:24** Ask in prayer, in my name: “Ask and ye shall receive”
 - C’ **16:24b–28** Disciples promised blessings: “that your joy may be full.”
- B’ **16:29–30** The disciples’ intervening remarks: “His disciples said . . . thou knowest all things and needest not that any man should ask thee. . .”
- A’ **16:31–33** Jesus predicts the disciples’ trials and eventual comfort: “ye shall be scattered. . . leave me alone . . . in me ye might have peace.”

John 16:16 “a little while and ye shall see me” The timing turned out to be three days and nights. Elsewhere in scripture “a little while” can mean hundreds of years. The Lord’s timing may seem puzzling, but we can trust that it is an integral part of His miracles.

John 16:20–22 “your sorrow shall be turned into joy” Jesus prophesied the full spectrum of reaction that will accompany His death. To help the disciples understand their extreme emotions in the next few hours, Jesus used the metaphor of childbirth to explain what is going to happen (also used in Isaiah 26:17). Just as the birthing process has water, blood, great pain—even nigh unto death—followed by new life and exquisite joy, so too with Jesus.

John 16:23 “ye shall ask me nothing *but it shall be done unto you*” (JST) The JST adds substantial clarification. For the fourth time this evening, Jesus directed His disciples to use prayer as the vehicle to ask the Father for help.

“ask the Father in my name” This is the central message of this small chiasmus, which means the message on praying in the name of Jesus was the most important message in this section.

John 16:24 “Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name” This sounds as if the disciples had not prayed in Jesus’ name before. (We noticed earlier that the Lord’s Prayer did not conclude in the name of Christ.) Elder Bruce R. McConkie observes that, “Perhaps, also, there was a matter of propriety which would keep prayers from being said in Jesus’ name as long as he was present and going ‘from grace to grace’ (D&C 93:13) in working out his own salvation. In any event, prayers in his name were to commence ‘at that day’ (v. 26), meaning after his resurrection.”⁵⁴

John 16:25–28 “I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father” Jesus promised that when the time would be right, things will become clearer, and He will take His disciples to reunite with Heavenly Father. He can do this because of the circle His life. The Son came into the world to redeem it, and to reveal our Father unto us.

John 16:29–32 “ye shall be scattered, . . . and shall leave me alone” As the apostles defended their faith in Jesus’ divinity, Jesus cautioned them, knowing the challenges of their next few days. Again, I do not see Jesus’ prophecy of what lays ahead to be instructions for them to leave Him alone. That type of reasoning denies the human nature of the apostles and the prophetic nature of Jesus’ words. The verse ends by repeating that wonderful relationship between Jesus and His Father—The Lord had never been left alone because He had never done anything to offend His Father.

John 16:33 “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” Every time the scriptures mention the Lord’s command to “be of good cheer,” it comes at a time of great trial. It gives an interesting perspective to the commandment. If we apply Jesus’ counsel during these difficult times, and remember that He has overcome sin and death, then our trials fall into perspective and we can be of good cheer. By Jesus overcoming all problems and satanic influences, Jesus opened the doorway for us to do the same. Ironically, “No one else has understood sin as did the sinless Son of God”⁵⁵

Part of our mortal probation is the need to pass through afflictions; “after much tribulations come the blessings” (D&C 58:3–4). This was reiterated to the elders in this dispensation in D&C 64:2, and 3 Nephi 1:13. When the trials of the world feel overwhelming, we can find peace in knowing that everything is going to turn out for the

best—in fact, better than we can imagine. Victor Ludlow contrasted peace from the Lord’s overcoming the world with peace in the world: “There is a great difference between the kind of peace that Jesus spoke of and the world around us. We live in a wicked world, a world gone crazy with wanton indulgence and crime. Each day the news bears tragic record of wars, natural disasters, terror, and the frustrated efforts of mankind to avert or respond intelligently to the disasters. In spite of all this, Jesus has promised his followers that they may have peace in this world.”⁵⁶

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

How the Spirit Guides Disciples in all Truth

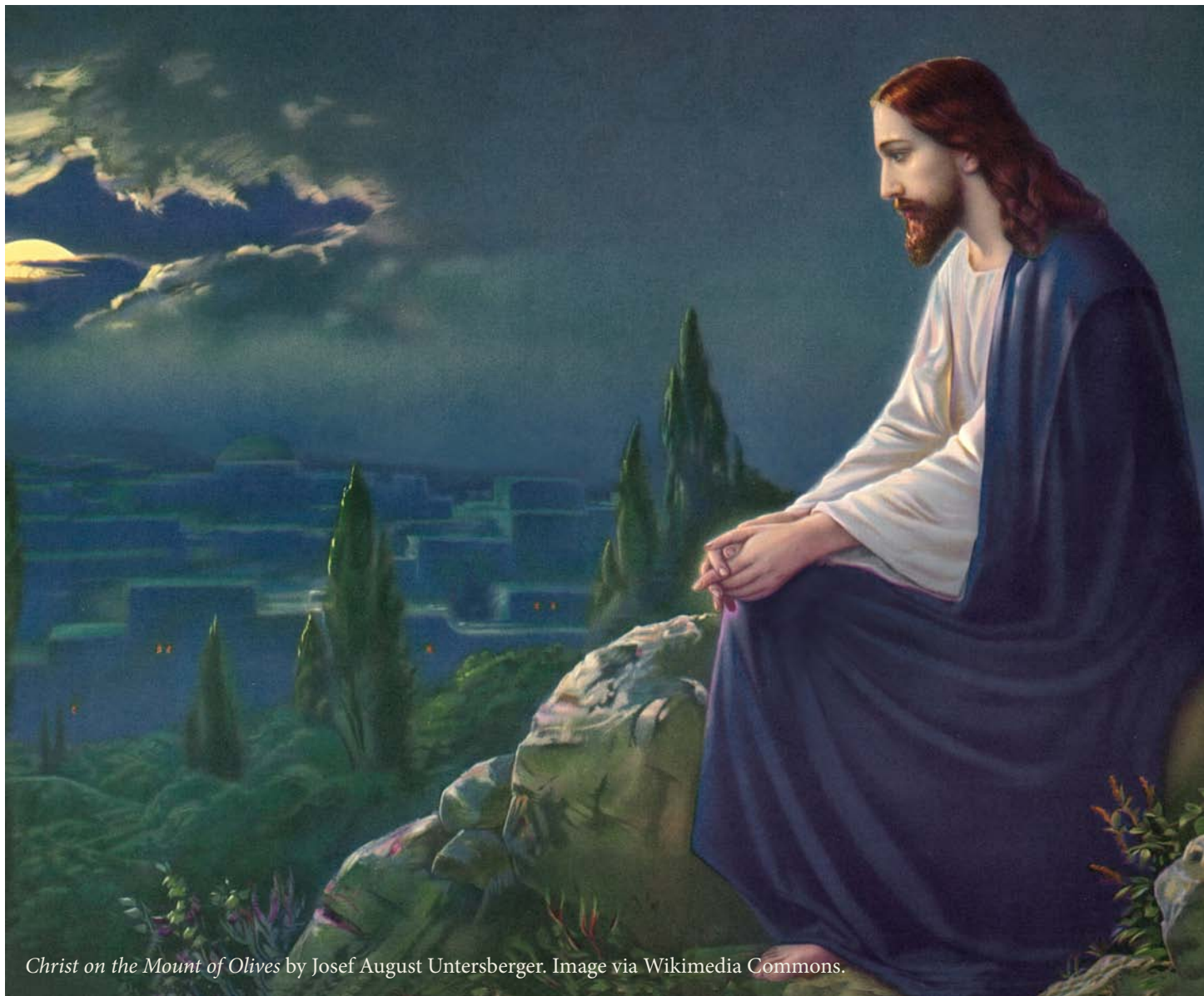
John 17 is the climax of the Lord’s final discourse. It is both a prayer and a farewell. (In content and form, it fits into the farewell genre.) President David O. McKay said it was the greatest prayer ever given. As early as the 5th century, Cyril of Alexandria referred to the prayer as a “high priestly prayer.”⁵⁷ The High Priest prayer dates back to the Law of Moses, where once each year, on the Day of Atonement, the presiding High Priest in ancient Israel entered the Holy of Holies. He performed the ordinance of sacrifice in behalf of the sins of all Israel. The High Priest acted as a mediator to intercede with the Lord on behalf of his people. As he communed with God at the veil, he uttered the name of God ten times (Leviticus 16). The author of Hebrews encouraged us to look for parallels between the Lord’s and the High Priest’s sacrifice (Hebrews 9:12–14; 2:10–11). I would add to look for parallels between the High Priest’s communion and the intercessory prayer.

This chapter unfolds the Godhead and our relationship to them. It also clarifies the separateness of the Father and Son. Interestingly, at the end of Moses’ farewell sermon he addresses God, and then in Deuteronomy 33, Moses blesses the tribes for the future—foreshadowing Jesus’ pattern. Hugh Nibley and J Ruben Clark have thought perhaps this prayer (and John 15–16) were given on the Mount of Olives, after Jesus said, “arise let us go hence” (John 14:31). I even go one step further and wonder, as John mentions nothing about Jesus’ suffering in Gethsemane, could this prayer on becoming “*one*” be the theology underlining the need for the sacrifice? Could it be part of Jesus’ great prayer in Gethsemane? John does not include the Savior suffering in Gethsemane, but instead includes a prayer pleading for the Father’s love and union to be shed on the disciples. It emphasizes the very roots of the *at-one-ment*. Even if this prayer were not part of Jesus’ Gethsemane experience, I see it as the answer to *why Jesus needed to suffer*. It also describes the doctrinal *prelude* of how Christ could become at-one with His disciples and all who come unto Him.

Jesus Prays for Disciples

John 17:1 “Father the hour is come” Jesus turned to His Father in prayer by lifting his eyes to heaven. We see the same in John 11:41, “Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.”⁵⁸ The

verbal prayer lasts the whole chapter. Jesus called his “Father” six times in the prayer (vss. 1, 5, 11, 21, 24, 25) and then referred to “thy name” four times (vss. 6, 11, 12, 26). Could this use of ten names parallel the High Priestly prayer mentioned above? Also, the prayer includes “I am” five times (a mini-Pentateuch).⁵⁹ Here Jesus’ desire was to finish the Father’s work. He asked that the Father might glorify Him. Glory for the Son is also glory for His Father and His disciples by bringing to pass the immortality and Eternal Life of man.



Christ on the Mount of Olives by Josef August Unterschberger. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

There is an interesting interrelationship here—each needs the other. The Father is glorified through the Son and the Son is glorified through the Father. We see this same dependency in the First Vision. “The Father needed the Son to accomplish his purposes, and the Son needs and looks to the Father for direction, power, and exaltation. By their acts of mutual service, each fulfilled, and was fulfilled, in the other.”⁶⁰ Likewise, our salvation is God’s joy

and His glory. In the same sense, the success of all children is the joy of their loving parents (Moses 1:39; D&C 88:60). “In like manner worthy Saints will be glorified through their children and their children through their parents.”⁶¹ God’s plan has a lot to do with relationships.



Jesus in Prayer by Alexander Bida, 1874. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

John 17:2 “power over all flesh that He should give eternal life” The Father appointed Jesus as the mediator over “*all flesh*.” (In Greek, flesh can mean humanity and/or beast.) Jesus acts as judge and will give the reward of Eternal Life to all those whom the Father “*hast given him*.” In this sense, the disciples became Christ’s children; He has spiritually saved them. Jesus gives the formula for exaltation: it is to love and obey God. As we obey Him, we see the wisdom of His plan, which draws us to seek for more light and truth. The journey to know our God begins with obedience: “to obey Him is to know Him. To know Him is to be one with Him and to possess eternal life.”⁶²

John 17:3 “this is life eternal, that they might know thee” Jesus defined Eternal Life as God’s Life, or having an intimate knowledge with the Father and Son. The Greek word, “**know** / *ginosko*” means close relation and is a Jewish idiom used for *conception* or intimate relations. Jews also used *know*, as “true knowledge,” which carried over from one’s thought to one’s conduct. One did not “*know*” something until it was practiced in one’s life. It is also translated as to perceive or understand. The early Gnostics interpreted knowing something or knowledge as intellectual learning, or secret cultic activities. Yet, Jesus explained that knowing God is becoming like Him. Our knowledge must be *of* God, not merely *about* God. We can *know* God only when we live His commandments and become like Him. Knowledge of God is gained as we are sanctified by Him and partake of His divine nature to become spiritually one with Him.

We find similar ideas in the Doctrine & Covenants. The Lord taught the Prophet Joseph that it is through our relationship with Him that we begin the path to live with God the Father in Life Eternal (D&C 78:7; 76:92–96). Joseph repeated this in at least two sermons: 1) “If you wish to go where God is, you must be like God, or possess the principles which God possesses.”⁶³ 2) “It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another.”⁶⁴

John 17:4 “I have finished the work thou gavest . . .” Jesus glorified the Father by doing what was asked of Him. Up to this point, He had done everything the Father had asked of Him. Four times John uses the verb “finished/ *teleioun*/perfect, consecrated, fulfill.” All four are in conjunction with the work of His Father. One feels as though Jesus had already crossed the threshold from time to eternity and was on the way to His Father. This prayer underlies “why” Jesus offered Himself as the great and last sacrifice. It was all part of the work of the at-one-ment.

John 17:5 “with the glory which I had with thee before the world” Through Jesus’ premortal obedience, He gained so much glory that He became more intelligent (i.e. light and truth, D&C 93:36), than all other of Heavenly Father’s spirits. In God’s kingdom “glory” comes from blessing others, not self-serving motives (Moses 1:39). God shared His glory with Jehovah (who became Jesus on earth). We learn in other books scripture that Jehovah / Jesus became a leader in heaven too (Abraham 3:19, 24; Hebrews 1:9; Mosiah 3:5), including being given the authority and power to create this earth and all things therein (D&C 38:1–3; Hebrews 1:2). Jesus will need that extra premortal endowment of strength to overcome His last mortal assignment.

John 17:6 “I have manifested thy name” Jesus glorified the Father by manifesting His plan and motives to His disciples (John 14:9–11). The name of God was sacred and important to His audience. The scriptures of His day read: “The Lord shall be for a name for an everlasting sign,” and “You shall be called by a new name which the Lord shall give.” The apostles received other ordinances described in Revelation 2:17 that included receiving a “new name.” John the Revelator also wrote of God’s name, “him that overcometh . . . will I write upon him the name of my God” (Revelation 3:12).⁶⁵

“thine they were, and thou gavest them me” In the second half of this verse, we are taught how Jesus becomes our father. In a sense, we are given to Jesus by the Father and then become Jesus Christ’s children as we take on us Christ’s name in this redemptive relationship.

John 17:7–8 “they did believe that thou didst send me” The apostles understood that Jesus’ power came from His Father in Heaven. In the prayer, at the end of His mission, Jesus reported back to His Father. He gave an accounting or stewardship report. Jesus explained that He revealed to the disciples everything God had asked Him to do. Jesus then reports that they have learned what they were supposed to learn.

John 17:9–10 “I pray for them . . . for they are thine” Jesus prayed for His disciples. It is as if He were recommending them to God the Father, reporting that they were ready to receive more or to possibly enter into His presence. Earlier Jesus commanded His disciples to pray for their enemies; but in this prayer it was for “His own” righteous ones. Those who come unto Christ with full intent are received by the Father.

“I pray not for the world” Jesus did not pray for those who rejected him, “the world” at large, but asked God to receive those who were prepared to return to Him. We are asked to come out of the world. John describes the world with the metaphor of Babylon in Revelation 18. Nibley describes it in twentieth century vocabulary: “all the good things that are for sale, the fast transportation, the chariots, the silks and satins and precious things, and the souls of men. You can buy anything. You can have anything in this world for money.”⁶⁶ This describes the world. Some think we can have both. Jesus has already taught you cannot serve two masters.

John 17:11 “Keep through thine own name, those whom thou hast given me” As Jesus neared the end of His mortality, He asked the Father to take care of His disciples, that they might be “one” or completely unified with Him. Nibley explains this verse with a slightly different twist than the KJV translation, “Test them on the name with which you endowed me that they may be even as we are one. This takes us back to the *kapporeth* [‘seat of atonement,’ the place where atonement and expiation was made] for only the High Priest knew [or was allowed to say] the name that he whispered for admission through the temple veil on the Day of Atonement.”⁶⁷ With this perspective, we see Jesus asking the Father to test His disciples to see if they were ready to have their exaltation sealed so that they “may be one, as we are,” Later in the prayer, Jesus returned to this theme of oneness in verses 21 and 23.

John 17:12 “none of them is lost, but the son of perdition” Jesus referred to Judas Iscariot as a son of perdition. This is how we know the Lord was not instructing him to deny him. This is also why I think that Jesus included him in the circle of those whose feet he washed. Judas denied the Lord after that sacred ordinance. In 3 Nephi 27:32, Jesus again referred to Judas. The betrayal had been prophesied in ancient scripture. Two of the scriptures that it might have been are: Zechariah 11:12, “they weighed for my price thirty *pieces* of silver;” and

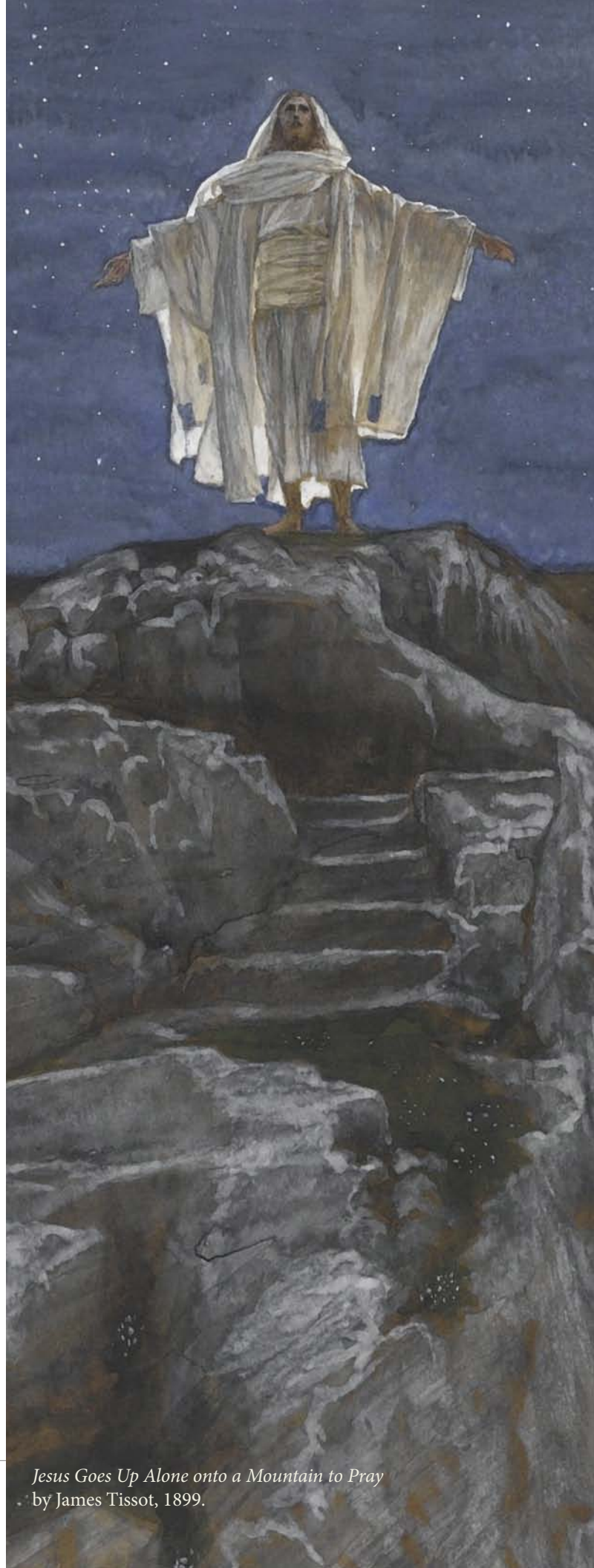
Psalm 41:9, “mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.”

John 17:13 “I speak . . . that they might have my joy fulfilled” Jesus asked His Father if the disciples might enjoy real joy—by which I believe He meant the assurance of Eternal Life.

The Disciples and the World

John 17:14 “not of the world” Jesus again contrasted God’s kingdom and the world. Over the past three years, Jesus prepared His apostles (or those “sent”) to go out and preach to the world. But “the world” rejected and hated them *and* their message. Those “of the world” are under Satan’s influence or control. Satan, or the “prince of this world” (John 16:11), hates the Lord and His disciples because they refuse to follow his counterfeits. Disciples motivations and goals are different. They reject short term pleasures, in hopes of a better, holier sphere with the Father.

Two modern prophets, advised disciples on how to identify and stay away from the world: “All of the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah haunt our society. Our young people have never faced a greater challenge. We have never seen more clearly the lecherous face of evil.” It is more essential now than ever to separate evil from our lives with the growing interference of constant internet noise. Disciples “must do as Abraham did when he pitched his tent and built ‘an altar unto the Lord’ and not do as Lot did when he ‘pitched his tent toward Sodom’ (Genesis 13:12, 8).⁶⁸



Jesus Goes Up Alone onto a Mountain to Pray
by James Tissot, 1899.

John 17:15–16 “I pray . . . that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” The Lord desires to keep His disciples from temptation. Overcoming temptation and worldliness is part of the test of discipleship. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught disciples to ask in prayer, “lead us not into temptation” (Matthew 6:13; Luke 11:14). *As a parent, I try to add this to every morning prayer with my children.* Our earth life requires struggling with the devil. Prayer, obedience, covenants, the Spirit, and worthily taking on (or honoring) the name of the Lord can protect us from evil (D&C 20:77; Proverbs 18:20; John 18:5–7).

Jesus’ Sanctification

John 17:17 “sanctified them through thy truth.” Sanctify is to make holy. Earlier in the prayer, Jesus addressed His Father as “*holy*” (John 17:11). Now He asked His Father to make the disciples “*holy / hagios*.” The process of “Sanctification / *hagiasmos* / purification or holiness,” is how the Spirit and the Grace of Christ work in conjunction to cleanse us. This is also consistent with John’s emphasis on Jesus as the truth (John 15:3; 17:6, 14). Reading the list of these word in the topical guide gives a better feel for these words in scripture.

In the OT, God sanctified His people through his commandments or word.⁶⁹ In Exodus 38:41, Moses was told to consecrate and sanctify priests. Through sanctification, we draw closer to God. Helaman 3:35 explains, “. . . they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts. Sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God.”

John 17:19 “for their sakes I sanctified myself” Jesus prayed on behalf of His apostles as he explained their assignment. It is for us, His disciples that Jesus went through what He did. Jesus will complete His suffering and sanctification in order to bless His disciples. Sanctification comes through consecration. In the OT holy people and holy animals were consecrated for special tasks (Jeremiah 1:5). Jesus is about to complete his sanctification through consecrating His life as the sacrificial victim. (Deuteronomy 15:19; Hebrew 2:10; 9:12–14; 10:10; Alma 34:10–14). After He vicariously covered the sins of the world, then the disciples could be sanctified through Him.

The Oneness of Those Who Believe in Jesus

John 17:20–23

John 17:20–21 “Neither pray I for these alone” Jesus first prayed for the oneness of the Father and the Apostles (17:11). Now he expanded that sphere by asking the Lord to also accept “as one” those whom the apostles will teach. The universality of Jesus’ gift allows future generations of disciples to receive the gospel and the Savior’s sanctification. Through the work of the Spirit and vicarious ordinances, disciples throughout the history of the world may receive the same blessings as Jesus’ apostles (D&C 124, 127, 128; 138). “For just as we come unto the Father through the Son, so do we come unto the Son through the Holy Ghost.”⁷⁰

“they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us” In addition to this generous offer of unity, this verse clarifies the earlier confusion about a separate Godhead. When humanity is added to the “oneness,” we realize it refers to unity in heart, blessings, and purpose. We become like Jesus and Heavenly Father when our thoughts and actions return to seek unity with them through repentance and forgiveness.

John 17:23 “I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one” The ability for us to become “one” only works because our God and His Son are perfect. Like anything we multiply with infinity becomes infinity, so anything joined with a perfect being becomes perfect. There is one more step required with disciples and that is the addition of the Spirit to cleanse one and provide the sanctification required to join God. A literal translation of these verses shows a tighter parallelism:

- A 17:21 That all may be one
- B 17:21 Just as you, Father, in me and I in you
- C 17:21 That they also may be one in us
- D 17:21 Thus the world may believe that you sent me
- E 17:22 And the glory which thou gavest me
- E’ 17:22 I have given them
- C’ 17:22 That they may be one
- B’ 17:22–23 Just as we are one, I in them and you in me
- A’ 17:23 That they may be brought to completion as one
- D’ 17:23 Thus the world may come to know that you sent me

Jesus’ Plan for Finding Unity with Believers

John 17:24 “that they may behold my glory, . . . [from] before the foundation of the world” Jesus’ final wish (or will/*thelo*) was that His followers join Him in heaven. Not only does this verse repeat the premortal stature of Christ, it also describes Jesus’ intense desire to build and bless the apostles. Jesus “surrendered His very soul for friend and enemy alike. The one perfectly obedient, perfectly sinless man voluntarily subjected himself to the fullness of the wrath of God. He did this so that the Father might be glorified through the salvation of his children. Little wonder that the Father loved his beloved and chosen Son from all eternity!”⁷¹

John 17:25 “O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee” Now “righteous” is added to the title of Father. Even though this title is not found elsewhere in scriptural, “righteous God” is found in Psalms 7:9, “let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just: for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins.” This is a magnificent closure to this prayer.

John 17:26 “I have declared unto them thy name” This is the fourth time Jesus used “name” in this chapter (and the 15th in the gospel of John with this meaning). Jesus showed great reverence when referring to the “name of the Father.” The use of “*name*” has significance as it parallels the Lord’s petition and the High Priest’s prayer (Hebrews 9:12–14; 2:10–11). The High Priest typified Jesus’ roll as He was about to offer himself as a sacrifice.

“the love you have for me may be in them” (NIV) The greatest feeling of love is to experience Heavenly Father’s love. Jesus wants that for his loyal disciples. He wants them to enjoy everything He will receive from the Father, including the ability to feel the Father’s love. The author, John, elaborates on this theme of love in his epistles. President Gordon B. Hinckley taught, “Love is the polar star of the gospel.”

Interestingly, the Gospel of John does not include the scene where Jesus suffers in Gethsemane, but instead, includes this pleading intercessory prayer of submission, and where the Lord pleads in behalf of His apostles for union.

Header Image: The Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci, ca. 1498. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Below: Olive trees in the traditional garden of Gethsemane. Photo by Ian Scott via Wikimedia Commons.



ENDNOTES

1. F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 38. Historians looking at the whole country estimate the population of all Palestine between 500,000 and 600,000. Although Josephus' numbers sound very exaggerated, he claimed that over two million pilgrims celebrated a Passover. Josephus, *Antiquities*, XVII.217; *Jewish Wars*, 2.12
2. Kent Brown, *BYU New Testament Commentary: The Testimony of Luke* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 982. The list of women came from combing their names across the Gospels at the cross and tomb.
3. John carefully outlines his calendar starting with, "six days before the Passover," as discussed in John 12:1.
4. During the time of Herod's temple, at sundown after Nisan 15, priests harvested the first barley crop just outside of Jerusalem (which had been designated early by the Sanhedrin). The next day, or "on the day after the Sabbath" a priest took the bundle or sheaf of barley and waved it over the altar (Leviticus 23:11). But which sabbath do they mean? The Passover and first day of Unleavened Bread were both sabbaths as well as the seventh day of each week. Nisan 16th is the usual day, but with the extra Sabbath, perhaps it was the 17th just as the women came to the tomb when the sabbath ended. This offering of fruistfruits began the countdown of days before Pentecost.
5. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology in three volumes* (NYC, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1871.), 1.152, 160. Alexander Campbell, *The Evidences of Christianity: A Debate Between Robert Owen, of New Lanark, Scotland and Alexander Campbell* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishers, 1929), 91–92.
6. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (SLC, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2006), 592.
7. Adele, Berlin, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (NYC, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), "cleanliness." The Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud are filled with them including in the "Code of Jewish Law" or *Shulhan Arukh* (*Orach Chaim*, 4:2; 4:18; 92:4–5; 158:1; 181:1; 233:2; etc.). They took their washings very seriously, to the degree that if the handwashing is not done before a meal, excommunication is threatened. A mikvaot immersion bath had seven steps down into a pool of running water (not stagnant water). Wealthy Jews had a mikvah in their homes, others used them in conjunction with their worship at a synagogue and temple. The Essenes used them daily, most only periodically as needed (i.e. after childbirth, contamination, etc.).
8. Raymond Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 564. A commentary on Exodus 21:2, *Midrash Mekilta*, gives the ruling that a master could not require a Jewish slave to wash his feet. I presume this was for male slaves, as a concubine could.
9. Jacob Neusner, *The Economics of the Mishnah* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 27. "One should train for the job all those who are employed on the estate, whether slaves or children or women." Josephus, *Against Apion*. 2.25. Philo, *A Volume of Questions and Solutions to Questions which arise in Genesis*, I.29.
10. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Bartchy, "Servant" 4.420. Tim G. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins, 2003), 183. Across the Roman Empire, at different

times, estimates range between six and sixty million people were slaves. Junius P. Rodriguez, *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABD-CLI, 1997), 7.548.

11. Heshey Zelcher, *A Guide to the Jerusalem Talmud* (Universal Publishers, 2002), 92. “The middle class citizens often owned eight slaves, the rich from five hundred to a thousand, and an emperor as many as twenty thousand.”
12. Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament* (NYC, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1998), 15–16. Ninety percent of Jews living in Palestine at the time of the New Testament had a vocation that supported farming or fishing villages. We do not have their records though, only from the literate aristocracy. Also see Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ’s Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: GP, 2015), chapter 7–8.
13. Philo of Alexandria, *A Volume of Questions and Solutions to Questions which arise in Genesis*, I.29; “. . . the woman, being in the rank of a servant, is praised for assenting to a life of communion.” David Sedley, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, XXV (Oxford, England: Oxford University, winter 2003), 213.
14. Robert H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1913), 2.134. “The Lord said: . . . thy wife shall tremble when she looketh upon thee.” This account comes from the Jewish Pseudepigrapha, written by professional Jewish scribes sometime between 200 BC and 100 AD. Also see Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 367–369.
15. Judith R. Baskin and Kenneth Seeskin, *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture* (NYC, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 313. “The intentional community of the Rabbis was centered on the master-disciple relationship; through this link between teacher and student, the full import of life according to the Torah of Moses could be appreciated and acquired. . . . Students would apprentice with a master, often for many years, learning direct teachings and observing how a rabbinic Jew was to behave. These explicit and inferred rules governed all aspects of human life, from ritual matters and legal rulings to ethical maxims and daily behaviors.”
16. John Bernard, *The International Critical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John, part I* (Edinburgh, Great Britain: T and T Clark, 1953, reprint), 41, emphasis added. I think it is significant that is exactly what John the Baptist said he was not worthy to do for Jesus in John 1:27
17. Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 564. We have an example of a loved one washing feet as a sign of devotion dating from 100 BC to AD 100. It is an OT apocryphal about Joseph of Egypt’s betrothed wife, Asenath, who offers to wash Joseph’s feet. Joseph protests that a servant girl could do it; but Asenath exclaims devotedly: “Your feet are my feet . . . another shall not wash your feet.”
18. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, reprint 1976, 1949), 1:323–24; also see 2:308–9, 426–31, 374, 475. Joseph performed the ordinance at the school of the prophets and to the priesthood quorums.
19. *Ibid.*, HC, 1:323–24
20. *Ibid.*, 1:323–24.
21. John Parry, in a New Testament class discussion at Cardinal Stritch University in 2002.
22. Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 554.
23. *Ibid.*, 576.
24. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: The Order of St. Bene-

- dict, 1988), 74.
25. Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 582
 26. Kent Jackson, Robert Millet, eds., *Studies in Scriptures: The Gospels* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1986), 419.
 27. This has been a debated topic by biblical readers since the early Gnostics as mentioned above. Some interpret this conversation as Jesus directing Peter to deny Him (at least by a possible reading of the Greek in the Synoptics). The defense stems from those who think apostles are infallible and can be traced to many factions of Christianity. Even in our faith, some approach Pres. Kimball's talk, "Peter my brother," with this perspective. I disagree. By defending Peter as a sincere trying human, Pres. Kimball's never suggests this Augustinian doctrine. The argument is inconsistent with God, agency, and prophecy.
 28. The Four Gospels rarely include the same accounts. Between Jesus' baptism and Last Supper, there are only four events that all four include (1. The cleansing of the temple 2. Healing the official's son; 3. Feeding 5,000; 4. Triumphal entry).
 29. Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 618.
 30. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:365.
 31. A close reading of 3 Nephi 8:5, and 10:18, gives the time between the "first month" and "end of the year."
 32. Alexander L, Baugh, "Parting the Veil: The Visions of Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 38.1 (1999): 23–71.
 33. Wilford Woodruff, *Discourses of Wilford Woodruff* (SLC, UT: Bookcraft, 1969), 288–289.
 34. Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, vol. 4 (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1993), 4.117.
 35. 35 Jesus identifies Himself with seven metaphors using the sacred name: 1) John 6:35, "I am the bread of life;" 2) John 8:12 "I am the light of the world;" 3) John 10:9 "I am the gate;" 4) John 10:11 "I am the Good Shepherd;" 5) John 11:25–26 "I am the resurrection and the life;" 6) John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth, and the life;" 7) John 15:5, "I am the vine." The Gospel of John quotes the Lord using "I am" to identify Himself over twenty times.
 36. Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 621, 631.
 37. Todd M. Compton and Stephen D. Ricks, ed., *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 16–17.
 38. Jackson and Millet, *Studies in Scripture: Gospels*, 5: 413.
 39. *Lectures on Faith*, 5:2; "He is also the express image and likeness of the personage of the Father."
 40. Andrew Ehat and Lindon Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 4. The quote continues with an idea on those of Abraham that seems to apply to spiritual reactions during the Second Great Awakening. "It is more powerful in expanding the mind, enlightening the understanding, and storing the intellect with present knowledge, of a man who is of the literal seed of Abraham, than one that is a Gentile, though it may not have half as much visible effect upon the body; for as the Holy Ghost falls upon one of the literal seed of Abraham, it is calm and serene; and his whole soul and body are only exercised by the pure spirit of intelligence; while the effect of the Holy Ghost upon a Gentile, is to purge out the old blood, and make him actually of the seed of Abraham. That man that has none of the blood of Abraham (naturally) must have a new creation by the Holy Ghost. In such a case, there may be more of a powerful effect upon the body, and visible to the eye, than upon an Israelite, while the Israelite at first might be far before the Gentile in pure intelligence."
 41. Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:379–81; Ehat and Cook, *Words*, 13–15.

42. 2 Nephi 1:15; 2:3; 10:2–3; 25:13; 3 Nephi 19:14–36; Mormon 1:15; 8:26; Ether 3:6–16; 9:22; 12:39; D&C 67:10; 76:5–10, 22–25, 114–19; 84:18–27; 88:3–5, 67–69, 75; 93:1; 97:16; 101:23, 38; 103:20; 107:18–20, 49, 53–57; 109:5, 12; 110:1–10; 130:3; also see Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols., 1:55.
43. Hugh Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 273.
44. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:58.
45. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, *The Allegory of the Olive Tree* (SLC, UT: Deseret, 1994), 477–555.
46. Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 663.
47. *Ibid.*, 663, 661.
48. Jackson and Millet, *Studies in Scripture: Gospels*, 5:419–420.
49. Gordon B. Hinckley, *General Conference*, “The Essence of True Religion,” October, 1978.
50. Brown, *A Concise Commentary*, 83.
51. Hugh Nibley, *BYU Speeches*, “Leaders and Managers,” August 19, 1993.
52. We also know that Jesus’ apostles baptized, John 4:2, and that Jesus introduced the ordinance of the washing of feet (John 13).
53. Brown, *John XIII–XXI*.
54. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (SLC, UT: Bookcraft, 1975), 1:758.
55. Jackson and Millet, *Studies in Scripture: Gospels*, 5:214.
56. Victor Ludlow, *Companion*, 428.
57. Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 747.
58. Also 1 Nephi 8:6, “Lift up your eyes to the heavens;” Moses 1:24, “Moses lifted up his eyes unto heaven, being filled with the Holy Ghost;” Psalms 123:1 “Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens”
59. When we count the number of times that Jesus includes the name of “God” and “Father,” we find seven, or a “perfect” set of references (John 16:1, 3, 5, 11, 21, 24, 25).
60. Rodney Turner, “The Doctrine of the Firstborn and Only Begotten,” in H. Donl Peterson and Charles D. Tate Jr., *The Pearl of Great Price: Revelations from God*, ed. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 93.
61. Kent Jackson, and Robert Millet, *Studies in Scripture: The Doctrine and Covenants* (Sandy, UT: Randall, 1984), 1:103.
62. Jackson and Millet, *Studies in Scripture: Gospels*, 5:421.
63. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:5881
64. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:305; also D&C 132:22–24.
65. In addition to God’s sacred name, the John the Revelator, also wrote of a new name that all who overcome will receive (Revelation 2:17), A Catholic interpretation of that verse reads: “the Christian alone knows a new name and has the name of God written on him” (Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 754).
66. Hugh Nibley, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon*,
67. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 606.
68. Gordon B. Hinckley, *General Conference*, October 2001; and Elder Quinton L. Cook, “Lessons from the Old Testament:

In the World but Not of the World,” *Ensign*, Feb. 2006, 53–55.

69. Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 765.

70. Jackson and Millet, *Studies in Scripture: Gospels*, 5:418.

71. *Ibid.*, 5:419.



MATTHEW 26; MARK 14; LUKE 22

JESUS' LAST SUPPER AND GETHSEMANE

INTRODUCTION

The Synoptic Gospels now move to Jesus' Last Supper—including the prophetic preparations, shocking announcements, and introduction of the sacrament. During the meal He tries to prepare His disciples for His death and their unmet expectations. Even though Jesus knows what lies ahead, when the time comes to actually experience the excruciating suffering required to atoning for the sins of het world, it is harder than He expected. Nevertheless, Jesus endures Gethsemane and nobly moves forward to His arrest, submitting to His Father's will. The chapter ends with Peter also learning that living through Satan's temptations are harder than he expected.

Plot to Kill Jesus includes Judas as Betrayer

Matthew 26:1-5, 14-16; Mark 14:1-2, 10-11; Luke 22:1-6

Matthew 26:1-2; Mark 14:1; Luke 22:1 “after two days was the feast of the passover and of unleavened bread”

As discussed in more depth previously, the Jews came to Jerusalem for three pilgrimage feasts each year—Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Each recalled different miraculous events from the redemption of the children of Israel from Egypt under Moses. The most important was Passover, as it recalled God’s destroying angels passing over the first-born Israelites. Each feast also typified something about their Promised Messiah that we will discuss as they are fulfilled in Jesus’ passion. The week after the Passover feast was known as the “Feast of Unleavened Bread,” which Mark and Luke mention here.

Matthew 26:3-4; Mark 14:1b; Luke 22:2 “consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him” The growing animosity against Jesus as a false teacher reached a point of alarm. The chief priests, scribes, and elders under the direction of the high priest (who was Caiaphas that year), had authority as Jewish leaders to govern the temple and Sanhedrin, even though Rome oversaw the Jewish nation politically.



Judas sells Jesus for thirty pieces of silver by Lippo Memmi, 14th century. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Matthew 26:5; Mark 14:2 “Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar” These temple leaders planned to act secretly, in hopes of not triggering the masses who saw Jesus as a prophet.

Mark 14:10; Luke 22:3 “Then entered Satan into Judas” It sounds as though Satan possessed Judas. The JST of Mark includes how that happened to Judas, “for he turned away from him, and was offended because of his words.” Some have wrongly suggested that Jesus directed Judas to betray Him, but this idea came from “the apocryphal Gospel of Judas, ... without historical basis.”¹ Satan instigated a frontal attack and the disciples were not strong enough yet to resist him.

Matthew 26:14-15; Mark 14:11; Luke 22:4-5 “What will ye give me, and I will

deliver him unto you?” Satan uses the love of money to motivate. Only Matthew 26:15 includes 30 pieces of silver, perhaps to show the tie to the Old Testament: “they weighed out my wages, thirty pieces of silver” (Zechariah 11:12). Also, if a slave were killed, Exodus 21:20 required retribution of thirty pieces of silver. Some slaves may have been sold for that price, but the price varied dramatically depending on the age, gender, and skill level.² Thirty pieces of silver was the value of 30 days of unskilled labor.

Matthew 26:16; Mark 14:11b; Luke 22:6 “from that time he sought opportunity to betray Jesus” (JST). Judas’ heart changed and he left His apostleship and Master. Satan became Judas’ new master, and sadly, Judas obeyed him.³ Matthew includes this verse after Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus with an expensive oil, but Luke keeps Judas’ arrangements all together.

Anointing in Bethany at the House of Simon

Matthew 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; John 12:1–8

Matthew 26:6; Mark 14:3a; John 12:1 “Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper” John’s Gospel links this house with Martha, Mary, and Lazareth. Perhaps Simon was their father or Martha’s husband. (Luke 10:38 refers to it as Martha’s house). We are never introduced to this Simon in the New Testament, so we assume, that due to his illness or death, he no longer lived at home. With Bethany’s close proximity to Jerusalem, it would have been an easy walk (1.5 miles or 2.4 km). Luke documents another earlier episode in Galilee where “a woman of the city, who was a sinner” (KA⁴) anoints Jesus’ feet, but this appears to be a different event (Luke 7:36–50).

Matthew 26:7; Mark 14:3b; John 12:2–3 “an alabaster flask . . . of pure nard, very costly . . . and poured it over his head” (KA) Each account remembers the story slightly differently. John identifies Mary of Bethany as the gracious hostess who anointed Jesus as he sat at the table. Matthew has the oil anointing Jesus’ head, while John has the spikenard poured on His feet and wiped with her hair. John also recalls that the fragrance was strong enough to fill the house.

Matthew 26:8–9; Mark 14:4–5; John 12:4–6 “Why . . . wasted? For this ointment might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and given to the poor” (KA). Some disciples (or Judas, as John singles out) are upset about such an indulgence. The ointment was worth nearly a year’s salary of an unskilled laborer, used on one person.

Matthew 26:10–13; Mark 14:6–9; John 12:7–8 “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing . . . she has done it to prepare me for burial” (KA) Jesus defended Mary and accepted her generous gift. Knowing His future, Jesus saw life with an eternal perspective. Jesus also prophesied that this story will be shared across the world.

LAST SUPPER

The four Gospels differ on which day it is. John, alone, puts the meal before the Passover feast. To rectify this timing difference, Elder James Talmage suggests they had two days of slaughtering the lambs, but I can't find any evidence for this. It appears each of the Gospel writers remembered it differently.

Timeline of Details

MATTHEW 26

26:17 First day of Unleavened Bread

26:17–19 A man in the city,

Prepare for Passover

26:20–25 Announces Betrayal

26:26–29 Sacrament

MARK 15

14:12 First day of Unleavened Bread

14:12–16 A man meets you with a water pot. Follow to guest room, upper room furnished, prepared for Passover

14:17–21 Announces Betrayal

14:22–25 Sacrament

LUKE 22

22:7 Day of Unleaved Bread

22:8–13 Man meets you with a water pot. Follow to guest room, upper room furnished, there make ready

22:14–20 Sacrament

22:21–23 Announces Betrayal

22:24–30 Who is Greatest?

JOHN 13

13:1 Before Passover

13:4–17 Jesus washes disciples' feet

13:19–27 Announces Betrayal

Preparations for the Passover Meal

Matthew 26:17–19; Mark 14:12–16; Luke 22:7–13

Matthew 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7 “Then came the day . . . when the passover must be killed” Symbolically, Jesus is the Passover Lamb that will be killed (1 Corinthians 5:7). The symbols of the “male of the first year,”



The Last Supper by Giampietrino, ca. 1520. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

or at the prime of life, “without defect,” a lamb or goat, with no broken bones, had pointed to Jesus’ death for a millennium and a half (Exodus 12:5, 46).

Matthew 26:18; Mark 14:13 Luke 22:8–10 “He sent Peter and John . . . prepare us the passover” Luke specifies that Jesus sent Peter and John to help with the arrangements for their Passover Seder. Their actions contrasted with Judas who acted in the opposite direction and betrayed Jesus. It appears that the women who traveled with Jesus from Galilee and are mentioned at both Jesus’ cross and tomb, were involved in preparing and serving the Passover meal.⁵ In Jerusalem, respectable women were discouraged from leaving their homes, but at the Passover feast, the city was full of families—including women—who journeyed from the Roman Empire to worship together.

“a man will meet you carrying a ceramic water jug” (AB) Unlike some commentaries on this verse that discuss customary gender roles for domestic chores, in the Greco-Roman world, carrying water jugs was also a man’s job.⁶ Especially in Jerusalem at this time, this would have been a man’s job. Rabbinic social customs/tradition preferred that women did not go out in public or even leave their homes.⁷ Seeing a man carrying water was actually a common sight in Jerusalem. The two disciples did not need to identify which male servant to follow, because Jesus prophesied that the man will approach them.

Mark 14:14; Luke 22:11 “The goodman of the house” is the owner, and probably a fellow disciple of Jesus. He may not have been the man carrying the water pot; he may have been a servant of the owner. (The average middle-class home employed eight servants or slaves.)⁸

“**The guestchamber**” is actually a “*katalyma* /inn,” and is the same word used when Joseph and Mary are looking for lodgings in Bethlehem (Luke 2:11; 2:7). It is one of the parallel points between Jesus’ birth and death. Jesus relied on rented rooms at both his birth and death. He who was born in the stable of a “*katalyma*” was content to eat His Last Supper in a “*katalyma*.”⁹

Mark 14:15–16; Luke 22:12–13 “a large upper room furnished . . .” meant that it was strewn or spread with pillows and pads to rest on while eating.¹⁰ The upper or second floor often had exterior stone or interior wooden stairs and was the family’s living area.

“**found as he had said**” Both authors underscore that Jesus’ predictions were fulfilled.

Introduction of the Sacrament

Matthew 26:20–29; Mark 14:17–25; Luke 22:14–20

Matthew 26:20; Mark 14:17; Luke 22:14 “when the evening was come, he sat down with the twelve” The gospels refer to the “twelve” as a means of differentiating a particular group of disciples or apostles. If this were a Passover dinner, this intimate gathering of the Twelve would have possibly included the helper women who traveled with them, and they would have shared a lamb. Josephus tells us that a minimum of ten people was required per Passover lamb to avoid waste.¹¹

Luke 22:15 “with desire I have desired,” Only Luke, the native Greek speaker, includes this Aramaic or Hebrew phrase. (Aramaic was a Semitic language brought back by the Jews from their Babylonia captivity.) This suggests that the disciples recorded some of Jesus’ sayings in Aramaic or Hebrew, before the New Testament was drafted in Greek. Most likely, Aramaic was the Galileans’ mother tongue. The phrase expresses Jesus’ heart felt prayer that He might share a last meal together with His closest disciples.

Luke 22:16 “which is written in the prophets concerning me. Then I will partake with you, in the kingdom of God” (JST). Jesus connected the Last Supper with the prophesied Messianic Banquet (Isaiah 25:6–8; Matthew 8:11–12; 22:1; etc.). There Jesus will again lead the discussion with His disciples.

Luke 22:17–18 “Take this and divide it among yourselves” The ritualized Passover Seders now have four cups, and Luke mentions only two. Significantly, the group of disciples shared the same cup and ministries. The cups would have been full of Passover wine (which was diluted with three parts water to one-part wine, substantially stronger than the common ten-to-one dilution).¹²

Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19 “Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and break it . . . Behold this is for you to do in remembrance of my body; for as oft as ye do this ye will remember this hour that I was with



you” (JST) Only the three Synoptic Gospels include Jesus introducing the sacrament at His Last Supper.¹³ Jesus instituted the sacrament with unleavened bread. It was not puffed up or prone to rot. It was used at this feast to represent the Israelites’ haste in leaving Egypt. Jesus “transforms the bread from remembrance of affliction in bondage to one that points to himself (1) the messianic deliverer from sin (2) as the bringer of the kingdom of God in the end-time and (3) as the one who suffers vicariously for all.”¹⁴ Jesus taught the Apostles the meaning of His death as a symbol to remember the New Covenant/Testament

During the traditional Passover Seder, the last bread eaten is the bread that was hidden (the afikoman). In modern Seders, the children at the meal usually hunt for the hidden bread, and the one who finds it is promised a gift. Some Jews hold the tradition that the child who finds the piece of hidden bread is given the hope that “you will

find the Messiah in your day.” The lost bread represents the hidden Messiah. Interestingly, at Jesus’ Last Supper, instead of hiding the bread, He held it up and said, “This is my body.”

Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:20 “He took the cup . . . *This is in remembrance of my blood which is shed for many, and the new testament which I give unto you*” (JST) Luke has this as a second cup “after supper.” Traditionally, this cup is known as the “Cup of Redemption.” The Jews still recite the simple prayer in their Passovers before drinking the cup, “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.” Jesus gave the cup a symbol similar to that which Moses did as he sprinkled the children of Israel when they covenanted at the base of Mount Sinai (as recorded in Exodus 24:5–8).

[He] offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.

Jesus identified the wine as a sign of His blood. It was a gift with a blessing, as well as a sign of the “new testament” or “covenant” (same word in Greek, *diathekes*). Jesus’ new symbol also corresponded to the last of Isaiah’s suffering servant passages when “He poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12).

Prediction of the Betrayal

Matthew 26:21–25; Mark 14:18–21; Luke 22:21–23

Matthew 26:21–22; Mark 14:18–19; Luke 22:21–23 “As they did eat, he said, . . . **one of you shall betray me**” Ironically, the betraying “hand” is at the same table as the covenanting hands in the first sacrament. The JST adds that they “all” questioned, “Is it I?” All disciples must ask if our words and actions sometimes betray our belief in the Lord.

Matthew 26:23–25; Mark 14:20–21; “Thou hast said” Jesus’ answer, can be translated, “you would know.” Jesus answered them by pointing out an example of hypocrisy. The betrayer was feigning friendship by eating at the same table, and dipping food in the same dish. It was a great honor for two friends to dip from the same sop-dish. It was even a greater mark of respect for one to dip with his friend and then present it to him as John records Jesus did for Judas. Judas feigned his loyalty. By offering the sop, Jesus was extending friendship and love, but Judas rejected Him and choose Satan. (The Passover included dipping multiple times as a sign of leisurely dining enjoyed by the wealthy, not by slaves.¹⁵)

Who Shall be Greater?

Luke 22:24–30

Luke 22:24 “**And there was also a strife among them . . .**” Similar conversations are remembered as happening elsewhere in Jesus’ ministry, too (Matthew 18:38, 20:20–28; Mark 10:35–45). Only Luke includes it among the disciples at the Last Supper. Placing it here emphasizes it as a pervasive problem, even among the disciples. This is also one of the first topics Jesus touches on while teaching the Nephites, “he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of **contention**” (3 Nephi 11:29).

Luke 22:26 “**it ought not to be so with you**” (JST) Jesus plead with the disciples to do away with social hierarchy and competitive feelings. Luke again emphasizes—for the last time—the need for leaders to serve. (This is made even clearer in Mark 10:41–45.)

Luke 22:27 “**who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? . . . I am among you as one who serves**” Jesus’ last message became “the capstone that lays emphasis on service.”¹⁶ Unlike the Roman social strata, in Jesus’ kingdom, the greatest are those who serve. A major part of His ministry taught masters how to serve. He set a clear example of the greatest servant.

Jesus Departs to the Mount of Olives

Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26; Luke 22:39

Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26; Luke 22:39 “**and when they had sung an hymn, they went out . . .**” Hymn or Psalm singing is part of the Passover service. Psalms-Hymns are often vehicles of the Spirit. Now Psalms 115–118 are sung as part of the Passover Seder.



The Protestations of Saint Peter by James Tissot, 1899.

Jesus Warns Peter

Matthew 26:33–35; Mark 14:29–31; Luke 22:31–34

Matthew 26:31–33; Mark 14:27–29 “**All of you will be offended because of me**” I presume this warning was not just for ancient Christians, and we also need to be on the alert, as “the very elect will be deceived” in the latter-days (Matthew 24:24).

Luke 22:31–32 “**Satan hath desired you . . . I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not**” (JST) This precious protection extended beyond the Lord’s love for Peter. Jesus had probably said that to each of His disciples. His prayer is that our faith will not fail us. When we want to pray for what is most important, let’s add this to the list.

“**when you are converted, strengthen your brethren**” What did the Lord mean by “converted?” The Gospel must penetrate our hearts. Elder D. Todd Christopherson enumerated the elements of conversion as increasing our “desire, submissiveness to God, study, prayer, service, repentance, and obedience. From these, coupled with your worship and activity in Church, will come testimony and conversion.”¹⁷

Matthew 26:34; Mark 14:30; Luke 22:33–34 “. . . **Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee**” Peter’s boast was answered with another prophecy that Peter didn’t believe. But everything Jesus says will happen did happen. When the Lord warns us, we need to trust Him—take it seriously and avoid the danger at all costs.

Personal Protection

Luke 22:35–38

Luke 22:35–36 “**if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one**” In the past when Jesus sent His disciples out on missions without money, an extra bag, coat or shoes, they lacked nothing. But, now knowing of what lay before Him, Jesus called for more personal preparation. Jesus asked about swords, perhaps for self-protection in the future, or perhaps just for that night to stand guard over Jesus in Gethsemane as He needed to pray undisturbed. In either case, it triggered Peter into using it that night.

Luke 22:38 “**It is enough**” may mean, “two is enough for now,” or “this is enough talk about swords.”

GETHSEMANE¹⁸

Matthew 26:36–39; Mark 14:32–38; Luke 22:39–45; John 18:1

Matthew 26:36; Mark 14:32; Luke 22:39 “**Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane**” There were olive orchards (also called gardens), on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives. This garden appears to have many ties to the Garden of Eden. Jesus acted as the second Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45); and the second Son of



The Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane by Adriaen van de Velde, 1665. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

God. Luke's genealogy traces Joseph's lineage back to Adam, "the son of God" (Luke 3:38). In this garden Jesus will symbolically return to the first garden and the presence of God. This time, the Son of God was ready to "crush [Satan's] head" in order for Himself and all humanity to partake of the Tree of Life *without* sin (Genesis 3:15).

We are told by Matthew and Mark that the place was called, "Gethsemane." Luke and John include that Jesus went there often (Luke 22:39; John 18:1). John adds that they crossed a winter flowing stream, "the brook Cedron" (John 18:1; also spelled Kidron). We assume that in the midst of the olive orchard there was an olive press, as Gethsemane means, "olive press."

Pressing Olive Oil. To produce olive oil required three heavy pressings with huge stone weights that crush each olive for a little drop of oil. Olives were pressed three times. The first without water, the second and third were



Agony in the Garden by Frans Schwartz, 1898. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

soaked to squeeze out every last drop of liquid. The oil from the first crushing squeezed out the most precious oil, which was sent to the temple for the most sacred anointings. The oil from the second pressing was used for nourishment and was used on one's body. The third pressing produced the oil used to burn for light and fire. In this context, it is significant that Messiah (Hebrew) and Christ (Greek) mean Anointed One (English). Jesus' crushing sacrifice in Gethsemane provides an atonement that enables all three pressings to be active in our lives. First, He provided the anointing for temple priestesses and priests to receive Eternal life. Second, His atonement heals us physically and spiritually. Third, He provides baptism by fire to cleanse us from sin, and the Holy Spirit to give us light and a witness of truth.

“and the disciples began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy, and to complain in their hearts, wondering if this be the Messiah. And Jesus knowing their hearts said . . . sit ye here” (JST). This additional insight from Mark's JST, sheds light on why the apostles were separated into two groups. He needed those with the most faith and willingness to pray to support Him during His darkest hour. Unfortunately, even those three disappointed Him, “sleepest thou? Couldst not thou watch one hour! Watch ye and pray.”

Matthew 26:37–38; Mark 14:33–35; Luke 22:41 **“My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch”** In each of the Synoptic Gospel's description, the Lord's suffering in Gethsemane emphasizes the author/editor's theological focus. These textual differences are interesting in light of the authors' differences. The early Christian writers claimed that the apostles, Matthew and Peter (with Mark acting as Peter's scribe), had a strong hand in organizing the source material for the first two Gospels.¹⁹ As eye witnesses, these two repeatedly point to the human side of the sleeping apostles and Jesus being overpowered by pain. Luke on the other hand, was not there. He was a Greek convert to Christianity years after the fact. Luke portrays Jesus and the apostles blessed with God's empowerment. For example, Luke records Jesus kneeling to pray, but Matthew and Mark describe Him falling to the ground in pain and on His face in pain, respectively. (We will find similar differences in the way they describe Jesus on the cross.) The author of John also claims to be an eye witness, but he chooses not to mention Jesus' suffering. A close look at each of the four Gospel accounts of Jesus in Gethsemane demonstrate significant differences (see table on next page)

Comparison of the Accounts in Gethsemane

MATTHEW 26:36–39

Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, **Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.** 37 **And he took with him Peter** and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and **very heavy.** 38 Then saith he **unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.** 39 **And he went a little further, and fell on his face,** and prayed, saying, *O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.* **And he cometh** unto the disciples, **and findeth them asleep,** and **saith unto Peter,** What, could ye not **watch** with me **one hour?** 41 **Watch and pray,** that ye **enter not into temptation: the spirit** indeed is willing, **but the flesh is weak**

MARK 14:32–38

And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, **Sit ye here, while I shall pray.** 33 **And he taketh with him Peter** and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be **very heavy;** 34 And saith **unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch.** 35 **And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground,** and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. 36 And he said, *Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.* **And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping,** and **saith unto Peter,** Simon, sleepest thou? couldst not thou **watch one hour?** 38 **Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit** truly is ready, **but the flesh is weak**

LUKE 22:40–45

And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.

41 And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, 42 Saying, *Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.* 43 And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. 44 And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. 45 And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them **sleeping** for sorrow.

Matthew and Mark emphasize the physical nature of both the apostles and Jesus. Fatigue overpowered the disciples, even when Jesus asked for help. Jesus' mortal body could hardly bear the suffering and disappointment, and He pled for help without receiving any.

Luke on the other hand hardly mentions their mortal limitations. Luke honors the apostles by mentioning that they fall asleep from sorrow, and they only disappoint the Lord once. Luke also softens the Savior's suffering, by including the Father answering His prayer for help by sending an angel with power to comfort, strengthen, and triumph over more than a mortal could bear. (Luke alone mentions that Jesus' sweat was as blood, Luke 22:44).

Adding John's Gospel into the comparison is even more striking. While the Synoptics record Jesus' prayer as a result of His extreme suffering and agony, Jesus' prayer John that includes solicits the Father to unify the apostles with Him and give them Eternal Life. Then, John has Jesus crossing the Kedron brook into a garden on the Mount of Olives when Judas and his henchmen arrive.

Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42 “Abba” was the word for “father / dad” in Aramaic. We assume that Jesus' mother tongue was Aramaic, along with most of the Jews in Palestine. We find at least eight examples of Aramaic phrases in the New Testament.²⁰ Even though Greek was the formal language of the Greco-Roman Empire, Aramaic was the earlier language from the Assyrian and Babylonians. The Jews used this language in their captivity and brought back after they returned to their promised land.²¹

“if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will” Previously two Gospels included Jesus' prophecy of this moment, “Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering?” (Mark 10:38; Matthew 20:22). A cup of wine should be sweet if the grapes are gently pressed. It only becomes bitter if the grapes are forcefully crushed so that the seeds crack open. The symbol is clear; Jesus underwent an atoning sacrifice of an excruciating pressing of His mind and spirit, making it bitter.

The cup has special meaning in light of the cups in Passover, and the new covenants made during the Last Supper. The sacrament cup directs us to remember this moment. As we repent (meaning to return our hearts and obedience to God), we plead for forgiveness. Repentance is relatively simply compared to the suffering He partook of in Gethsemane. Perhaps this is why the symbol of the sweet sacrament wine/water, represents the easier gentle pressing of a grape. But, if we don't repent, we are told that we too must suffer excruciating pain even as Jesus did. The Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith this truth in D&C 19:16–20.

16 For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;
17 But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; **18** Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and

spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—**19** Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men. **20** Wherefore, I command you again to repent, lest I humble you with my almighty power . . .

This is the only first-hand account of Jesus’ suffering in scripture.

Matthew 26:40–44; Mark 14:37–40; Luke 22:40, 46 “Pray that ye enter not into temptation” Matthew and Mark include Jesus’ direction to pray to overcome temptation/trials once, and Luke includes it twice. Earlier, Matthew includes the Lord’s advice for all disciples to pray for protection from temptation (Matthew 6:13). Disciples now need to follow this commandment more than ever before. This is why we sing, “I need thee every hour” and “more holiness give me.”

Table of Betrayal and Arrest Scriptures

Matthew 47–56; Mark 14:43–52; Luke 22:47–53

	MATT	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
Jesus Betrayed, Arrested and Forsaken	26:47–56	14:43–52	22:47–53	18:2–11
1st Stage of Jewish Trial. Examination by Annas				18:12–14,19–23
2nd Stage of Jewish Trial. Jesus Condemned by Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin	26:57–68	14:53–65	22:54,63–5	18:24
Peter Thrice Denies the Lord	26:58,69–75	14:54,66–72	22:54–62	18:15–18,25

Jesus’ Betrayal and Arrest

Matthew 26:47–56; Mark 14:43–52; Luke 22:47–53; John 18:1–9

Matthew 26:47–48; Mark 14:43–44; Luke 22:47b–48; John 18:1–3 “Judas . . . came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves . . .” The four Gospels describe Judas arriving in Gethsemane in the middle of the night leading a band of armed men carrying torches. The men include chief priests, scribes, elders, and Pharisees.

Matthew 26:49–50; Mark 14:45; Luke 22:47–48 “. . . Judas, betrayest thou the Son of [M]an with a kiss?” Even after Judas’ blatant hypocrisy, Jesus continues to treat him with kindness, and greets him with, “friend.” (The JST changes that to his name.)

Matthew 26:51–54; Mark 14:47–49; Luke 22:49–53; John 18:10–11 “Peter having a sword . . . smote the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear” As the apostles left the upper room, Luke includes Jesus instructing the them to carry a sword, so it seems natural that Peter would use it. It appears that the noise awakened Peter and he acted instinctively without observing Jesus’ directions. In the dark of the night, it’s fortunate that he only cut off an ear. All four Gospels share the story, but only John includes both names, Peter and Malchus. This suggests that Malchus became a believer and a Christian, as his name was known. Even at this time of danger and confusion, Jesus taught a message of peace, “all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword” (Matthew 26:52). He also submitted to His Father’s will, “the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11).

Matthew 26:55–56; Mark 14:50–52; John 18:3–9 “then all the disciples forsook him, and fled” With all of the chaos and confusion of the moment, Matthew and Mark describe the apostles running away. John remembers that Jesus’ told his captures to “let these go their way.” Jesus is portrayed with protective care of his apostles. And, Luke does not condemn anyone by not including it.

Mark 14:51–52 “there followed him a certain young man . . . men laid hold on him . . . and he fed from them naked” Tradition has labeled the author himself as this “young man” who followed with only a linen drape about him and then let it go in order to free himself from the grasp of his captures. John Mark would have been a young disciple living in Jerusalem with his mother, Mary (Acts 12:12), making the account plausible. The linen cloth was a sign of wealthy clothing, and the home that he and his mother lived in was large enough to house large groups of disciples (Acts 13:5; 13:13; etc.).

Jesus Taken to the High Priest’s Palace

Matthew 26:57–58; Mark 14:53–54; Luke 22: 54–55; John 18:13–18

Matthew 26:57; Mark 14:53; Luke 22:54; John 18:13–14 “. . . led him away to Caiaphas the high priest” By this time, the position of high priest was no longer passed down from father to son, nor given to a righteous representative of Moses’ brother Aaron (Leviticus 16:32; Numbers 20:28; etc.). In Numbers 35:25, “high priests” served for life, as our prophets do. But, at the time of the New Testament, they were politically appointed and moved around. It was an appointment that corresponded to the whim of the Roman leader. The position was given to the chief priest who was willing to compromise on many fronts. It was a “puppet” position.

“to Annas first; for he was the father in law to Caiaphas” Caiaphas was appointed the high priest by the



Jesus in the House of Annas by José de Madrazo y Agudo, 1803. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Romans from AD 18–36. His father in law, Annas, was appointed in AD 6 and deposed in AD 15. Annas' five sons eventually ruled as the high priest. Their whole family is noted for their greed, wealth and power.²² Luke and John are the two evangelists who associate Annas with the general period of Jesus' ministry. (Annas II, who reigned in 62, had James the brother of Jesus stoned.) Luke refers to Annas I a "high priest" as a title of courtesy (Luke 3:2).

Matthew 26:58; Mark 14:54; Luke 22:54; John 18:13–17 "Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciples: that disciple was known unto the high priest . . ." All four Gospels state that Peter somehow got into the high priest's palace thanks to a disciple at the door who knew him (John 18:16). The author of John does not tell us that this was himself, or the beloved disciple as he identifies himself elsewhere (John 20:2). It is hard to imagine that a poor fisherman from Galilee would be the person who is closely connected with a Jerusalem politician.

The author often uses “other disciple” for himself, but he also uses it for someone other than himself (John 14:22). I wonder if it were Malchus, whose ear Peter had just cut off? It would have been exceedingly difficult to get into the palace.

Peter was completely out of his element there. It was the last place he should have been. If Peter had *really* believed or remembered Jesus’ prophecy about denying Him, he would not have gone to Caiaphas’ Palace. That was the last place Peter should have gone. Perhaps all four Gospel’s include it to warn disciples to stay away from such palaces of our lives.

Jesus’ Trial Before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin

Matthew 26:59–66; Mark 14:55–64²³

Matthew 26:59–63; Mark 14:55–61 “All the council sought false witnesses . . . but Jesus held his peace” This probably was not the full 72 member Sanhedrin, nor even a smaller portion of 23 members of the same council. The Sanhedrin was the highest Jewish court in Jerusalem. The members sat in a semi-circle in the “Hall of Hewn Stones,” which was a colonnade on the Temple square. It was forbidden for them to meet in the house of the high priest.

Matthew 26:64–Mark 14:62–66 “Thou hast said . . . hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power . . .” According to the Mishnah, a “blasphemer is not liable to the death penalty, unless the victim has pronounced the Ineffable Name [YAHWEH].” Blaspheming or cursing God without pronouncing the “ineffable Name” was punishable by flogging only. Jesus’ prophecy of His return in glory was enough to condemn him with blasphemy.

Jesus is Mocked

Matthew 26:67–68; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:63–65

Matthew 26:67–68; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:63–65 “they spit . . . buffeted . . . smote . . . prophesy . . . who is he that smote thee?” After having just suffered for the sins of the world in Gethsemane, Jesus’ level of exhaustion physically, spiritually, and emotionally was unfathomable, and yet, he did not retaliate.

Peter Denies Knowing Jesus

Matthew 26:69–75; Mark 14:66–72; Luke 22:56–62; John 18:17–27

Matthew 26:69–75; Mark 14:66–72; Luke 22:56–62; John 18:25–27 “a certain maid . . . another saw him . . . and about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed . . .” The three denials are slightly different in each gospel, but, clearly, they are three separate situations. The young girl, a man, and the kinsman of the servant Peter cut off his ear, all represent different social situations where temptations fall. Interestingly, there are three here, just as Satan tempted Jesus three times. Satan seems to use the same strategy over and over. Luke



St. Peter's Denial by Rembrandt, 1660. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

gives a parallel retelling of “woman” and “man,” making them a more universal temptation. It is interesting to me that there are three attempts to destroy Peter.

Matthew 26:74; Mark 14:71 “. . . he began to curse and to swear, saying I know not this man” Characteristically, Luke avoids the detail of people throwing stones at Peter.

Matthew 26:74b–75; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:60–62; John 18:27 “Immediately . . . the cock crew . . . and the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter . . . and Peter wept bitterly” Peter’s terrible remorse speaks to his deep sorrow when he finally realized what he had done. His recommitment to the Lord and changed nature speaks to his repentant heart. In this account Peter represents all disci-

ples, who are still under Satan’s temptations and can fall short. No one, but Jesus was or is infallible. In modern Jerusalem, a plaque hangs at a church dedicated to this event, which reads: “Likewise Jesus turns to look upon each of us when we sin in hope, we can likewise repent.”

President Spencer W. Kimball spoke with compassion about this event, “Peter was under fire; all the hosts of hell were against him . . . If Satan could destroy Simon now, what a victory he could score. Here was the greatest of all living men. Lucifer wanted to confuse him, frustrate, limit his prestige, and totally destroy him. However, this was not to be, for he was chosen and ordained to a high purpose in heaven, as was Abraham.”²⁴ This does not mean the *Lord told* Peter to deny Him. That idea was spread by those who interpret apostleship with infallibility. It minimizes the power of the atonement to save us. It also speaks against the doctrine of agency. We believe that all humans—especially those called of God—are tempted, need to watch themselves and need to repent.

Header Image: The Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane by Francesco Trevisani, 1740. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

1. Kent Brown, *BYU New Testament Commentary: The Testimony of Luke* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 977.
2. Sandra R. Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman World* (NYC, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 100, 105, 128.
3. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (SLC, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2006), 592.
4. Translation is taken from Kurt Aland, ed., *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* (Stuttgart, Germany: German bible Society, 1972), 277.
5. K. Brown, *Luke*, 982.
6. Marcus Joel, *The Anchor Yale Bible, Mark 8–16* (Binghamton, NY: Yale University, 2009), 945. “It is regularly asserted in scholarly literature that this would be an unusual sight . . . This goes back to Lagrange (373), who lived in Jerusalem at the turn of the twentieth century, and is based on nothing more than his observation of Palestinian habits in his own day. . . . Greco-Roman artists regularly depict male slaves carrying jugs . . . of water . . . and there is no reason to think that Jewish custom was different.”
7. Judaeus Philo, *Special Laws III.*, 7 vols. (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1967), 3.169, 171. Philo was a Jewish contemporary of Jesus. Two of his samples follow: “Marketplaces and council-halls, law-courts and gatherings, and meetings where a large number of people are assembled, and open-air life with full scope for discussion and action – all these are suitable to men both in war and peace. The women are best suited to the indoor life which never strays from the house . . . A woman then, should not be a busybody, meddling with matters outside her household concerns, but should seek a life of seclusion.” Philo also wrote that women “were always kept in seclusion and did not even appear at the household door, and their unmarried daughters, who were limited to the women’s quarter, women who *for modesty’s sake shunned the eyes of men*, even their closest relatives.” Philo of Alexandria, Pieter Willem van der Horst, trans., *Philo’s Flaccus: The First Pogrom* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2003), 70. Also see Ben Sira, *Ecclesiasticus*, 42:11–12, who lived a century before Jesus.
8. Junius P. Rodriguez, *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery*, vol. 7 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABD–CLI, 1997), 7.555. Generally, Roman era servants or slaves, were more like a serf from the feudal system. They were often released by age thirty or thirty-five, or forty, depending on your source material. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4.545. Ken Campbell, ed., *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 135.
9. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. ii (New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1898), 483. Also see Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1999), 399–400.
10. Kent Brown, *Luke*, 985.
11. Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 6.423. Also see Talmud, *Pesachim*, 64b.
12. Richard N. Holzapfel, Thomas A. Wayment, Eric D. Huntsman (SLC, UT: Deseret, 2006).
13. As mentioned in the study guides for John 6, 13–17, John includes the symbols of body and blood in Jesus’ “bread of Life” sermon (John 6:35–59).

14. Kent Brown, *Luke*, 993.
15. Marcus, *Mark*, 951.
16. Kent Brown, *Luke*, 1005.
17. Elder D. Todd Christofferson, *General Conference*, April, 2004.
18. In the last hundred years, biblical scholars have tended to interpret Jesus' suffering in Gethsemane, not for the sins of the world), but rather fear at facing His own death the following day. The restoration clarifies what happened when the Lord revealed the only firsthand account of the His suffering in scripture, D&C 19:18.
19. David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 422–433. Early Christian fathers and historians including Papias (c. 120), Irenaeus (c. 180), Clement of Alexandria (c. 195), and Eusebius (c. 315) mention that Mark acted as Peter's scribe to compile the Gospel known as Mark. However, modern critical biblical scholars doubt this second to fourth century claim, as well as the authorship of Matthew and John. David Noel Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 859–861.
20. In the NT we find lingering Aramaic remnants in the Gospels:
 - Talitha cum*, "Little girl, get up!" (Mark 5:41)
 - Ephphatha*, "Be opened." (Mark 7:34)
 - Abba*, "Father" (Mark 14:36)
 - Raca*, "fool" (Matthew 5:22)
 - Rabbouni*, "teacher" (John 20:16)
 - Eli Eli lema sabachthani*, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46)
 - Hosanna*, "O Lord, save us." (Mark 11:9)
 - Maranatha*, "Lord, come!" (1 Corinthians 16:22)
21. The Aramaic language remained the Jewish tongue from the sixth century BC to the fifth century AD. The OT books of Daniel and Ezra were written in Aramaic as well as the Talmud. (Both the Jerusalem Talmud, written in Galilee, and the Babylonian Talmud, written in modern day Iraq, were also written in Aramaic.) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Aramaic-language> (site accessed 5-9-19)
22. Raymond Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 820.
23. John 18:13–27 is the only one who includes a Jewish Trial
24. Spencer W. Kimball, *Brigham Young University Devotional*, "Peter my Brother," July 13, 1971.



MATTHEW 27; MARK 15; LUKE 23; JOHN 19

THE PASSION OF THE MESSIAH

INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE

On the same night as the Last Supper, Jesus suffered in Gethsemane, was arrested, and accosted. We now look at the next morning when He was tried in multiple courts, scourged, crucified from noon to three, and buried. The descending weight that began in Gethsemane was heavier than the physical torture and emotional abuse that followed. Yet in His weakened state, His persecution and suffering continue; “From indignity to indignity, from torture to torture.”¹

The Book of Mormon encourages its readers to look for “types and shadows” of the Savior (Mosiah 3:15; 13:10). This council is easily applied to these chapters as much of the Law of Moses points directly to this time of the Lord’s death and resurrection (Galatians 3:24–25). Finding the types, shadows, and prophecies enrich our understanding of both the Old and New Testaments.

Kent Brown describes this section as, “Kingship Misunderstood.” The account “brims with irony . . . [as] Jesus’ royalty drips from the verses in this chapter, but it goes unheeded . . . The Savior, with his hands bound, walks steadily, willingly, toward the crucifixion and burial.”² Luke especially portrays Jesus’ obedience to Roman and Mosaic Laws (but which is opposed to the “tradition of the Jews” or 10,000 Oral Laws).

	MATT	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
JEWISH TRIAL CONTINUED				
3 rd Stage of Jewish Trial Jesus Condemned by the Sanhedrin and Led to Pilate	27:1, 2	15:1	22:66–23:1	18:28
Judas’ Remorse and Suicide (30 silver shekels = 4 months’ work)	27:3–10			Acts 1:18–9
ROMAN TRIAL				
1 st Stage: Jesus before Pilate for the First Time	27:11–14	15:2–5	23:2–5	18:28–38
2 nd Stage: Jesus before Herod Antipas			23:6–12	
3 rd Stage: Pilate Sentenced Jesus with Crucifixion	27:15–26	15:6–15	23:13–25	18:39–40
Scourged and Mocked Jesus	27:27–30	15:16–19		19:1–2
Pilate delivered Jesus to the Jews				19:3–15
THE CRUCIFIXION				
On the Way to the Cross	27:31–34	15:20–23	23:26–33	19:17
Jesus Crucified and Reviled	27:35–44	15:24–32	23:33–43	19:18–27
His Three Sayings during First Three Hours, Darkness Three Hours, Four Sayings	27:45–56	15:33–41	23:44–49	19:28–30
Jesus Died. Cataclysmic Earthquake				
Jesus Found Dead, Body Buried, Tomb Guarded	27:57–66	16:42–47	23:50–56	19:31–42

SETTING: Jerusalem—east, west, and north. The Lord is led to King Herod’s palace, back to the High Priest’s palace, possibly to the Antonian Fortress or Judgment Hall, to Calvary/Golgotha/Place of the Skull, and finally is laid in a Tomb in a garden.

JEWISH TRIAL CONTINUED

Jesus' Condemnation and Delivery to Pilate

Matthew 27:1-2, Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-23:1; John 18:28-37

Matthew 27:1, Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71; John 18:28-37 “in the morning . . . the whole council condemned him” Other Greek manuscripts include “at daybreak” suggesting that the Jewish trial with Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin lasted until about 6:00 a.m. As mentioned previously, the Sanhedrin was the Jewish ruling body made up of 70 members (Numbers 11:16). They were chief priests (from the temple), scribes (similar to lawyers) and elders (the lay branch of membership). Both major parties were represented, the Sadducees and Pharisees (the latter being the minority in the council). Only twenty-three of the members were needed in attendance to make a decision.

Each Gospel includes different details. Luke refers to the assembly or Sanhedrin as the “multitude.” He uses this word 24 times, Matthew never does, and Mark does once. Luke includes the group asking Jesus two questions: “art thou the Christ,” and “art thou the Son of God.” These questions were answered in Luke’s birth narratives by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:32, 35). This becomes one of Luke’s many connections between Jesus’ birth and death accounts.³

Matthew 27:2, Mark 15:1; Luke 23:1; “they bound him . . . and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor”

As a vassal state, Judea had a Roman prefect [governor] assigned to: 1. Keep the peace, 2. Act as Judge, and 3. Watch over Rome’s economic interest (taxation). Pilate, was of the lower Roman nobility, and ruled as the sixth Roman prefect in Judea for ten years (AD 26 to 36). His appointment was initiated by an anti-Jewish Syrian delegate.⁴

Jews despised Pilate for many reasons. Once he marched into Jerusalem at night with images of the Emperor and the eagle (thus breaking the second of the Ten Commandments), and minted pagan symbols on their coins. Josephus and Philo indicated that Pilate was a stern ruler and not wise. Josephus claimed that Pilate used sacred temple treasury funds to build an aqueduct from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. When the Jews found out, they rioted, and Pilate extinguished the uproar with bloodshed.⁵ The early Christian historian, Eusebius (AD 263-339), claimed that Pilate committed suicide.

John 18:28-29 “the Jews did not enter the Praetorium to avoid being defiled and unable to eat the Passover”

(BSB) We assume that the “hall of judgment” was the Roman praetorian—either in the Antonian Fortress (the garrison on the NW corner of Temple Square) or more likely, Herod’s Palace (on the west hill of Jerusalem near modern Jaffa Gate).⁶ The irony is tragic—to avoid ceremonial uncleanness which would disqualify them from

eating the Passover the upcoming night, the Jews did not go into the Roman judgment hall. So, Pilate stepped out to talk to them. Yet all the while, their filthy hearts sought to murder Jesus, the true Pascal Lamb. Readers now do not miss the point that Jesus has the power to make these Jewish leaders and all of us clean every whit (not just ritually clean).⁷

Judas Commits Suicide

Matthew 27:3-10

Matthew 27:3-4 “Judas . . . brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests . . . I have betrayed the innocent blood” Judas learns of Jesus’ condemnation and goes to the temple to talk to the chief priests. In addition to the previous discussion on the spectrum of prices for slaves (see notes from Matthew 26:13 and Old Testament ties to Zechariah 11:12; and Exodus 12:32), Taylor Halverson and others have noted that thirty pieces of silver is one-tenth or a tithe of the cost of the ointment Mary of Bethany used to anoint Jesus about a week earlier (Mark 14:5; John 12:5). Interestingly, Judas was the one who complained about the wasted money. Then a week later, he valued the Lord so little that he betrayed him for only 10% of Mary’s gift.



Remorse by J. H. Hartley, 1929.

Matthew 27:5 “he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary” (NASB) Matthew’s original text describes Judas throwing the money toward a specific part of temple, the “sanctuary/*naos*.” This was known as the Holy Place and Holy of Holies. In Moses’ tabernacle, this was where the Ark of the Covenant topped with the Mercy Seat was placed (Exodus 24:33). This symbolized the throne of God.

“. . . hanged himself on a tree. And straightway he fell down, and his bowels gushed out, and he died” (JST) There must have been different traditions that spread regarding Judas’ death, because the two places this is mentioned in the Bible only agree in part. (Acts 1:18 reads: “this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.”) The JST addition (above in italics) adds to their commonality.

In the Bible, there are only two other examples of men who hang themselves (2 Samuel 15:30; 17:23; 18:9-13). Both stories foreshadowed the Lord’s betrayal. Judas’ death was foreshadowed by David’s betrayal by his trusted counselor,

Ahithophel, and David's son, Absalom. When David learned that Ahithophel betrayed him, the king went out to the Mount of Olives to weep and pray. His son, Absalom, had revolted against his father and gathered an army to fight against him. During a battle, Absalom rode through a forest, but his long thick hair got caught in an oak tree. As his mule ran on, Absalom hung there until his enemies found him, mocked him, and killed him with a javelin.

Matthew 27:9, “Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled” (NIV) This is the last of Matthew's fourteen “fulfillment” passages.⁸ Jesus' life fulfills many Old Testament patterns, and similar to Jeremiah 18:2 or 32:6–15, we find an even closer match with Zechariah 10:12–13, “. . . they weighed for my price thirty *pieces* of silver. And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty *pieces* of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD.” Matthew's citation is interesting in light of historical accessibility to scriptural texts. Rarely did one individual have access to all the scripture scrolls, especially all the writings of the prophets. I wonder if Matthew had just remembered the prophet and was not reading the text. Matthew had just quoted Zechariah when describing Jesus' Triumphal entry.⁹

THE ROMAN TRIAL

1st Stage: Jesus before Pilate

Matthew 27:11–14, Mark 15:2–5; Luke 23:2–5; John 18:29–38

John 18:29–30 “What accusation bring ye against this man?” The Jews would not go in, so Pilate went out to ask them (either on a balcony, from his front porch, or outside). Pilate rarely interacted with the Jews, and the issue of ritual purity may have been one of the reasons. The relationship between the Jewish leaders and Pilate was already strained. Because the Jews asked Pilate for a favor, this turned into an unusual scene where Pilate got them to a place of cooperation. To foster this Jewish submission to Roman authority, Pilate betrayed Jesus.

Luke 23:3 “. . . to accuse him . . . forbidding to give tribute to Caesar . . . saying, that he himself is Christ a King” The Jews expected their Messiah to be a king, so they use the phrase, “Christ a King” (with Christ as the Greek word for Messiah). While the Jewish leaders falsely attacked Jesus on political grounds, “perverting the nation,” the Gospel of Luke portrays Jesus as innocent. Repeatedly, Luke demonstrates Jesus obeying Roman and Mosaic Laws. What Jesus denounced was the rabbinic traditions or oral laws.

John 18:31–32 “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death” These verses suggest that Jews were unable to sentence anyone to death. As Rome conquered and annexed countries to its Empire, they wrote specific by-laws for their governing. We do not have that document for Judea. But, in many cases, Rome kept the right to inflict

capital punishment. According to Josephus, Roman law gave power from Caesar to give the prefect “authority even in capital cases.”¹⁰ Nonetheless, in the New Testament, we find certain Jews stoning Stephen (Acts 7:54–58). If Josephus was right, then the high priest who had Stephen stoned acted under “lynch law.”

Matthew 27:11a; Mark 15:2a; Luke 23:3a; John 18:33 “Art thou the King of the Jews?” All four Gospels quote this phrase exactly (a very rare find!). It is a question for all disciples to answer as well. Pilate’s question can be answered positively by all disciples. It appears that there was no interpreter present in the praetorium, but that Jesus speaks Greek to Pilate. Most educated people at the time spoke two or three languages, with koine Greek being the most common. (The Gospels record Jesus speaking Aramaic—probably his mother tongue—in Gethsemane, on the cross, and earlier.¹¹)

John 18:33–35 “Sayest thou this thing of thyself or did others tell it . . .?” As He often did, Jesus answered Pilate by asking Him a question (at least in John’s Gospel). Another way of interpreting Jesus’ question is, “Are you converted or just quoting others?” Pilate ignored the opportunity to ask Jesus about His teachings, and instead became defensive. Pilate answered with the usual Roman contempt for Jews.

Christ in front of Pilate by Mihály Munkácsy, 1881. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



John 18:36 “My kingdom is not of this world” Jesus did not answer Pilate’s second and third questions (“am I a Jew? . . what hast thou done?”), but went back to the first about His kingdom. Jesus’ subjects include numberless angels who could have defended Him, but He will not fight or reign in Jerusalem this morning.

Matthew 27:11b; Mark 15:2b; Luke 23:3b; John 18:37-38a “thou sayest . . . to this end was I born” This becomes another thought-provoking question for disciples to ask—to what end were we each born? Jesus was born to rule on earth—and in heaven. But Satan, the great usurper, has become the counterfeit king of the world. Tragically, most mortals obey him. In Matthew’s Gospel the JST adds: “*for thus it is written of me.*”

“Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?” Jesus continued to teach more about Himself, but His words fell on deaf ears. Unless people are committed to learning truth, they will not listen to His voice. Fortunately, Jesus told someone about this private conversation and it was recorded, so that His words live on. Now each reader can answer Pilate’s question. Jesus did not answer’s his question in verse 38, but He did in 1833; “Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 93:24).

Luke 23:4; John 18:38b “I find no fault,” or “I find not even one fault in him” (ABPE), or “no crime in him” (ASV). Luke alone includes that Jesus did not offend the Roman authorities, and Pilate offered a verdict of innocence. This message that Jesus and the early Christians were law abiding, devoted citizens is repeatedly found in Luke. This is Luke’s first disclosure from Pilate’s mouth that the Lord was not guilty.

Matthew 27:12–14; Mark 15:3 “when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing” Previously, Jesus answered Pilate, but He no longer answered those who He had already taught.

Luke 23:5 “and they were the more fierce . . .” Jesus’ silence riled the Jewish leaders all the more and they relentlessly repeated their demands. They claimed that Jesus was a national threat from Galilee to Jerusalem, but in reality, He is only a threat to Satan’s kingdom.

Luke 23:6–7 “as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod’s jurisdiction . . .” Up to this point the two Roman rulers in Palestine, Pilate and Herod, had been competitive enemies. But, when Pilate heard that Jesus was from Galilee, Pilate happily passed Him over to Herod Antipas to find a verdict. (This was the son of King Herod, the great builder. This Herod beheaded John the Baptist and would soon kill James the Apostle and imprison Peter (Acts 12:2–3). The soldiers next took Jesus to Herod’s quarters.



Pilate Sends Jesus to Herod by William Hole, 1905.

2nd Stage: Jesus' Hearing before Herod Antipas

Luke 23:8-12

Luke 23:8-9 “Herod . . . was exceeding glad . . . he hoped to have seen some miracle” Herod is portrayed as a “sign seeker” (the word “miracle” is often translated *sign*, NIV, ESV, BLB, etc.), but Jesus was not intimidated by Herod’s position and refused to even talk to him. In this scene, Luke points out that Jesus is in complete control. (Jesus initiated the arrest and trials by going to the place where Judas could easily find Him.) Only Luke includes Jesus’ contempt for Herod and the mistreatment of another Roman official. This may have been included to parallel with Herod’s father in the birth narratives (Luke 2:1; Matthew 2:1).

Luke 23:10-11 “. . . mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe” Perhaps in revenge for Jesus not cooperating, or perhaps to placate the Jewish leaders, Herod mocked Jesus having Him wear a “gorgeous” or “bright and shining” robe. In two verses we learn that Herod also found no reason to have Jesus killed.

Luke 23:12 “Pilate and Herod were made friends” The two enemies now had a common enemy that ironically unified them. Luke has neither Roman official saying anything against Jesus’ character.

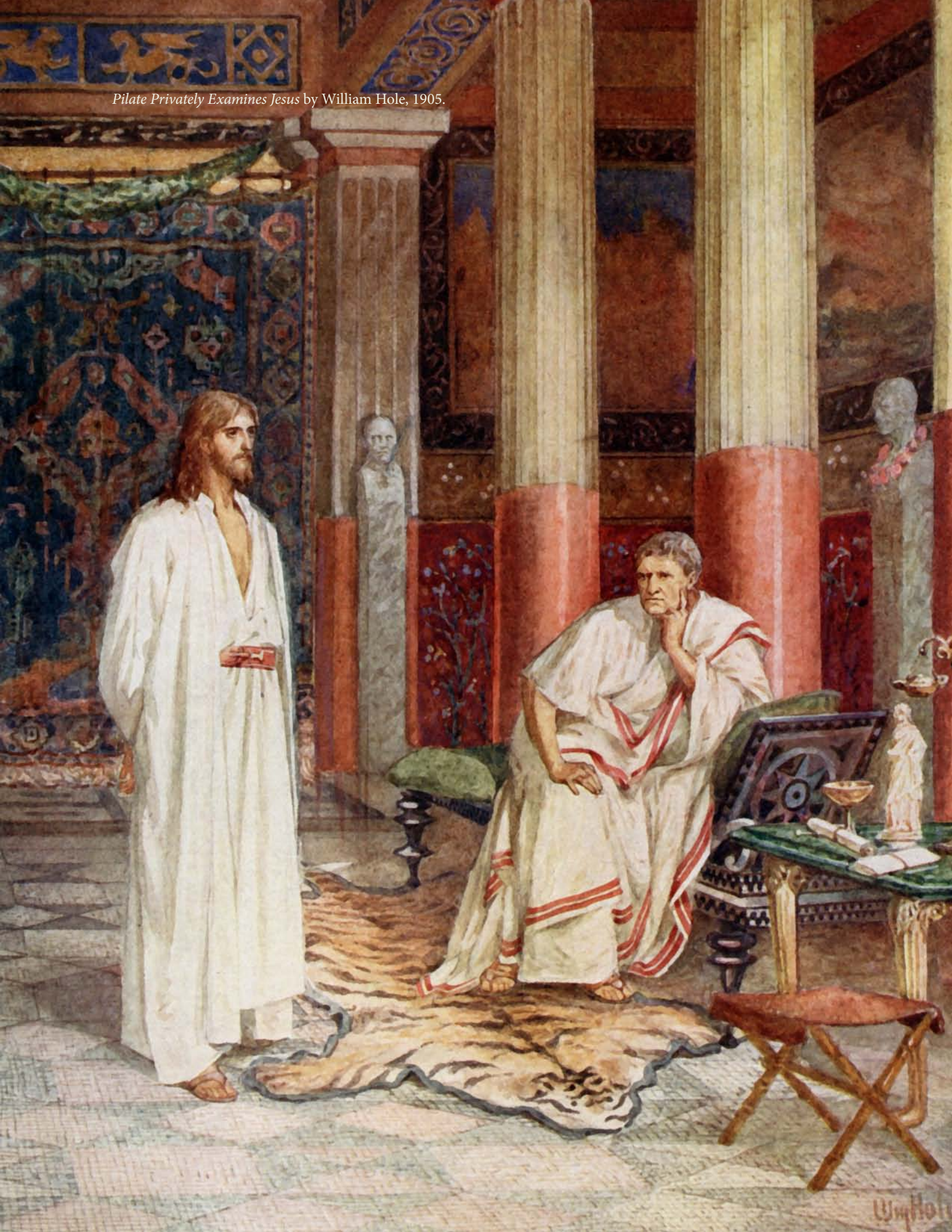
3rd Stage: Second Hearing before Pilate

Matthew 27:15-32; Mark 15:6-21; Luke 23:13-26; John 18:38-19:16

Luke 23:13-15 “I . . . found no fault in this man . . . nor [has] Herod” Members of the “council” or Sanhedrin escorted Jesus back to Pilate who stated Jesus’ innocence for the second of four times in Luke. Jesus was not guilty of what they accused him—He had not offended Rome.

Luke 23:16 “I will therefore chastise him . . .” Cruel Pilate tried to placate the Jews by suggesting he “chastise” or “scourge” Him (John 19:1). At the Last Supper Jesus introduced Himself as the servant/slave, “the one who leads should become like the one who serves . . . I am among you as the One who serves” (Luke 22:26-27, ISV); in John’s Gospel He enacts that by washing their feet (John 13:2-17). In the Roman Empire, the identifying sign of a slave, was scars on their backs from whippings.¹² This seems all too meaningful to miss the sign of Jesus’ scourging now as He becomes the servant of us all.

Pilate Privately Examines Jesus by William Hole, 1905.



BARABBAS

Matthew 27:15; Mark 15:6; John 18:39a “**You have a custom that I should release one man . . .**” (ESV) The custom of releasing one of the prisoners at Passover to display clemency, appears to have affected only the provincial jurisdiction of Judea, not the rest of the Roman Empire.

Matthew 27:16; Mark 15:7–8 “. . . **Jesus Barabbas Jesus know as Messiah?**” The Anchor Bible prefers an older Matthean text that includes the parallel first names, too. The names are quite interesting as Jesus/Yeshua was another form of the name, Yehoshua/Joshua. The Hebrew roots mean, “to deliver, save.” The name, Barabbas means, “son of the Father” in Aramaic. In a sense, both men tried to deliver their people, one through violence and the other through fulfilling God’s plan. Mark and Luke explain that Barabbas had been part of the violent uprising against Rome, and “committed murder in the insurrection” or “sedition” (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19). Ironically, he is the antithesis of the Lord, and actually committed the wrongs that Jesus was charged with. The Jews wanted to let him go like the scape goat, filled with sins (Leviticus 16:10). Barabbas’ name and political tyranny represent everything that Jesus was being tried for: In the Roman trial He was tried for tyranny against the government, and in the Jewish trial, for blasphemy for claiming that He will sit “at the right hand of the Mighty One” (Matthew 26:65.)

Matthew 27:17; Mark 15:9–10; John 18:39b “**Shall I release . . . the King of the Jews?**” Pilate’s response can be interpreted in different ways. Is he honoring Jesus or laughing at the Jews? In light of his tense relationship and cruel history with the Jews (see Matthew 27:2 above), I see him poking fun at them and Jesus. He called a bound prisoner their king. Pilate had already declared Jesus’ innocence, yet his actions showed that he did not care about justice. His words showed that he was politically motivated. The Jewish trial was “a mockery of a prophet, and the Roman trial a mockery of a king.”¹³

Matthew 27:18–21; Mark 15:11–12; Luke 23:18–20; John 18:40 “**They shouted back, “No, not him! Give us Barabbas!”** (NIV) Clearly, as recorded in all four Gospels, the voice of the Jewish leaders gathered outside the Praetorian wanted Jesus killed. Pilate’s position was made more challenging as his wife intervened with the message that she had had a dream of Jesus’ innocence. Pilate would someday regret not following his wife’s advice. Centuries later, the Greek Orthodox Church made Pilate’s wife a “saint” for defending Jesus.¹⁴

Matthew 27:22; Mark 15:13; Luke 23:21–22 “**They cried, saying, crucify him, crucify him**”

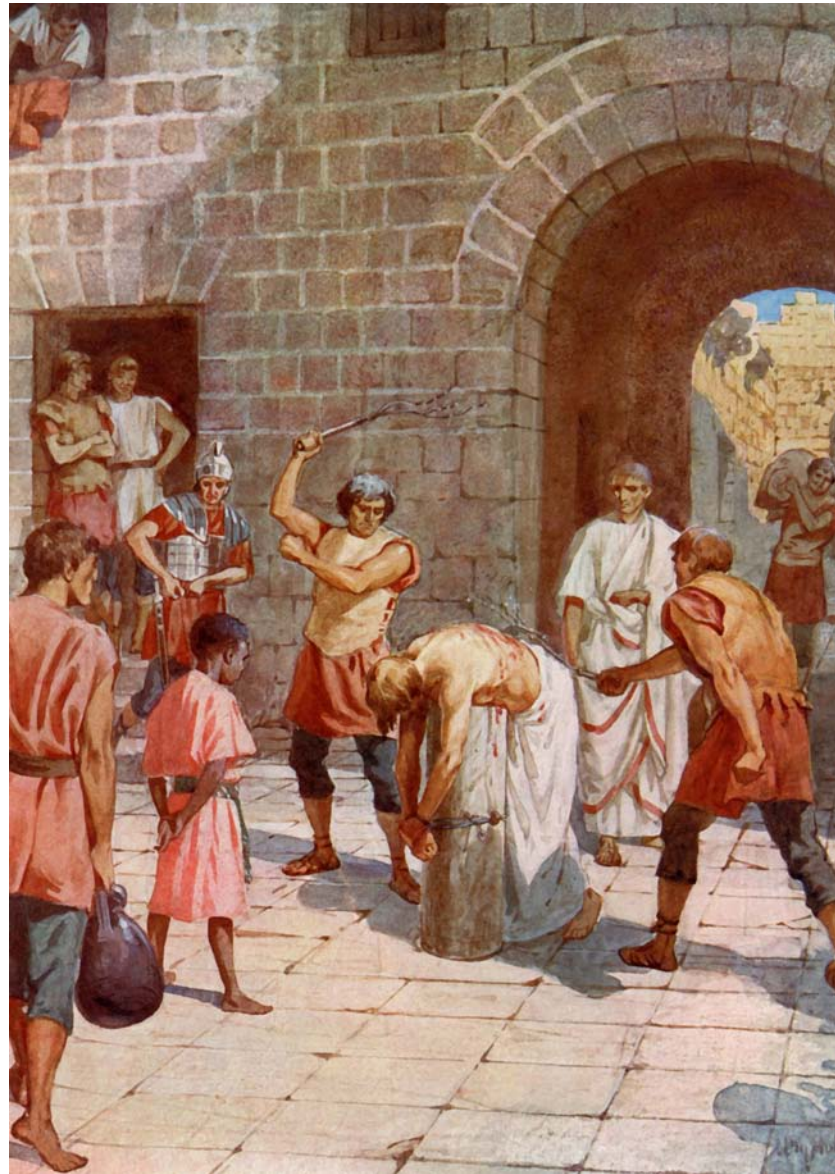
Pilate’s Soldiers Scourge and Mock Jesus

John 19:1 “**Pilate . . . took Jesus, and scourged him**” John does not paint a nice picture of Pilate and is the only Gospel to include Pilate’s order to scourge Jesus. (Matthew and Mark include the scourging after the mocking, without identifying Pilate.) Often Romans preceded a crucifixion with scourging or flogging. The weapon was a

whip made with leather thongs and attached to a wooden handle. It was made more dangerous by weaving sharp objects into the leather (such as bones, rocks, and lead shot). To perform the torture, two soldiers tied their victim to a post, and both soundly beat him. If it were a Jewish whipping, the Law of Moses allowed “no more than forty lashes” (Deuteronomy 25:3, BSB). They usually stopped at 39 to make sure they did not break the Law (2 Corinthians 11:24). Some victims died from the scourging and loss of blood. If the prisoner lived, they were left naked in excruciating pain with quivering bleeding flesh. Some victims were then taken outside the city wall to endure the terror of living crucifixion.

Jesus’ skin was lashed, ripped, and pierced like a crushed olive.¹⁵ This episode fulfilled two sections of Isaiah: “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting” (Isaiah 50:6); and “from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores” (Isaiah 1:6). While Jesus fulfilled the role of the “suffering servant” in Isaiah, he also received the trademark of a slave in the Roman Empire, a “scarred back.”¹⁶ A few years after Jesus’ scourging, the Sanhedrin also had the apostles beaten (Acts 5:40).

Matthew 27:27–29; Mark 15:16–17; John 19:2 “the soldiers . . . stripped him, put on him a scarlet robe . . . platted a crown of thorns . . . a reed in his right hand . . . a purple robe . . . and mocked him” Matthew and Mark join John in their inclusion of the soldiers mocking Jesus. They took Jesus back into the hall or Praetorium with “the whole band” gathered to mock Jesus. This actually identified a “cohort” of soldiers (600 men!). The dramatized mockery of a king had probably been performed before by the Romans on others who aspired to take over their leadership.



Pontius Pilate Delivers Jesus to Be Scourged by William Hole, 1905.

Thorns for Jesus' crown could have been easily gathered, but difficult to create without injury. The land of Israel was filled with thorns of all sizes and strengths. They draped a robe on Jesus that was from fabric used for royalty. (Scarlet in Matthew and purple in Mark, John, and the JST of Matthew.) Purple was the name for an expensive fabric associated with extreme wealth. The costly dye was extracted from sea snails and mollusks from the Syrian and Phoenician coast. (The name Phoenicia, means "land of the purple.")¹⁷

Matthew 27:30; Mark 15:18–19; John 19:3 “Hail King of the Jews! And they smote him . . . spit . . . worshiped him” The mocking by the Roman soldiers was probably more for political humor—laughing at the Jewish excuse for a king—than directed animosity at Jesus. As they mocked Jesus, they were scorning the Jewish nation by mimicking, “Ave Caesar!”¹⁸ The Roman records describe a similar scene in their triumphal marches of the first century.¹⁹ The Roman Soldiers in Jerusalem were, at best, apathetic toward Jews and, at worst, rabidly anti-Jewish. Ironically, the unbelieving gentiles called Jesus, a king, but soon believing gentiles will use the same title.

Pilate Delivers Jesus to the Jews

John 19:4–15

John 19:4–5 “I bring him forth to you . . . I find no fault . . . Behold the man!” Only John records this scene. The setting *appears* different than what Pilate says. It appears that Pilate was sarcastically jeering at his Jewish subjects. If he had planned on protecting Jesus after announcing Him innocent for the third time (John 18:38; 19:4, 6), why did Pilate parade Jesus before the mob in a beaten, bleeding state, all dressed up as a mock king? By Pilate introducing Jesus this way, still “wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe,” we get a feel for Pilate’s animosity against the Jews. If Pilate’s words were sincere, why then the scourging and additional mocking?

John 19:6 “Take ye him and crucify him” Pilate allowed the Jews to take control of their victim, but they preferred the Romans did their dirty political work. Pilate became one of the serfs of Satan who disfigured Jesus as prophesied in Isaiah’s suffering servant passages (Isaiah 52:14–53:12; also 42:1–7; 49:1–6; 51:4–11).

John 19:7 “by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God” The Law of Moses that was to protect the name of God and prepare a people to receive their God, was used by the Jewish leaders of this time to kill Him. Leviticus 24:16 explains that “whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD must to be put to death. The whole assembly surely must stone him.” But rather than the Jews stoning Jesus’ and risk falling out of favor with the majority of the Jews who honored Jesus as a prophet or Messiah, the chief priests and scribes asked the Romans to crucify Him.

John 19:8–9 “Pilate . . . was the more afraid . . . but Jesus gave him no answer” John recorded the dialogue between Jesus and defensive, superstitious Pilate who worried about Jesus being Divine. The polytheistic Roman religion believed in half-mortal-half-gods. Pilate’s fear of Jesus fitting into this category led him to question his



Pilate Yields Jesus to Be Crucified by William Hole, 1905.

decision. Jesus refused to respond to the hypocrite. Jesus again fulfilled Isaiah 53:7, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.” Jesus’ response shows His control of the conversation and the entire situation.

John 19:10–11 “Speakest thou not unto me? . . . I have power to crucify thee” As we look at life from an eternal perspective, no one has any power on his or her own. Everything we have comes from our Omniscient Father.

John 19:12 “The Jews cried out, saying, If you let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend” Romans used the honorific title, “Friend of Caesar,” for those who performed a great service or loyalty.²⁰ By now though, Pilate had already egged-on the Jewish mob and weakly succumbed to their pressure.

John 19:13 “Pilate . . . sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement . . . Gabbatha” For capital sentencing, Pilate would have mounted the judgment seat. In reality, though, Jesus is the only Judge in the room. Everyone else is actually on trial. Kelly Ogden explained that, “*Gabbatha* is equivalent to the Greek *lithostroton*, meaning the stone courtyard of the judgment hall . . . made of large Roman flagstones . . . in a raised platform resembling a throne where the governor sat in judgment.”²¹

John 19:14 “it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour” The preparation of the Passover means the day before the Passover (with Passover starting at sunset, or approximately 6:00 p.m.).²² Holy days, like Passover, were also called and treated as Sabbaths. As the Jewish daylight hours began at 6:00 a.m., the sixth hour would have been noon. The Levites were slaughtering their unblemished, male Passover lambs at the temple as the sun began to decline.²³ No unleavened bread was eaten after noon as well.

Matthew 27:23–25 “Pilate . . . took water and washed his hands before the crowd . . . I am innocent of this man’s blood” Matthew includes Pilate’s regret of his involvement by washing his hands. This was not after the Jewish manner of washing to become clean. Pilate had only a little understanding of Jewish beliefs, and even less respect for them. The Romans and also the Greeks practiced this custom to absolve themselves of responsibility.

Matthew 27:26; Mark 15:15; Luke 23:23–25’ John 19:15 “Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar” This put the Jews right where Pilate wanted them—to confess they have no king but Caesar. As a master politician, he manipulated the situation to his own ends. “The meaning of the trial is now clear; the presence of Jesus has provoked a judgment whereby the Chosen People have abandoned their birthright.”²⁴ Philo (a Jewish contemporary of Jesus, who lived in Alexandria), complained that Pilate had “vindictiveness and furious temper,” and was “naturally inflexible, a blend of self-will and relentlessness . . . 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.”²⁵

THE CRUCIFIXION

Jesus' Painful Walk to Golgotha

Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26–31

Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26 “A certain man from Cyrene, Simon . . . they forced him to carry the cross” (NIV) The victim usually carried the cross for his crucifixion through the city streets to the place of crucifixion. Yet, after Jesus’ overwhelming night in Gethsemane, the scourging and mocking, Jesus was too weak to carry His own crossbeam. The Synoptic Gospels each record that a man from Northern Africa had just arrived in Jerusalem, and as an obvious foreigner, the Romans compelled him as a slave to carry the cross. It appears that this Simon became a Christian, or at least his family did, because Mark adds, “the father of Alexander and Rufus.” As the author knew and included their names, we assume that he had enough contact after this experience to learn his name, and that his children’s names would mean something to other Christians in Mark’s audience.



Christ Carrying the Cross by Titian, ca. 1560.
Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Luke 23:27–31 “There followed . . . women, which also bewailed and lamented him” In opposition to the detractors, Luke switches the scene to Jesus’ supporters, the women. This group of women may have included those that Luke highlights as working with Jesus in Galilee, supporting Him financially, and traveling with him, “Mary called Magdalene . . . Joanna . . . Susanna, and many others” (Luke 8:2–3).

Even in this time of excruciating pain and exhaustion, Jesus saw their sorrow, and reached out to the women. Culturally, men were discouraged from speaking to women, especially those not in their family. Jesus’ action broke several of the oral laws. Jesus continued, even during His last hours, to reach out to empower women and give hope to those who were sorrowing.

“Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming . . .” Jesus prophesied of the future destruction of Jerusalem as a warning to them. This verse also hints that Jesus had taught in Jerusalem before and had disciples there as well as in Galilee (as the Gospel of John records).



Crucifixion by Gabriel Metsu, ca. 1660. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Golgotha or Calvary

Matthew 27:33–34; Mark 15:24–26; Luke 23:33; John 19:16–27

Matthew 27:33; Mark 15:22; Luke 23:33b; John 19:17 “they brought him to . . . Golgotha (which means the place of a skull) (RSV) Along a main road, outside a city wall in Jerusalem was the location where crucifixions took place. The JST changes the *skull* to a place of burial. This may have been the site where the ritual ashes of the red heifer were kept “without the camp in a clean place” beyond the walls of the Temple and city as “a water of separation: it is a purification for sin” (Numbers 19:9). Both “Golgotha” (Hebrew) and “Calvary” (Latin), mean skull. Perhaps it was referred to as place of the skull because of all the bones left there; or perhaps the pockmarked limestone rock along the road may have looked like a skull.

Matthew 27:34; Mark 15:23; “they offered him wine to drink, mingled with gall; but . . . he would not drink it” (ESV) Twice in Mark the Lord is offered something to drink during his last hours. This timing would have been before the crucifixion. Perhaps more than for thirst, this drink was to stupefy the senses. Matthew and Mark have the drink offered to Jesus before His arms are stretched out and nailed to the cross beam. Gall (Matthew) or myrrh (Mark) may describe a mind-altering drug that numbed the pain like an analgesic.²⁶ The authors included this detail in part to show it fulfilled prophecy: “Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for *some* to take pity, but *there was* none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (Psalms 60:20–21).

Jesus is Crucified

Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24–25; Luke 23:33; John 19:18

Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:33; John 19:18 “**There they crucified him**” The upcoming Passover did not detour the Jewish leaders nor the Roman’s from carrying this out. Mark 15:25 tells us the soldiers crucified Jesus at the “third hour” or 9:00 a.m. (This means He was on the cross for over six hours.) Romans crucified robbers, revolutionaries, and insurrectionists. From 37 BC to AD 70 the Romans crucified thousands of Jews in Palestine for these reasons. They used three kinds of crosses: one in the shape of a “T,” another in an “X,” and the last in a “I” (or a dagger). Some crosses left the victim 8–10 inches off the ground and others about three feet off the ground.²⁷ Crucifixion was official governmental violence.

CRUCIFIXION

Romans refined the Persian, Greek, and Syrian practices of crucifixion to create maxim torture. They hoped to delay death as long as possible to inflict more pain. In an attempt to put fear into their subjects and to maintain order, they crucified malefactors in public areas so that more people could see and be scared into obeying the Roman rule. They kept the instruments of crucifixion always ready. Large poles (or trees) were secured in the ground near major roads. These acted as a warning to all passersby. When a victim was crucified, they usually carried their own cross beam to the major road where the posts stood. Then the victim was nailed or tied to the cross beam before being lifted up by a pulley system onto the main post. Once suspended, the victim suffocated as they hanged. To draw out the torture, Romans placed a piece of wood for the victim to sit on to rest their arms from the weight of their body pulling on the nails. But, leaning on the seat would have only prolonged their suffocation from hours to days of excruciating pain, burning fever, thirst, and the sting of insects. Just hanging publicly naked was the uttermost humiliation for a Jew.

Jesus First Words from the Cross

Luke 23:34 “**Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do**” Luke’s emphasis of the empowered and gentle Jesus, records this sensitive gift of forgiveness to those carrying out the high priest’s wishes and Pilate’s orders. The JST adds that Jesus was specifically talking about the Roman soldiers. Kent Brown summarized, “In pleading with his Father to forgive his executioners . . . Jesus’ terrible situation on the cross, which seems to point to his defeat, really shows off his power to remit sin and to bring willing souls to himself.”²⁸

Matthew 27:35–36; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:23–24 “**and parted his garments**” It was a perk for the Roman executioners to have the right to the victim’s possessions (sandals, head covering, outer robe, etc.). All four Gospels include this detail. Perhaps that is because “the coat was without seam, woven from the top” (John 19:23). The seamless woven tunic or garment denotes its expensive nature. It was probably a gift from one of the

wealthy women who “ministered unto him of their substance” (Luke 8:2). Some have argued that Jesus’ tunic was similar to the sacred garments worn by the Aaronic temple priests. Moses instructed, “Weave the tunic of fine linen” (Exodus 28:39).²⁹ John refers to four parts suggesting that there were four soldiers who crucified him.

“**Casting lots**” was done by each participant placing their own piece of wood, stone, or potsherd into a bowl and then shaking it. Whatever piece jumped out first would signify its owner as the winner. Greek uses a different word for shaking “knuckle bones,” which were similar to our dice. Matthew includes that they stayed and sat down when their job was done.

The event was foreshadowed in Psalm 22:18, “They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19–22 “This is the King of the Jews” Again, only John identifies Pilate as the one who wrote the sign (until the JST, which added Pilate to Matthew and Mark as well). John recorded that Pilate had Jesus’ name and title written in three languages: Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. Pilate’s title, “King of the Jews,” upset the high priest, but Pilate would not change it. Customarily, Romans wrote the crime on a board and then carried it before the prisoner as he walked through the city to his crucifixion. In Jesus’ case, they placed it on the cross. Each of the Gospel sources remembered the title slightly differently, but they all included, “King of the Jews.”

Matthew	Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews
Mark	The King of the Jews
Luke	This is the King of the Jews
John	Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews

At Jesus’ birth he received the same title, “King of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2).

Further Mocking by the Rulers and Crowd

Matthew 27:39–43; Mark 15:29–32a; Luke 23:35–37

“**IF thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself**” The main road was filled with people preparing for the Passover. The crucifixion poles had been intentionally placed close enough for any passerby to chide or strike them. In addition to the physical pain from lacerated veins, crushed tendons, swirling dizziness, cramped muscles, traumatic fever, and the feeling of suffocation with every short breath, Jesus had the emotional abuse of his countrymen. The railings, “If . . . if thou be . . .” sounds just like Satan’s temptations all over again.

Second and Third Conversations from the Cross

Matthew 27:44; Mark 15:32b; Luke 23:39-43; John 19:25

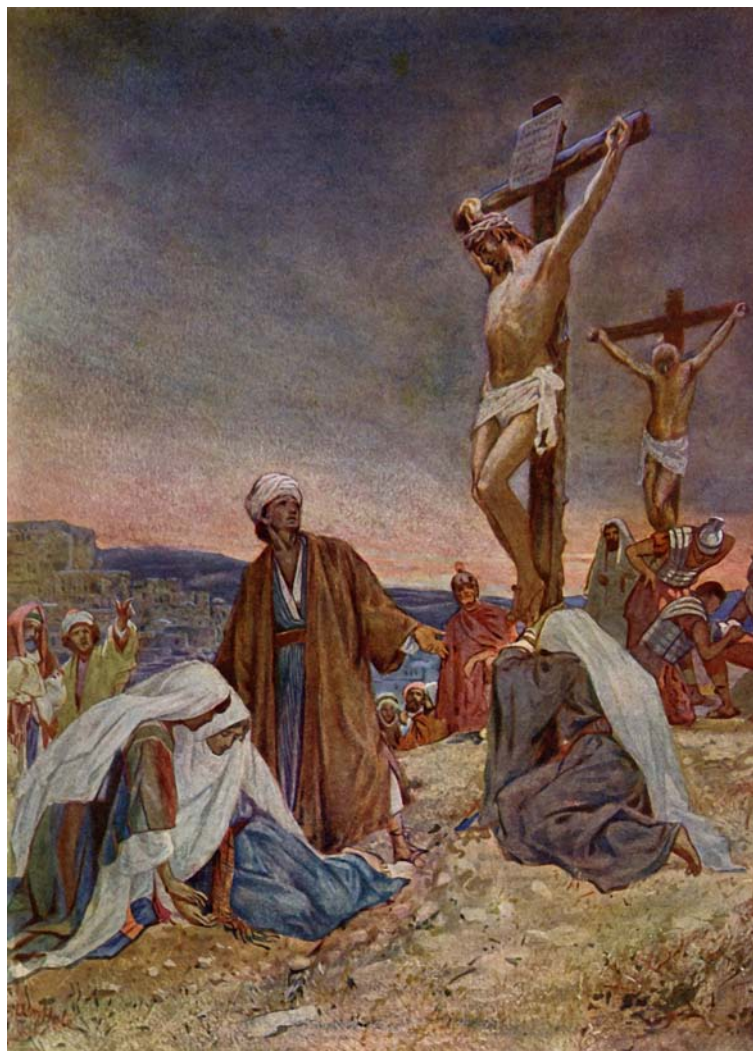
Matthew 27:44; Mark 15:32; Luke 23:39-43 “Lord remember me . . . Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” The second thief knew of Jesus’ innocence and defended Him to the other thief. Jesus’ fame must have been well enough known that even prisoners had heard of Him and understood that Jesus’ kingdom was still to come. This man believed that Jesus could help him eternally, and asked for help in the afterlife. I trust that Jesus’ promise of being with him in paradise left the man with peace. We are fortunate to have President Joseph F. Smith’s vision to enlighten us on Jesus’ mission in paradise. Only a very few Christians know of the beautiful work that Jesus did to organize missionary forces in the Spirit World during the three days and nights that his body lay in the Tomb (D&C 138).

Witnesses at the Cross

Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; Luke 23:39; John 25-27

Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; Luke 23:39; John 19:25 “Now there stood by the cross . . . his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary . . .” Every Gospel shares a list of women who did not forsake Jesus, but remained close enough to witness His crucifixion and death. John remembered them “standing by the cross,” but Luke’s sources reported they “stood at a distance and saw . . .” (RSV). In either case, they were close enough to witness and talk to the Lord even when “looking on from afar” (Matthew 27:55; Mark 15:40; RSV). This becomes another connection with the birth narratives, when wicked men tried to kill Jesus, and women tended to Him.

The last time that the Gospel of John specifically mentions both Mary the mother of Jesus and John the Beloved together with Jesus was back at the wedding of Cana (John 2:4). By combining the women at the tomb and the women at the cross, we find a lot of consistency. One of the women that John mentions is Jesus’ “mother’s sister,” opening an interesting familial possibility:



Jesus Charges John With the Care of His Mother by William Hole, 1905.

MATT 27:56

Mary Magdalene
 Mary mother of James & Joseph
 Mother of sons of Zebedee
 Other women

MARK 15:40

Mary Magdalene
 Mary, mother of James the less & Jose
 Salome
 Other women

LUKE 24:10

Mary Magdalene
 Mary of James
 Joanna (wife of Chuza)

JOHN 19:25

Mary, Jesus' mother
 Mary Magdalene
 Mary wife of Cleopas
 Jesus' mother's sister

Which of these women are Jesus' aunt? I see three possibilities—either Salome, Joanna or another woman. Joanna was “the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward” (Luke 8:3). With such an important position of wealth, it does not seem consistent with an arranged marriage from a poor family in the small town of Nazareth. This makes Joanna an unlikely choice. Salome seems more likely, especially because that relationship makes the apostles, James and John (also known as the “sons of thunder,”) Jesus’ first cousins. The last option is that the Synoptic Gospels do not mention Jesus’ aunt by name, and she is one of the “other women.” It also seems less likely that such an important person in early Christian history would not be pointed out.

John 19:26–7 “When Jesus saw his mother . . . woman behold thy son” Only John’s Gospel records Jesus lovingly giving the guardianship of His mother to His beloved disciple. We learn in Mark 6:3, and Matthew 13:55–56, that Mary had at least six other living children. It appears that Joseph had died, though, as no Gospel mentions him alive during Jesus’ ministry.

Tradition states that John the Beloved, took Mary to Ephesus where they built the Kingdom for decades. (Visitors can go into a little house where some think Mary lived.) One reason why John received the care of Mary rather than one of her own children, is because John tells us they did not believe in Jesus’ divine role at this time. Also, John the Beloved would have been able to take care of her throughout her life since he will outlive Mary (and everyone for two millennium). If there were a family tie, that guardianship makes even more sense. Mary was the first Christian disciple, and now she received the role of the mother of the ideal disciple. With this commission of His mother, Jesus finished the work He came to do.

Nature Responded to Her King

Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44–45

Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44 “there was a darkness over all the earth” Jesus had already been on the cross for three hours when all went dark (Mark 15:25). As Passover is timed with the vernal equinox (which

includes a full moon), it would have been impossible for an eclipse to occur then. The three hours of darkness began at noon, and ended at three in the afternoon, the “hour of prayer.” The darkness is understood by the Creation mourning its Creator’s death, or because “he is in the sun, and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made” (D&C 88:7). Whatever the cause, the blackness covered Jesus as well, as this would have also been the hours during which the lambs were being slaughtered at the temple altar for hundreds of thousands of Jewish pilgrims in Jerusalem. No storm is mentioned, only darkness and later an earthquake.

Matthew 27:51; Mark. 15:38; Luke 23:45b “the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom” In the Mosaic tabernacle and subsequent temples, the Sanctuary was bifurcated by a veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The veil represented the dividing line between heaven and God’s throne room. In Herod’s Temple there were two veils hung eighteen inches apart. The torn veil may have been the inner one to open the way to the Holy of Holies. This also takes us back to Luke 1 with Zacharias in the Holy Place lighting the incense beside the veil. Symbolically, the opening reflects at least two things: 1) Jesus opened the way to the presence of God again so that humans could all return to His presence through repentance; 2). the end of animal sacrifices or Mosaic temple ritual.

Final Words from the Cross

Matthew 27:46–50; Mark 15:34–37; Luke 23:46; John 19:29–30

Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34 “Jesus cried . . . *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?* . . . My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Jesus has now been on the cross for half the day; it is 3:00 p.m. or “the ninth hour” (Mark 15:34). Repeatedly, Matthew and Mark portray the mortal side of Jesus’ nature. Here they are the only two to include this desperate call for help. These two Gospels include the last Aramaic phrase from Jesus’ mouth. For some tragic reason, Jesus had to experience His Father’s absence, too.

Matthew 27:47; Mark 15:35 “them that stood by . . . he calleth Elias” We only know of the soldiers, John the Beloved, and the group of five-plus women who remained beside Jesus’ cross, but there may have been others. Elias is the Greek name for Elijah. Those near him may have thought of the well-known promise in Malachi 4:5, “I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.”

John 19:28–29 “Jesus knowing . . . the scripture might be fulfilled, saith . . .” Jesus knew which scriptures had to be fulfilled, including Psalms 69:21, “They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” Before Jesus’ crucifixion, Matthew and Mark mention Jesus rejecting the wine mixed with gall, which acted as a mild pain killer. Three hours later, Jesus was again offered vinegar on a sponge, as they had earlier before the crucifixion.



Matthew 27:48; Mark 15:36; John 19:29 “one of them ran and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar . . . and gave him to drink” This time, six hours later, Jesus accepted the drink. Vinegar was thought by some to be a cheaper wine. The liquid was transported to Him via a sponge or a hyssop branch (according to John 19:29). John may have specified the hyssop, because of its symbolism for purification. It is an herb like thyme, but ever since its use in the first Passover in Egypt, when Israelites dipped hyssop with the paschal lamb’s blood to smear on their doorposts, it has been a sign of God’s protection. This symbol of the Lord’s protection extends to each pilgrim’s sojourn in the wilderness/world/Egypt.

John 19:30 “Jesus . . . received the vinegar, he said, It is finished, and he bowed his head and gave up the ghost”

Luke 23:46 “And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice he said: Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” Jesus’ last sigh of relief in Luke and John’s records, can be read as a cry of triumph—not merely patient resignation. As Jesus “gave up the ghost,” John again used the

word, “*pneuma*/breath/spirit-ghost.” This ties to the beginning of John’s Gospel when John the Baptist saw the Spirit descend upon Jesus and stay with Him (John 1:33). Now, the Spirit has gone on. Luke and John record almost nothing of Jesus’ physical suffering during the crucifixion.³⁰

The Old Testament allusions of sacrifices underline the “great and last sacrifice” (Alma 34:10). The Gospels center on how the crucifixion inaugurated the new covenant and kingdom. Medieval Christian traditions concentrated on Jesus’ agony, which obscured the proclamation of the cross as a sign of victory.³¹

Luke and John include slightly different versions of the last words. They portray a more dignified and trusting Jesus than in Matthew’s and Mark’s version with His desperate cry of disappointing abandonment. Each Gospel

consistently portrays a different perspective that fits into the author's theology and message of Jesus as our Savior. Jesus' sigh of relief can be read as cry of triumph—not merely patient resignation.

In review, here is a list of the combined Gospels' seven recorded statements from Jesus on the cross:

1. Luke 23:34 "Forgive them for they know not what they do. (JST meaning the soldiers who crucified him.)"
2. Luke 23:43 "Today thou shalt be with me in paradise"
3. John 19:26–7 "Woman behold thy son! . . . Behold thy mother!"
4. Matthew 27:46 & Mark 15:34 "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? (My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?)"
5. John 19:28 "I thirst."
6. John 19:30 "It is finished." (JST Matthew 27:50; "Father it is finished, thy will is done.")
7. Luke 23:46 "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit"

Soldiers Attempted to Break Jesus' Legs but Instead Peirce His Side

John 19:31–37

John 19:31–2 "the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath day" Only John's Gospel includes these two details in the next six verses. Did he include them for prophetic and symbolic lessons too? The word *Sabbath* meant either an approaching Friday night to Saturday night, or a Holy Day. As mentioned in John 19:14, this was actually the "*preparation*" for the Passover, so it could have been any day of the week. The Jews had enough influence with the Romans to make sure that no victims were "exhibited" on their Sabbath or Holy Feast days.

John 19:32 "Then came the soldiers and break the legs" We find examples of other Jews requesting to break the legs of those being crucified, in order to shorten the length of time on the cross.³² Usually the Romans left the bodies on the crosses after death to be eaten by birds and animals of prey. This deprived the family from the privilege of visiting the grave. However, the Jews tried to remove them before night fall in keeping with Deuteronomy 21:23, "His body shall not remain all night upon the tree."

Ironic as it sounds, breaking the legs was a kind thing to do as it brought a quicker end to the torture, because now the crucified victims would suffocate, not being able to hold themselves up on their legs. However, when the soldiers came to Jesus He had already entered into His Eternal Reward.

John 19:33, 36 "he was dead already. . . the scripture should be fulfilled" Not breaking Jesus' bones fulfilled the Old Testament citations from Exodus 12:46 and Psalm 34:20. This fulfillment of scripture testifies that Jesus'

death had been planned from the beginning. Yet some Jews at that time believed that if a victim were truly innocent, God would not let him or her die. With this misunderstanding, they thought because God allowed the soldiers to crucify Jesus, He could not have been innocent, nor the Messiah. Furthermore, Deuteronomy 21:23 states anyone hung on a tree (including for crucifixion), “is accursed.”

Yet others, including the apostle Paul saw Jesus’ death in the symbolism of the children of Israel killing their paschal lambs: “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7; also see 10:1–6). Likewise, John the Baptist referred to Jesus as “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29, 36). We can find at least seven ways that Jesus typified sacrificial lambs.

1. The lamb must be the firstborn (Exodus 13:2,12; D&C 93:21).
2. The lamb must be a male (Exodus 12:5; Matthew 1:21).
3. The lamb must be without blemish (Exodus 12:5; Hebrews 7:26–27; 1 Peter 2:22; Malachi 1:7–14; 3 Nephi 12:48).
4. No bones of the lamb were to be broken (Psalm 34:20; Exodus 12:46; John 19:36).
5. The lamb was to be killed from noon to three (John 19:14).
6. The lamb was to be eaten near the spot of the sacrifice with no flesh carried far away (Exodus 12:8, 46; John 19:41).
7. Nothing of it shall remain until the morning (Exodus 12:10).

John 19:34–35 “one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side and forthwith came there out blood and water” The Church Father, Augustine (AD 354–430), and others, saw Jesus’ water and the blood from the cross as symbolic of the Christian sacrament of baptism and the sacrament flowing from Jesus’ redemptive death. They saw the spear wound in Jesus’ side symbolic of Adam’s side opened for the creation of Eve. With Jesus’ death, the church can now be born from the side of Jesus—the new Eve from the side of a new Adam.³³ When Jewish sacrifices were killed, the Jews were required to immediately drain out the blood and sprinkle it on the altar. This is another type of Christ. The blood also witnesses of Jesus’ mortal body.

John 19:37 “They shall look on him whom they pierced” This fulfilled Zechariah 12:10. “. . . and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem . . . And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart.” This has at least a dual application. John also quotes it later in the Book of Revelation, looking forward to its fulfillment at Jesus’ second coming “and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him” (Revelation 1:7).

Jesus Yields Up the Ghost by William Hole, 1905.



Jesus' Burial

Matthew 27:57-66; Mark 1:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42

Matthew 27:57; Mark 15:42-43; Luke 23:50-51; John 19:38 “there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph . . .” All four Gospels include the kindness of Joseph of Arimathaea. He was not only well to do, but also well respected and well connected. Luke refers to him as a “good” and “just” man who “waited for the kingdom of God.” Mark adds that he was an “honorable counsellor.” To make sure the reader does not question Joseph’s loyalties, Luke adds, “the same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them.”

The Synoptic Gospels explain that he was a member of the “counsel” or Sanhedrin. In order to be a member of the Sanhedrin, he must have been over 50 years old. John includes that he kept his discipleship a secret, “for fear of the Jews.” This fact might have made it easier for Pilate to allow him to take Jesus’ body. The Synoptic Gospels describe Joseph’s interaction with Pilate, that he “begged the body” (Luke 23:52; Matthew 27:58), and “craved the body” (Mark 15:43).

Archeologists do know where Joseph’s home town, Arimathaea, was located. But, early Christian historians claimed it was the town where the prophet Samuel was born and buried, “Ramathaim-Zophin” (1 Samuel 1:19; 25:1).³⁴ With his responsibility in the Sanhedrin, Joseph may have moved closer to Jerusalem for his tenure in the Sanhedrin.

John 19:39 “also Nicodemus . . . and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight”

Only John mentions another Sanhedrin member, and secret disciple. John includes a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus about being born again in John 3:1-21, and defends Jesus to the chief priests and the Pharisees in John 7:50. The courageous begging of Jesus’ body from Pilate showed Joseph’s and Nicodemus’ courage, in contrast to their previous timid discipleship. Their story demonstrates how Jesus’ death (and upcoming resurrection), began drawing people to Him.

Even though these men maintained a distance from Jesus and His followers, it appears that their position allowed them to be in the right place now to help. They came forward and did what the Galilean disciples could not have done. The two men probably worked together and divided their tasks: Joseph went to Pilate while Nicodemus bought the burial supplies. As wealthy men of influence, they would have also had several servants/slaves to help them with the task.³⁵ (Half the population of Jerusalem at this time were servants/slaves.³⁶)

Nicodemus brought an enormous amount of expensive burial myrrh mixed with aloes and oil. The total mixture amounted to a hefty seventy-five pounds. (“Pound” is the translation of Greek *litra*, which was actually twelve ounces by U.S. standards.) Myrrh is an aromatic gum grown in Arabia, Abyssinia, and India. The ancients highly prized myrrh from earliest times (Genesis 37:25). Israelites used it in incense (Exodus 30:23) and as a perfume



Joseph of Arimathea Lays Jesus' Body in His Tomb by William Hole, 1905.

for garments (Psalm 45:9). It was part of the cosmetic treatment used to purify young girls for the king's bed (Esther 2:13), and it was also used in embalming (Mark 15:23; John 19:39). In Revelation 18:13 myrrh appears among the items of luxury trade flowing into Babylon as it meets its doom.³⁷

Matthew 27:58–59; Mark 15:44–46; Luke 23:53; John 19:40 “they took Jesus’ body, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury” (WEB) Once Pilate was assured that Jesus was already dead, these two good men reverently handled our Lord’s mortal remains and gently prepared His body for burial. The Jewish custom was to wash, anoint and clothe the body for burial.

Matthew 27:60; Mark 15:46b; Luke 23:53b; John 19:41 “At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and . . . a new tomb” We learn that Golgotha was close to Joseph of Arimathaea’s garden and new sepulcher. This provides another echo from the Old Testament, where the paschal lamb must be eaten on the spot (or in greater Jerusalem), and not carried away (Exodus 12:46).³⁸

This is John’s second reference to a garden outside of Jerusalem. The first was the Garden of Gethsemane (18:1, 26) and now a garden where Jesus’ body was laid. These references to “gardens” should hearken back to the Garden of Eden where the promises to Adam and Eve are being fulfilled. The only other record that states that the burial was in a garden is found in *The Gospel of Peter*.³⁹ According to Matthew 27:60, the borrowed tomb was Joseph of Arimathaea’s own sepulcher.

The scriptures give us several details on the tomb. The Greek, *Codex Bezae*, adds that Joseph “put before the tomb a stone which twenty men could scarcely roll.”⁴⁰ Kelly Ogden outlined the following qualifications for the Lord’s tomb.⁴¹

1. It must be outside the city walls (John 19:20).
2. It must be near a main thoroughfare (Matthew 27:39; Mark 15:29; John 19:20).
3. It must be near a place of execution (Mark 15:27; Luke 23:33).
4. There must be a garden nearby (John 19:41; 20:15).
5. The garden must contain at least one tomb (John 19:41–42).
6. The rock tomb must be newly cut (Matthew. 27:60; Luke 23:53; John 19:41).
7. The tomb apparently had an anteroom (mourning chamber) and several places for burial; the tomb must be large enough to walk into (See Mark 16:5; Luke 24:3; John 20:8).
8. This particular tomb must have a large, heavy stone to seal the entrance, with a groove or trough for the stone to roll (Matthew 27:60; Mark 15:46; 16:4; Luke 24:2).
9. The tomb entrance must be small, so that one has to stoop to look inside; a person looking in from the outside could see the place where the body was laid (Luke 24:12; John 20:5, 11–12).
10. The tomb must have some place where linen burial cloths could lie and where a “young man” could sit (Mark 16:5), or two angels, one at the head and one at the foot, where Jesus’ body had lain (John 20:6–7, 12).

Matthew 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:54–56; John 19:42 “The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed . . . and saw . . . how his body was laid” (NIV). This enabled the women to return to the right place in three days. I presume there was a mutual respect between these two groups of disciples.

“Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation” John tells us a little about the timing, and Luke adds, “the Sabbath drew on.” This means it was approaching 6:00 p.m. In just a couple of hours, they were able to get everything done before their Sabbath or holy feast day. Thus, ends the New Testament account of the death of our Lord.

Header Image: Image of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ by Pete_Linforth via Pixabay.

Below: Pietà by Michelangelo. Photograph by Jebulon via Wikimedia Commons.



ENDNOTES

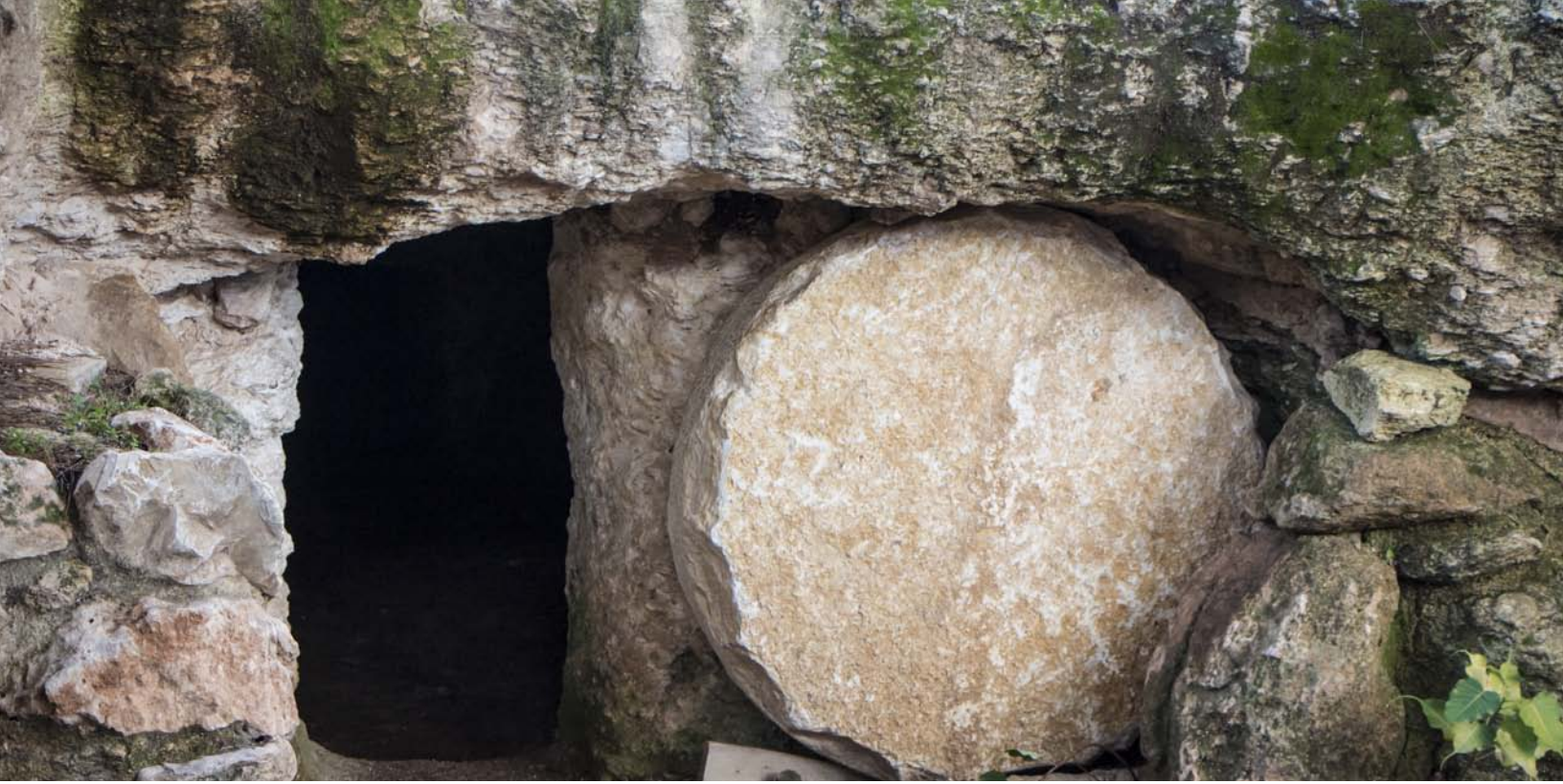
1. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. ii (New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1898), 603.
2. Kent Brown, *BYU New Testament Commentary: The Testimony of Luke* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 1051–2.
3. Lynne Hilton Wilson's article: "Jesus' Atonement Foretold through His Birth" in Richard Holzapfel and Kent Jackson eds., *To Save the Lost: An Easter Celebration* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2009), 103.
4. Pilate was given his assignment thanks to Sejanus, and anti-Jewish advisor to Tiberius Caesar.
5. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18:60-62; Wars of the Jews, 2:175-177.
6. Raymond Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John XIII-XXII* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 845.
7. Jackson, Millet, *Studies in Scriptures*, 5.444.
8. Matthew includes fourteen similar "fulfillment" verses followed by an OT citation (Matthew 1:22; 2:5b, 15, 17; 23; 3:3; 4:14; 8:17a; 12:17; 13:14a, 35; 21:4; 26:56; 27:9a). As mentioned earlier, the number fourteen was significant in Hebrew orthography as: David.
9. Most small villages shared one copy of the Torah with their Rabbi. Larger towns had the Psalms, next most frequently found text from this era is Isaiah. Furthermore, also find that Matthew mixes up two people in Matthew 23:35, "Zechariah son of Barachiah" (Zechariah 1:1) rather than "Zechariah son of Jehoiada" (2 Chronicles 24:20-22). Perhaps he intended to quote the closer parallel in Zechariah 10:12-13.
10. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/procurator> (accessed 6/7/19).
11. Matthew 5:22; 27:46; Mark 5:41; 7:34; 11:9; 4:36; John 20:16; and 1 Corinthians 16:22. Jews were taught this language in their Babylonian captivity and brought it back when they returned to Judea.
12. Beryl Rawson ed., *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (England: Oxford University Press, 1991), 161.
13. Brent A. Van Orden and Brent L. Top, *Sperry Symposium New Testament* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1990), 79.
14. Kent Jackson, Robert Millet, eds., *Studies in Scriptures: The Gospels* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1986), 5:446–447.
15. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, *Allegory of the Olive Tree* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1994), 8.
16. In approximately AD 165, Apuleius and Peter Oswald wrote, *The Golden Ass*. He described a group of slaves, "Their skins were seamed all over with the marks of old floggings, as you could see through the holes in their ragged shirts that shaded rather than covered their scarred backs; but some wore only loin-cloths. They had letters marked on their foreheads, and half-shaved heads and irons on their legs." https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Golden_Ass. (Accessed 6-5-19.) Also see Beryl Rawson, ed., *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), 161.
17. For most of Old Testament history, Phoenicia held a monopoly on the purple dye (Exodus 25:4; 2 Chronicles 2:7, 14; 3:14; Proverbs 31:22, etc.). The Romans and other ancient peoples found other sources in crustaceans and insects.
18. Brown, *Anchor Bible: John XIII-XXII*, 875.
19. T. E. Schmidt, "Mark 15.16-32: The Crucifixion Narrative and the Roman 'Triumphal Procession'" *New Testament Stud-*

ies, 41 (1995): 1-18. “The praetorian guard gathers early in the morning to proclaim the triumphator. They dress him in the purple triumphal garb and place a crown of laurel on his head. The soldiers shout in acclamation of his lordship . . . and performs acts of homage to him. They accompany him through the streets of the city. The sacrifice walks alongside a person who carries the implement of the victim’s death. The procession ascends to the place of the death’s head, where the sacrifice is to take place. The triumphator is offered ceremonial wine. He does not drink it but pours it out on the altar at the moment of sacrifice. Then, at the moment of being lifted up before the people at the moment of the sacrifice, the triumphator is again acclaimed as lord... and his vicegerents appear with him in confirmation of his glory . . . he is one with the gods.”

20. Brown, *Anchor: John XIII-XXII*, 879.
21. D. Kelly Ogden, Andrew C. Skinner, David B. Galbraith, *Jerusalem: The Eternal City* (UT: Shadow Mountain, 1996), 175–176.
22. Jewish calendaring began their day at sunset because the creation accounts in Genesis start with darkness before light.
23. Brown, *Anchor: John XIII-XXII*, 883.
24. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988), 93.
25. Philo, *On the Embassy of Gaius*, Book XXXVIII, 299–305.
26. W.F. Albright, and C.S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible: Matthew* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 348; it “stupefied.”
27. Jackson, Millet, *Studies in Scripture, Gospels*, 449. According to Peloubet’s Bible Dictionary, crucifixions were abolished by Constantine.
28. Kent Brown, *Luke*, xx.
29. Edersheim, *Life of Jesus*, 592. Edersheim argues the seamless garment was the dress of the High Priest, and that Moses wore one.
30. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness Articles of Faith*, 289; Elder McConkie claimed that Jesus had to continue to suffer for our sins on the cross, however I do not find that in scripture. (Also see James Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 605, 612–613.)
31. Brown, *Anchor: John XIII-XXII*, 353.
32. Erkki Koskenniemi, “Wine Mixed with Myrrh (Mark 15:23) and Crucifixion (John 19:31–32): Two Details of the Passion Narratives,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 27 (4): 379–391.
33. Brown, *Gospel*, 95. Greek traditions held that the gods enjoyed an equal balance of blood and water (Brown, *Anchor: John XIII-XXII*, 954).
34. Brown, *Anchor: John XIII-XXII*, 938; The “Onomasticon of Eusebius” and Jerome make this claim.
35. Heshey Zelcher, *A Guide to the Jerusalem Talmud* (Universal Publishers, 2002), 92. “The middle class citizens often owned eight slaves, the rich from five hundred to a thousand, and an emperor as many as twenty thousand.”
36. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Bartchy, “Servant” 4.420. Tim G. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins, 2003), 183. Junius P. Rodriguez, *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABD-CLI, 1997), 7.548. In AD 47, a census across the Roman Empire documented that one-third of the population was enslaved or worked as servants. Some large cities, including Jerusa-

lem, recorded that fifty-percent of the population were servants or slaves.

37. Paul J. Achtemeier, ed., *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row), 672.
38. *Brown, Anchor: John XIII-XXII*, 943.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Kent Brown, *Luke*, 1099.
41. Kelly Ogden, *Where Jesus Walked: The Land and Culture of New Testament Times*, 147.



MATTHEW 28; MARK 16; LUKE 24; JOHN 20–21

JESUS' RESURRECTION: SURPRISED BY JOY

INTRODUCTION

The last chapters of each of the four Gospels focus on Jesus' resurrection and His commission for all disciples to spread this 'good news' (the original root word for gospel).¹ Jesus' triumph over death is the greatest news ever given on earth. The Gospels unitedly proclaim that the first witnesses of this truth were women. The Lord deliberately and repeated called His female disciples to act as the first voice for this message. They saw angels and the Lord Himself who commissioned them to carry this message to the brethren and apostles. (This order was also seen in the birth narratives, and we will continue to find other similarities between the two accounts.) This empowering call set a standard of change in Christianity whereby both women and men were called to

mutually serve by testifying, preaching, and prophesying to build Jesus' church on earth.² The message of Jesus' redemption and resurrection is the central theme of Christ's restored church and scripture, including the Book of Mormon.³

THE EMPTY TOMB

Guards at the Tomb

Matthew 27:62-66

We start with the scene with the guards at the tomb from Matthew 27:62-66 and Matthew 28, because Matthew crafted a chiasmus about the guards bridging the two last chapters. Matthew mentions the guards three times, at the beginning and end, as well as at the center of the chiasmus, "showing that the main emphasis of the whole passage rests on them."⁴ An overview of the three passages about the guards was artistically organized:

27:62-66	The guards at the tomb
28:1	The women on their way to the tomb
28:2-4	The angel and the guards
28:5-8	The angel and the women at the tomb
28:11-15	The testimony of the bribed guards

The Gospel of Matthew's text is arranged this way probably for his apologetic purpose. The guards' false testimony obviously swayed many and pacified others. In Matthew's text, he wanted the facts to speak for themselves.

Matthew 27:62-64 "the next day . . . command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day" Matthew includes the Pharisees' concern about guarding Jesus' tomb. They are so zealous that they even break their Sabbath traditions to go ask Pilate to hire Roman guards to protect Jesus' tomb from robbers. The scripture says this happened on the next day, which would have included the first Passover night just after sunset. Like those who mocked Jesus earlier, these Pharisees knew that Jesus had said He would rise the third day. This became quite ironic as the unbelievers all remembered Jesus' promise to die and rise again in three days, but the disciples were shocked by His death, and flabbergasted when He rose again.

Matthew 27:65-66 "Ye have a watch . . . make it as sure as ye can" With great irony, Matthew includes "make [the tomb] sure," three times. To make it "sure" meant to seal it with your individual ring or signet pressed into wax, clay, or metal. One sealed a tomb with a stone but making the seal "sure" required adding guards to watch the stone. Because the Pharisees asked Pilate for the guard, we assume Pilate sent the Roman Praetorium sol-

diers. A Roman prefect, like Pilate, usually had a Roman Praetorium guard at his disposal. In light of the Passover setting in Jerusalem, with its enormous crowds and nationalistic emotions, as well as the uproar from Jesus' thousands of supporters, Pilate probably sent some of the most experienced soldiers to guard the tomb and maintain order.

The Praetorium guards were extremely disciplined and were governed by strict rules. Pilate may have sent a sixteen-man unit (as it was to guard Peter in Acts 12:4), or many times that number. Making a sure seal included:

Each member was responsible for six square feet of space. The guard members could not sit down or lean against anything while they were on duty. If a guard member fell asleep, he was beaten and burned with his own clothes. But he was not the only one executed; the entire sixteen-man guard unit was executed if only one of the members fell asleep while on duty.⁵

Some suggest that four guards took four-hour shifts, but all this speculation depends on how many soldiers Pilate sent. The point that Matthew makes next is that their assignment to guard the tomb turned into a big failure. Even if they were the best Roman soldiers, and the most "sure seal" Rome could muster, they crumbled in the face of God's power.

Women First Witnesses of Jesus' Empty Tomb

Matthew 26:1-10; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18

Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1 "When the Sabbath was past . . . very early in the morning of the first day of the week" All four Gospels share that this is the first day of the week. From this point on, Sunday became the Christian Sabbath as the resurrection became the central day in the history of the world. Christians



The Resurrection of Jesus Christ by Master Francke, 1430. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

still honor their Sabbath as a day of rest after the pattern of the Creation, but most Christians reverence the Sabbath as the first day of the week even more because of the resurrection.

“it was yet dark” John suggests that it was between 3 and 6 a.m. or possibly later if a dark fog remained. They still had plenty of moonlight as two nights prior on Passover there was a full moon. The darkness could be figurative too (which John uses often), as the women were filled with darkness and confusion within as well as without. Matthew and Mark recorded it was shortly before dawn. These minor variances in the story line are normal for oral history that is passed down, especially from those who were not eye-witnesses.

“Mary Magdalene” John only initially mentions one woman, Mary Magdalene, at the tomb, but then uses the plural for the women. Even with more than one woman, he wants to highlight Mary Magdala (Mary’s second name suggests that she was from the wealthy city of Magdala on the Northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, about 7 miles Southwest of Jesus’ mission headquarters in Capernaum). It would have been very odd for a single woman to have gone to a place of execution outside the city wall in the dark. Matthew adds another Mary as her companion. Mark adds Salome to the two Mary’s. Luke fills in all the women at the cross on the eve of the Passover, plus adds even more women joining this band of intrepid mourning women.

Luke 24:1b “the women came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.” In the Pharisaic culture, women were discouraged from going out in public, but these women could not be contained.⁶ Their oral laws also strictly limited what they could and could not do on the Sabbath.⁷ Although they could not anoint a deceased body, they could spend at least part of their Sabbath preparing anointments and spices. So before dawn they crept out on the dark and quiet streets to retrace their steps to the garden where they had seen the servants of Joseph of Arimathea lay Jesus’ body (Luke 23:55–56).

The same traditions limited where they could go, what they could wear in public, and who they could talk to. This small group of shrouded women slowly and quietly wound their way through the streets of Jerusalem to retrace their steps down the main road—slowly, because they carried the heavy load of ointments. They would have been draped in a fabric covering them from head to foot, not only because it was still chilly in the wee hours of the morning, but also because they were outside of their homes. In Jerusalem, Jewish women at that time were to stay indoors as much as possible. But, if they ventured out, they mostly completely covered themselves, including wearing a veil over their faces. As the women carefully crept down the narrow dark passageways, I presume they worried about disturbing those sleeping in corners and alleyways, public squares, and on roof tops. Nearly every available space was filled with visiting pilgrims.⁸

Even though the scriptures do not record their feelings, I assume they were in deep mourning and frightened as they retraced their steps past Golgotha and smelled the same smells. Their minds must have recalled the events of



The Resurrection Morning by J. H. Hartley, 1929.

J. H. HARTLEY



Angels Declare That Jesus Is Risen From the Dead by William Hole, 1905.

three days earlier, walking along the same road where the Roman soldiers had dragged Jesus, bruised-and-bleeding from Pilate’s scourging, to His crucifixion. I assume the women comforted each other as they stumbled along toward the garden sepulcher.

Matthew 28:2–4 “. . . a great earthquake, . . . an angel . . . rolled away the stone” Matthew explains how the stone was moved—a combination of a natural disaster—an earthquake—and a divine being coming down to move the stone. The account gives a dramatic arrival of an angel, whose shining appearance scared the guards so that they fainted or “became as dead men,” or as the Anchor Bible translates it, “paralyzed with fright.”⁹

God uses “earthquakes” as a means to speak to mankind many times in scripture (i.e. Alma the Younger, Saul/Paul). The miracle of God’s intervention is in the timing of the earthquake. This is the first time in Matthew’s Gospel since the nativity narrative that “the angel of the Lord” is mentioned. Most angelic visitations in scripture are described as having dazzling, shining clothes and faces.

Matthew 28:5; Luke 24:5 “Do not be afraid” In scripture, angels sometimes begin their dialogues by telling their audiences not to be frightened (for example, Luke’s angelic visitations in the birth narratives, Luke 1–2). Luke describes the women’s reaction as “terrified and bowing their faces to the ground.” But the angel assures them, “I know that you are looking for Jesus,” and then invites them to come and see the empty tomb. These devoted disciples, the Galilean women, who had been ministering to Jesus throughout His ministry, were now rewarded with being the first to hear the Good News, or *Gospel* (Luke 8:2).

Luke’s Gospel, includes a description of “two men . . . in shining garments.” Two is significant as they act as a double witness, fulfilling the requirement from the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). The JST changes each account to include plural angels. The JST also changed Luke’s shiny dressed men to angels, which give us

a good visual image of what these angels looked like. We do not know who these two sentinel witnesses were, but the Lord taught Joseph Smith that every angel who ministers to this world, lived or will live as a mortal on it (D&C 130:5).

The different Gospels paint a paradoxical contrast between the brave soldiers who passed out (Matthew 28:4), and the frightened women who walked into the tomb (Luke 24:3). This sepulcher was fancier than the normal shaft tombs of the time. Archeologists have found several different types and sizes of tombs in ancient Palestine, including larger two-chamber tombs like the one described in these verses. The two rooms had different purposes. The first entrance was a place to prepare the body and for mourning; the second was where the body lay for a period before the bones were gathered and placed together with older family bones. The mourning was laced with Jewish ritual.¹⁰

“Why seek ye the living among the dead?” Eric Huntsman’s translation emphasizes a new title for the Lord with a capitalization: **“the Living with the dead?”**¹¹ The Aramaic Bible also emphasizes this announcement as a different new title for Jesus, “Why are you seeking The Life among the dead?” Jesus used that title for Himself in Bethany as he comforted Mary and Martha at their brother’s death, “I am the resurrection and the life . . . I am the one who brings people back to life, and I am life itself” (John 11:25).¹² Jesus began His role as the source of life as the Creator of the world. Now He has become the source of immortal life (Moses 1:39).

Matthew 28:7; Mark 16:7 “Go quickly and tell His disciples, ‘He has risen from the dead’” An angel called the women to be the first witnesses of the resurrection. They were to tell the apostles and other disciples gathered in Jerusalem the joyous news. This is another connection with the birth narratives where Mary, Elizabeth, and the “prophetess Anna” become witnesses (Luke 1:11, 29; 2:9). This call for women to witness was a revolutionary difference from the Judean culture of the day. Normally, women were not allowed to speak as a witness in a legal setting except in a few rare exceptions. In fact, it was preferred that they did not speak to men at all.¹³ Christ, the apostles, and these angels raised the role of women to not only testify by bearing their witnesses, but also to take an active role in building God’s kingdom on earth.¹⁴ Throughout the Gospels, we find repeated examples of Jesus honoring women and raising their social status; now that same pattern continues after His resurrection. By combining both accounts from the cross and tomb, we get a more accurate picture of which women were there.

TABLE 1: WOMEN AT THE CROSS AND TOMB

Cross: Matt 27:56	Mark 15:40	John 19:25	
Tomb: Matt 28:1	Mark 16:1	Luke 24:10	
Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene
Mary mother of James & Joseph	Mary mother of James & Jose	Mary of James	Mary wife of Cleopas
Mother of the sons of Zebedee	Salome wife of Zebedee	Other women	Jesus' mother's sister
		Joanna wife of Chuza	Jesus' mother

Women Go to Tell the Disciples

Matthew 28:8; Mark 16:8b; Luke 24:9; John 20:2

John 20:2 “She runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple . . . we know not” At that early hour, Mary Magdalene probably awakened them, but she used the plural “we” suggesting there were others with her. Mary Magdalene is the main character in John’s resurrection account, definitely. For her, the open and empty tomb meant that the body had been stolen. Grave robberies were enough of a troublesome concern that an imperial edict addressed the problem.¹⁵ Mary Magdalene’s story tweaked Peter’s curiosity enough that he and John (“the other disciple, whom Jesus loved”), bolted to check it out for themselves. The synoptic account includes the women going to find the apostles together.

Matthew 28:8; Mark 16:8b; Luke 24:9–11; “they departed quickly. . . with fear and great joy” The ISV translates Matthew’s recollections of the women, “terrified but also ecstatic,” and Mark includes “they trembled and were amazed” or “bewildered” (BSB), but Luke and John avoid their emotions. The fact that the woman knew where the apostles were suggests they had been together at some point since Jesus’ death.

What would it have felt like for the apostles to have received this news from women? With the earliness of the hour, the women may have awoken the apostles. Much to my surprise, the women’s excitement was met with skepticism. The Lord’s choice of witnesses required the brethren to replace cultural ideas about gender superiority,¹⁶ to learn new skills, and to humble themselves to hear God’s choice of witnesses.¹⁷ They honestly recorded that it was hard for them to believe the women. Either due to cultural baggage about women witnessing or a bad

memory, Mark recorded, “They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.” Luke is probably more accurate as he painfully recorded that when the women told the eleven apostles, “their words seemed like idle tales and they believed them not” (Luke 24:11). Yet the Gospels of Luke and John then go on to tell that their story peeked Peter’s curiosity and he ran to see for himself.

TABLE 2: RESURRECTED LORD’S APPEARANCES ON EASTER SUNDAY

Matt 28:9–10	Mark 16:9–14, or 18	Luke 24:13–48	John 20:11–23
	*Mary Magdalene		
*Women from tomb (questionable timing)	*Two as they walked	*Two going to Emmaus (Cleopas and disciple)	
		*Simon Peter	
	Eleven at supper (probably next week)	*To a room full of disciples in Jerusalem, ate fish and honeycomb	*Evening room of disciples in Jerusalem, Breathed the Spirit

*Scripture verifies it happened on the first day of the week or the same day of Jesus’ resurrection.

Jesus Appears to Women

Matthew 28:9–10

Matthew 28:9–10 “Jesus met them. . . be not afraid: go tell my brethren . . . go into Galilee” These two verses insert that as the women were following through with the angel’s instructions to tell the disciples of the empty tomb, Jesus appeared to them, and gave them the same instructions. A close look shows that these two verses may have been adjusted at some point. First, because they interrupt Matthew’s chiastic outline mentioned above. Second, because they contradict Mark’s and John’s claims that Mary Magdalene was the first witness.¹⁸ Third, because they contradict John 21:11–17, where Jesus did not allow the first witness to touch Him. Fourth, because Mark, Luke, and John say that the disciples were informed and Peter found the tomb empty before Lord made His first appearance. Taking these into consideration, it appears at best, that these two verses were adjusted somehow, and at worst, added by a later editor trying to harmonize the angel’s message (from Mark 16:7) to go to Galilee.



Peter and John Hasten to the Sepulchre by William Hole, 1905.

Report of the Guard

Matthew 28:11–15

Matthew 28:11–15 “the guard . . . told the chief priests . . . they gave a sum of money . . . tell people . . . disciples . . . stole him away” In Matthew’s Gospel, this is the last leg of his chiasmus centered on the guards (see Matthew 27:62). The Pharisees’ attempt to guard the tomb turned into a fiasco. The chief priests covered it up with money. The bribe broke the Roman law that required the guards who dozed or lost the object they were to protect to be killed.¹⁹ Matthew included that this false story was still believed when he wrote many years after the fact, which must have been a frustrating stumbling block to those early missionaries.

Peter and John Run to the Empty Tomb

Luke 24:12; John 20:3–10

Luke 24:12a; John 20:3–4 “Peter . . . and that other disciple . . . ran both together” After all Peter had to regret over the last three days, he still acted in typical Peter fashion, and he was man who jumped up and ran to see.²⁰

“the other disciples did outrun Peter, and came first . . .”

The author must have been smiling when he added the winner of the foot race. (Especially since this is the only account that includes the other apostle; Luke 24:12 has only Peter running to the tomb). While John waited, enthusiastic, impulsive Peter kept running right into the tomb.

Luke 24:12b; John 20:5–7 “stooping down, he beheld the linen cloths laid by themselves, and departed, wondering . . .” By stooping down, the two men could have seen through the small opening into the tomb. It was empty. No angels were there to explain as there had been for the women. I imagine that the apostle’s hearts softened and they began to believe the women’s witnesses. In the economy of heaven, we must learn to allow the Spirit to testify of other’s words (D&C 46:13–14).

Seeing the linen clothing was evidence that the body was not stolen. (A robber would have taken the clothes or wrappings with the body, and certainly would not have taken the time to unwrap it and carry a naked, oozing corpse). John includes that the linen clothes were wrapped together, with the head bandage or handkerchief lay-

ing separately. The scene teaches that the resurrected Jesus no longer needed His mortal clothing. What He now wears is not of mortal making, but are heavenly robes of righteousness.

John 20:8–9 “**yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise . . .**” Perhaps seeing the clothing was enough to warrant John’s belief that Jesus had risen. Yet John points out that they didn’t understand the scriptures that spoke of the resurrection. In the Old Testament, in addition to the sign of Jonah 1:17, which the Lord cited repeatedly, we find two other scriptural promises of this event: Hosea 6:2, “After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight;” Psalms 16:10, “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.”

John 20:10 “. . . **went away again unto their own homes**” What did “own home” mean? Did the Galilean apostles have relatives in the area? Could they have a rented a place that became their home later? More probably, they went to John Mark’s mother’s home (another Mary!), as this home became a Christian meeting place later in Acts 12:12.

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

Mark 16:9; John 20:11–17

John 20:11 “**Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping**” The two apostles left, but in her pain and confusion, Mary could not leave the spot. With the sorrow that only those who have experienced the death of loved one can understand, she could not bring herself to leave Jesus’ tomb. She had stayed at the cross (John 19:25), she had stayed for the burial (Matthew 27:61; Mark 15:47), and now she stayed by the empty tomb. For her it is still the darkest morning of her life, and grief clouded her ability to understand what had happened. She walked over to the opening of the tomb, “stooped down, and looked into the sepulcher.”

John 20:12 “**two angels . . . one at the head, and the other at the feet**” As Mary looked inside, she remembered seeing two angels, but her witness, reaction, or emotions are not what is emphasized here. Rather, the author includes the angel’s position. The hewn rock shelf where the body had laid was wide and tall enough for two angels to sit at either end. It appears that she did not comprehend what she saw. But John’s description resembles the description of the angels in the Holy of Holies (Exodus 37:6–8).

In Moses’ Tabernacle, in the Holy of Holies *the only piece of furniture was the gold box*, known as the “ark of the testament” or covenant. It was covered with a gold lid, carved with two angels on either end facing each other. It was called “the mercy seat” and it represented the throne of God (Exodus 25:17–22). God’s throne is merciful because of Jesus’ atoning gift of Redemption. The most merciful gift in eternity is His resurrection. In a sense, the mercy seat foreshadowed this scene of the empty tomb with the two angels on either end.

Jesus Reveals Himself to Mary Magdalene by William Hole, 1905.



John 20:13 “Woman, why weepest thou?” In Mary’s state of sorrow, she did not understand that the angel’s brief dialogue could have continued and answered her devastation. Instead she turned from them in confusion. I presume this happens to all of us who do not recognize the angels (both from heaven and earth) that the Lord sends to help us.

John 20:14 “she turned around and saw Jesus standing there; but she did not recognize . . .” With her face probably still veiled, and her eyes blurred from tears, she could not have seen clearly. She would soon realize that this was the first of four-resurrection appearances of Jesus that John recorded in his Gospel. It is also the beginning of Jesus’ “forty-day ministry,” which spanned from Easter morning to His ascension on the Mount of Olives as recorded in Acts 1:3–11.

John 20:15 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? Jesus repeated the angel’s question. Again, John records Jesus as addressing a female with the respectful title, “woman/*gune*,” just as he had his mother at the wedding of Cana (John 2:4), the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:7–42), and the woman taken in adultery (John 8:9–10). We see a similar pattern in other Gospels (i.e. Matthew 15:28; Luke 13:12). John will refer to Mary by her own name in a moment, but perhaps this reference to “woman,” hearkens back to Genesis with Eve as the first “woman” (Genesis 2:22). Just as Eve’s life blessed all living and especially affected her daughters, so too will Mary’s experience be a blessing to all humanity, and a special gift to all women. Whatever His motive, it was polite way to address her (John 19:26).

John 20:15 “whom seekest thou?” Jesus asked Mary the question that the angel had asked her. The question was to help her recognize Him. It’s a good question for all disciples to answer, and in so doing we will find Him more easily. But, in her distracted and confused state of mourning, I can understand why she would not have recognized Jesus’ voice. She certainly was not expecting Him.

“She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if . . .” The sun was probably up by then, and after a long double holiday, she probably assumed the gardeners had arrived to start their pruning, weeding, and watering in the cool of the morning. In between her sobs, I presume she called out to one of them for any information about Jesus’ body, “. . . where have you laid Him?” But when the Gardener answered her, He called her by name, “Mary.”²¹ There was something powerful in this recognition—One from the other side of the veil called another by name to bring her into a realm of greater light.

John 20:16 “Mary” Mary in Hebrew is “*Mariam*,” Moses’ sister’s name. It was not until Jesus called her by name that she “turned” and recognized Him. Can you imagine what that sounded like to her? Jesus called her by name, just as He will do for each of us. Mary Magdalene was honored as the first witness of the resurrected Lord. Similarly, the young virgin Mary was the first witnesses of the Messiah’s birth (And the first witness to receive a visit

from Angel Moroni with the golden plates, was another woman with the same first name, Mary Whitmer²²). The key is to recognize Him and to know His voice.

“She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni” The New Testament includes this honorific title twice—here and by a blind man pleading with Jesus for sight (Mark 10:51). The extra suffix added onto Rabbi has been interpreted as an intensifier of a master or teacher, as well as meaning, “my great one,” “honorable sir”²³ or “my dear Rabbi.”²⁴

John 20:17 “Touch me not” Jesus may have meant “don’t detain me” or “don’t embrace me.” Elsewhere the translation of *haptomai* also means: “cohabitation.”²⁵ This appears to have been a short-term issue, as two other visits Jesus made that day included the women in Matthew 28:9–10, and ten apostles in John 20:19, who all touched Him.

“for I am not yet ascended to my Father” Jesus spent three days and nights in the spirit world organizing missionary work (1 Peter 4:6; D&C 138:19, 30). By combining these scriptures, it makes sense that Jesus needed to go to His Father in order to report before others could touch Him, as they did later. There must have been another change to His body or something important about the timing between this visit and the other visits later that day.

“Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father” It is noteworthy that Jesus gave Mary a message to relay to the apostles. Peter and John had just been at the tomb a few minutes earlier, but neither the Lord, nor any angels, appeared to them. Jesus intentionally chose Mary to be His first witness and for her to deliver a message to them.

John 20:18 “Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples” By delivering the message this way (from Jesus to Mary to the apostles), He taught an important lesson to the apostles about women in His church. They were to be honored and trusted, given a voice, and given permission to represent the Lord as witnesses. Jesus made an abrupt and dramatic change from the Pharisaic cultural view of women. The Gospel of John records Mary’s obedience and errand, but not the apostle’s disbelief as Mark did.

Mark 16:9–11 “Mary Magdalene . . . told them . . . and they . . . believed not” The Gospel of Mark gives a shorter account without the conversation, just the sad reality that at least some that she told did not believe her. This adds an interesting perspective to Thomas’ doubting. It also demonstrates how far the early writers would have had to change their perspective in order to include her story in the text as the valid first witness.

MORE WITNESSES TO THE RESURRECTION

Jesus Appears to Two Disciples on Road to Emmaus

Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-35

Mark 16:12; Luke 24:13-16 “He appeared in another form unto two of them as they walked . . .” Also, on Sunday morning, two disciples left Jerusalem to walk to a village, Emmaus (which is no longer identified for sure, although a few modern towns have historical claims to the old village that are four to seventeen miles from Jerusalem). The week following the Passover was the week-long celebration of “Unleavened Bread” (Leviticus 23:5-6). Many Jews did not travel during that holy week but stayed in Jerusalem (Acts 20:6). For whatever reason, it appears that the three men walking to Emmaus were not disturbed by crowds.

As they talked of the amazing events of the past few days, Jesus joined them, but not in a recognizable form. The NIV of Luke 24:16 reads, “they were kept from recognizing him,” and the JST adds, “their eyes were . . . *covered* that they *could* not know him.”

Luke 24:17-24 “What are you discussing so intently . . . with sadness . . .” Jesus joined in the conversation, to reason with them. (He tries to do the same with us according to Isaiah 1:18.) His first question dealt with their sadness. The two disciples admitted that they knew of the women’s witness of angels at the tomb, but their sadness showed that they did not believe it.

“**Cleopas**” One of the two men may have been the source of the conversation for Luke. It was probably Cleopas/Clopas, as Luke knew his name.²⁶ Cleopas may have been the same person as Clopas, married to one of the Mary’s mentioned at the cross and tomb (John 19:25; and Table 1 above).²⁷ Their conversation assures us that Jesus’ death and resurrection was well known in Jerusalem that weekend. They assumed due to his lack of knowledge that their fellow traveler (Jesus) must have been from out of town.

Luke 24:25-26 “O foolish ones, how slow are your hearts to believe . . . ?” (BSB). Jesus sees His Messiahship in a different light than others do. I’m fascinated at how Luke continues to tie the birth and death together by giving two more “outside” witnesses, paralleling Luke’s “outside” witnesses of Simeon and Anna at the Temple.

Luke 24:27-28 “Beginning at Moses and all the prophets . . . things concerning himself” Even without Jesus walking beside us, now with many scriptures available to us, we can find “types and shadows” of the Messiah in the details of the Mosaic Laws, the Tabernacle/Temple structure and ritual, and even the very lives of the proph-

ets (Hosea 12:10; 1 Corinthians 10:1–11; etc.). The Law was to act as a “schoolmaster” to lead them to Christ (Galatians 3:24). We find this perspective especially repeated throughout the pages of the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 11:4; Mosiah 3:15; 13:10, 31; Alma 13:16; 25:15; 33:19; etc.).

Luke 24:29–30 “Abide with us: for it is toward evening” When the trio arrived at Emmaus, the disciples constrained their guest to join them for the evening meal. Two sacred meals are mentioned twice in this chapter as places and times of enlightenment (Luke 24:35). Jesus took the unleavened bread, blessed it, broke it into pieces and gave it to them. Our hope is that our sacrament services can be as revelatory. (The men’s recognition happened at the “breaking of bread,” which hints at the possibility that these two men, although not apostles, may have been present or helping at the Last Supper.²⁸)

Luke 24:31–32 “Their eyes were opened” The veil over their eyes finally lifted. Luke uses the verb, “open/*dianoigo*.” This is the second time the author uses this word since Mary’s birth cleansing sacrifice at the Temple (referring to the first-born’s opening of a mother’s body, Luke 2:23). Luke continues to link the birth and death, in part to emphasize the *new birth* that the resurrection provides.

Road to Emmaus by Robert Zünd, 1877. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Luke 24:32 “Did not our hearts burn within us?” They remembered that as Jesus had taught on the road they had felt a warmth. This is a sign of how we are taught to recognize truth in our dispensation. It was one of the first lessons Joseph and Oliver were taught on how to identify the Spirit in D&C 9:7–9.²⁹ The JST adds a plural to include all our hearts. This is part of the baptism of fire. When we are born again it includes the Spirit’s witness and the Spirit’s immersion to cleanse and change our hearts.

Mark 16:13; Luke 24:33–35 “they rose up the same hour and returned to Jerusalem . . .” When the two men returned quickly to Jerusalem, they went the place where the eleven apostles (and probably others) were gathered. As they shared their story, they witnessed about what had come to them during the “breaking of bread.” Luke includes the happy news that Simon Peter had also seen the Lord (as did Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:5). But, Mark’s Gospel only records that “neither believed they them.”

Jesus’ Visitation to the Disciples

Luke 24:36–48; John 20:19–23; possibly Mark 16:14

Luke 24:36; John 20:19 “at evening . . . when the doors were shut . . . where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews . . .” This Sunday evening gathering is usually thought of as just the ten apostles, yet no author limits the group to just apostles or to ten (Mark alone gives a number, and he says “the eleven were gathered,” which does not mean others were not there. I think Mark’s account sounds more like Jesus visitation a week later when Thomas was there). Luke’s account suggests that the two men who ran back from Emmaus are still present sharing their story. John sounds as if many disciples had locked themselves together—which would have included the women who came back to this room at sunrise. Harmonizing these three accounts is problematic (Mark contradicts John), but it is safe to say, the group included at least the ten apostles and probably other believers.

“Peace be unto you” Jesus’ greeting alleviated their fear, “*shalom*/peace.” He repeated the greeting in the next sentence. He had uttered the same promise earlier at the Last Supper, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled” (John 14:27).

Luke 24:38 “Why are you troubled?” Again, Luke uses words at the death that are only found in the birth accounts tying the two together. (Zacharias and Mary were also “troubled” when Angel Gabriel came; Luke 1:12, 29).

Luke 24:39 “. . . it is I Myself; touch Me and see . . . flesh and bones” Jesus invited the room of disciples to come and touch his hands and feet, as He would do at the Temple in Bountiful in about a year (3 Nephi 11:14–15).³⁰ We assume that resurrected bodies have flesh and bones without blood.

John 20:20 “. . . then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord” This verse brings a new level of meaning to the word “glad.” It is also translated, “overjoyed” (NIV), and “rejoiced” (BSB). They were all able to touch Him and examine the nail prints and side wound just as the Nephites would do almost a year later when He visited the New World in 3 Nephi 11:15.

John 20:21 “as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you” This verse is especially interesting when we remember that *apostle* means “*one sent*.” Jesus’ commission, from the Father to the Son, used the word, “sent/*apostello*,” but from the Son to the disciples, used “I send/*pempo* you.” John never uses the word “apostle” in his Gospel, nor in his epistles (only in the Book of Revelation). He either uses the “twelve” (John 6:67), or “disciples.” With “disciples” we are not sure when it refers to all believers or the select twelve. From this time forward, the special witnesses are those to whom the resurrected Lord shows himself and commissions to witness of Him.³¹

Luke 24:45–48 “Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures” Just as He did on the Road to Emmaus, the Lord uses the scriptures to explain His mission and life. This is the first time Jesus referred to himself as “The Messiah” (or Christ in Greek). The Old Testament includes many anointed things (temple altar, brazen sea, priests, etc.), but *the promised* Messiah, was what the others were all pointing towards.

Luke 24:49 “tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” I appreciate many translations, including the NIV, ESV, and BSB that change “endued / endowed” to “clothe.” Endowing with power is clothing in the “robes of righteousness” (2 Nephi 4:33; 9:14). We do not know exactly when this event fit into the forty-day ministry, but the Lord clothed and empowered the disciples on the day of Pentecost with the Spirit (Acts 1–2). The Christian branch of Jerusalem were empowered and as a result were highly active for the next two decades until the persecution drove them out (Acts 1:12; 12:25; 25: Romans 15:25; Galatians 2:1; etc.).

Luke 24:53 “continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen” Luke begins and ends his Gospel in the temple (starting with Zacharias and ending with the disciples). The early Christians were endowed with the Spirit and blessed to work for their same Master as He directed the church from the other side of the veil. Luke begins his second volume of the Apostolic church in the book of Acts. Each Gospel has a different ending.

Jesus Gives the Holy Spirit

John 20:22–23

John 20:22 “He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” Jesus’ “breathing/*emphusao*” on them echoes Genesis 2:7 when “*Yahweh Elohim*/Lord God . . . breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and [Adam] became a living soul.” Just as the original Creation was completed by the breath of God, so too, the new creation is completed by the breath of the Creator. John also uses a word play with “breath/*pneuma*,” which can be trans-

lated as “breath, spirit, or wind.” John recorded the same word play with Nicodemus in John 3:5–8, using spirit/*pneuma*. When a similar event was recorded in 3 Nephi 18:36–7, the Lord gave the apostles authority to confirm the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands, not by breath.

Up to this point, all four Gospels have mentioned the Spirit, but only in conjunction with Jesus (see the Nativity accounts, Luke 1:15, the Baptism Mark 1:9–12, etc.). The twelve have demonstrated the power of God by casting out devils, performing healings, and preaching with power. But it appears that they did not have the power and authority to give the Gift of the Holy Ghost until now. John the Baptist summarized Jesus’ mission, to “baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire” (Luke 3:16). Jesus’ gift was the baptism of the Spirit.

There is a distinction between *the power* and *the gift* of the Holy Ghost. As the Gospels now stand, they claim that the Spirit did not work as fully during Jesus’ ministry until here, after the death and resurrection of the Lord. However, the gifts and fruits of the Spirit were present.³² In Joseph Smith’s terms, they received the gift of, or the right to receive, the Holy Ghost. The greatest outpouring of the Spirit’s force did not come until the day of Pentecost: “they were filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 1:8, 2:4).

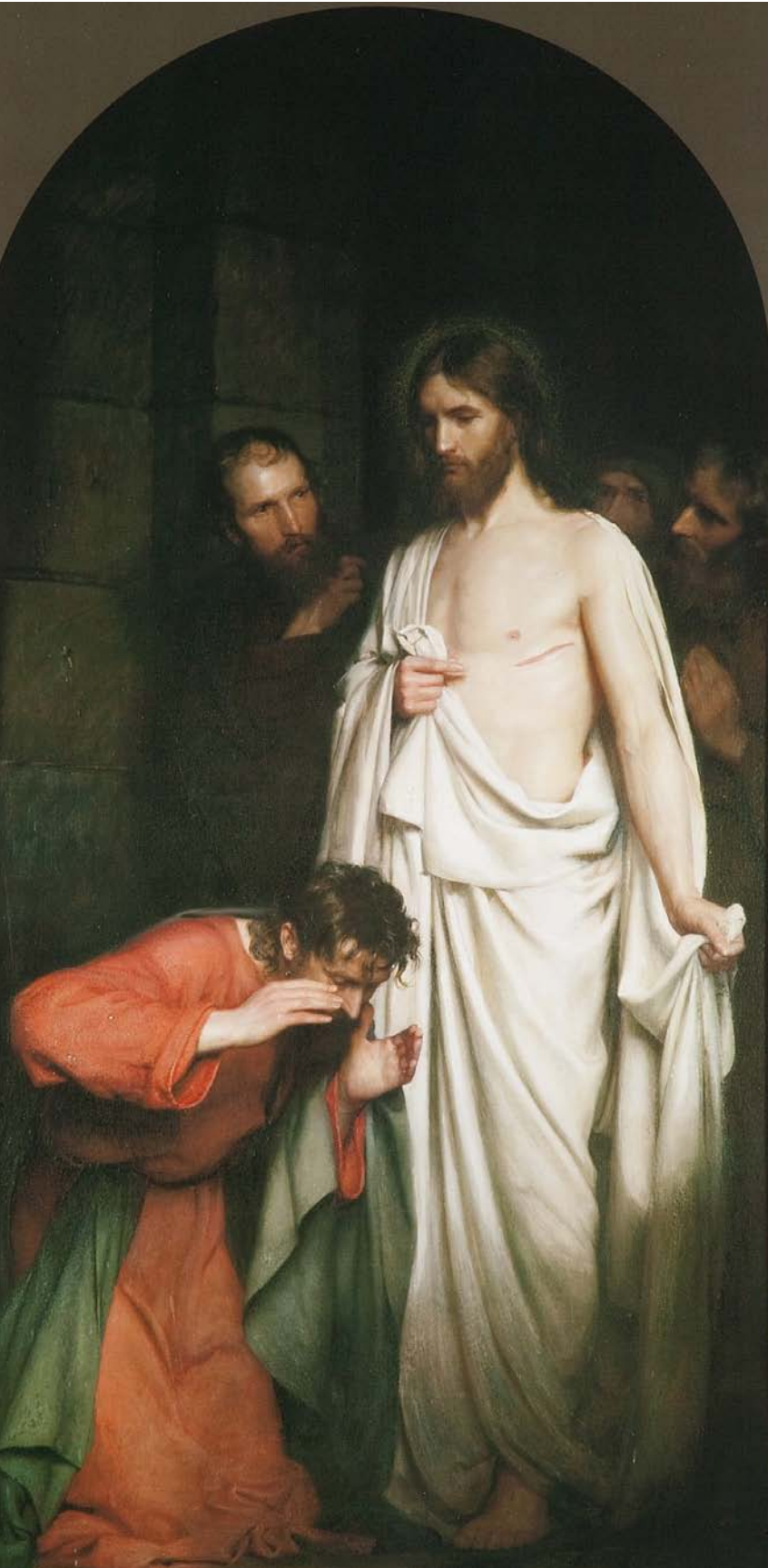
John 20:23 “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven” (CSB) The Lord gave the apostles the “keys” to yet another divine gift. Elder McConkie explained that the Lord delegates this to his “earthly agents, in which instances they can and will remit the sins of repentant persons. But, in the true sense it would be the Lord forgiving the sins, though He acted through the agency of His servants, the prophets (D&C 132:46–47).”³³

Thomas’ Faith Strengthened with Jesus’ Visitation

John 20:24–25; Mark 16:14

John 20:24–25 “But Thomas . . . was not with them when Jesus came” The Gospel of John singles out poor Thomas as the doubter (even though all the apostles doubted the women’s witness according to Mark and Luke). We also read of Thomas in: Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:8; Luke 6:15; John 11:16; 14:5. Thomas did many things right—even here, the account includes that he stayed with his brethren. He was with them, in the right place at the right time to see the Lord the very next week. Patrick Mason points out that Thomas persevered, he needed help, and he stayed with his brethren and was where he was supposed to be.³⁴ The problem was, *he allowed his fears to arrest his faith.*

John 20:26 “Eight days later, His disciples were once again inside with the doors locked” (BSB) It was again on a Sunday—adding more importance to this day as the new day for worship because of the Lord’s Day of Resurrection and visitation. I think Mark’s account of Jesus’ visitation fits here because it reads “Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven . . . he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen”



(NIV). Both of these facts only fit the second Sabbath visitation.

“Peace be unto you” The Lord also greeted them with the same greeting, which is also a promised blessing, especially for Thomas: *“Shalom.”* He asks us to seek peace through our faith. We disciples can control our minds and hearts enough to feel both peace and cheer. The Spirit’s gift of peace and hope comes as we diligently seek both of these blessings from God.

John 20:27 “Stop doubting and believe” (NIV) Thomas’ doubts were reasonable, but Jesus asks all of His called witnesses to replace their doubts with faith.³⁵ Could this also be a command? This statement from the Lord is like His earlier counsel/command to “be of good cheer,” which He also says at very challenging times (Matthew 9:2; 14:27; Mark 6:50; 10:49). God wants us to take charge of our emotions or feelings as recorded in the Book of Mormon: “the Messiah cometh . . . that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And . . . they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon” (2 Nephi 2:26)

John 20:29 “. . . blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” I admire the Lord’s reprimand, so filled with love that Thomas had hope for becoming better rather than despairing at his foolishness. Now the Apostles as a group, including Thomas, could act as eye-witnesses of the Resurrected Jesus. Christianity furnished other witnesses who

say (i.e. Acts 10:41) as a foundation of witnesses. But, the emphasis is to believe through faith on their message, not on the messengers. Jesus repeated this same emphasis to the Nephites: “More blessed are they who shall believe in your words because that ye shall testify that ye have seen me” (3 Nephi 12:2). Gratefully, the next two times the Lord appeared, Thomas was still there with the church (John 21:2, Acts 1:13).

John Identified his Purpose

John 20:30–31

John 20:30–31 “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded” Jesus gave His apostles unwritten signs, and those who enter His temples receive the same. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that the early Christian apostles knew, “all the ordinances, and blessings [that] were in the Church.”³⁶

“these are written that you may believe . . . by believing you may have life in his name” John states his purpose in writing is to bring souls to believe in order to receive Eternal Life. His writings are often referred to as the “Spiritual Gospel” as he speaks of spiritual things. Other scripture also focuses on bearing record of Christ or typifying of Him (Hosea 10:12; Moses 6:63; 2 Nephi 11:4; etc.). John’s purpose goes further. We are not only to believe but grow His witness into belief that grows toward “life in his name” or Exhalation (All four uses of “life/ zoe” by John reference Eternal Life—1:4; 3:36; 6:68).

THE APOSTLES FISHING

John 21:1–8³⁷

John 21:1 “Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias” This section refers to the “forty-day literature” when the resurrected Jesus appeared repeatedly during the first forty-days after His resurrection. The Sea of Tiberias was a different name for the Sea of Galilee. (Tiberias was a big city built by Herod Antipas in AD 18 on the western border of the sea as the capital of Galilee, so the sea took on its name.) In John’s gospel, Galilee was the first place to see Jesus’ glory during His ministry and now it was the last place to have that same honor.

John 21:2 “There were together . . .” Five apostles are mentioned by name, and two unnamed. The five include, Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James and John. These are the same five that were originally introduced as early disciples in John 1:35–50 (plus two others: Andrew and Philip). I think it is significant that John places Thomas after Peter, directly following his retelling of the time when Thomas doubted Jesus’ resurrection. This is the only time in a list of apostles where we find Thomas listed. The apostles had probably gone to Galilee in response to the Lord’s direction in Matthew 26:32, “after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee;” and Matthew 28:10b, “go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me” (also see Mark 16:7).



Jesus Shows Himself to Peter and Others by William Hole, 1905.

John 21:3 “I go a fishing” The Lord told the apostles at His Last Supper that He would no longer be able to completely protect and provide for them (Luke 22:36). So, it seems natural to me that as they waited for direction from the Lord, they returned to something they used to do professionally. They probably still owned their boat as they had used it during the ministry (“the boat” Matthew 13:2; 15:39; MARK 5:21; John 6:21; etc.). This way they could help provide for their families or perhaps earn money for future missions. Perhaps they went fishing because they did not know exactly where to put their energies next; they were not sure what their new life would entail. I am sure they all missed Jesus, as we all would, after spending three years beside Him every day. Whatever their motivation, when they returned home to Galilee, they took a night off to go fishing.

We see no evidence in the text that their faith or testimonies had wavered. Perhaps they lacked initiative and needed more divine direction. The Lord taught in modern revelation that disciples need to act without being constantly prodded. “For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward” (D&C 58:26).

The first apostles’ relationship to Jesus was more of a master and disciple/servant. They were used to taking orders and following as sheep, not brainstorming up their own plans. In fact, they had to be flexible in their thoughts and actions as Jesus often asked them to do very shocking things (healed and gleaned on the Sabbath, spoke to and instructed women, walked through Samaria and ate their food, etc.). They got to a point where they learned to wait and watch to see what Jesus did rather than follow their cultural norms.

“ . . . that night they caught nothing” John uses his characteristic irony, that the whole fishing expedition was spent for naught. His references to “night,” should trigger his oft-used symbolism of darkness (this time perhaps including their thoughts or need for direction). Commercial fishing was often done at night because the fish school swam closer to the surface then; also, they could sell the fresh fish in the morning. Not this time, though.

John 21:4–6 “**Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not . . .**” The fishermen did not recognize Jesus, probably due to the dim dawn light, the distance, or because He was unexpected. The person on the shore shouted out directions to put the net down again but on the right side of their boat this time. He called them “boys/*paidon*” or “lads” (AB). They took the advice and tried one more time. A miracle occurred; the net is filled.

John 21:7 “**it is the Lord**” coincides with the “*I am*” formula.³⁸ Either John’s younger eyes, or his sensitive heart, recognized the source of the miracle as Jesus. John immediately communicated this to his fishing partner and best friend, Peter. Fisherman usual wore only a bottom layer of clothing (either a fisherman’s smock or loin cloth). Out of reverence for the Lord, he grabbed his outer clothing or cloak and tied it around himself. (The Greek word is the same as when Jesus tied a towel around himself to wash the apostles’ feet as recorded in John 13:4-5). Then Peter literally “*threw himself*” into the sea and swam to shore.

John 21:8 “**And the other disciples came . . . dragging the net with fishes**” John assures the readers that they did not abandon Jesus’ gift, but rowed the little boat the last 100 yards (a cubit is about 18,” from elbow to fingertip) back to the shore. At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, He promised to make his disciples, “*fishers of men*” (Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17). Now with His help, the disciples caught every type of fish in their net, symbolic of their future proselytizing work. Their commission was to gather and draw people to Jesus.³⁹

Jesus Instructs Them in Fishing by Love

John 21:9–14

John 21:9–10 “**As they were come . . . they saw a fire . . . and fish . . . and bread**” Jesus provided a fire to warm them and food for their breakfast (and it appears that He even acted as chef). We see the roles reversed again, as Jesus served His apostles. In our lives, He will also provide for our needs if we will follow His direction.

John 21:11 “**It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn**” (NIV) The number of “*great fishes*” is significant here. According to Jerome, the number 153 was the exact number of species of fish that the Greek zoologists had enumerated at that point in time.⁴⁰ Symbolically, as this story will lead to a call for greater missionary work, the 153 fish can imply that the Gospel net would extend to all species or kindreds, tongues, and people.

More important than the exact number is the inclusion that the net did not break. The net points to the apostles’ role as fishers among humanity. Their capacity as fishers of men will also extend to all who are drawn into the net of the Lord’s gospel. Earlier when the Lord had directed Peter (and possibly his partners James and John) to let down their nets for a great catch, the net broke (Luke 5:6). Now, the net was strong enough for the job and the apostles could handle the work before them. Jesus instructed the fishers to take care of the catch He has provided, “Bring of the fish which you have now caught,” and Peter went back to help drag the net ashore.

John 21:12–14 “Come and dine” is an invitation to all who hear the Lord’s call. This is the third post-resurrection visit to the apostles in the Gospel of John (John 20:19, 26). It is also the third or fourth meal that Jesus provided for the disciples. It has other similarities to John 6, in which He feeds the multitude bread and fishes as well. He asks all disciples to join in a sacrament meal to remember His sacrifice.

John 21:15 when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, *son of Jonas*” In John 1:42, Jesus gave Simon a nick-name or new name, “Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.” From then on, Jesus always included “Cephas/Peter/stone” when referring to him in the Gospel of John. Here Jesus did not call him by the ennobling or familiar name, “rock.” Was it intentional? Perhaps because the author had just introduced him as “Simon Peter,” it was too redundant, and shortened it. But that is not the author’s pattern earlier. We find thirty-two times where Jesus referred to Peter in the Gospel of John, and he never dropped “Peter,” except here. In addition, the verbal tense is less familiar “and thus challenging his friendship.”⁴¹

“Lovest thou me more than these?” The Lord’s reference to “these,” I presume includes the nets, boats, fishes, or more generally, His occupation and mortal desires. His choice of “love” is more nuanced in Greek than in English. Throughout the Gospel of John, the author(s) carefully and consistently chose two words for “love,” *agape* and *phileo* (even though in Greek there are at least five words meaning love).⁴² In English one cannot tell, but this conversation includes both *agape* and *phileo*:

The Good Shepherd, mosaic in Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, 1st half of 5th century.
Image via Wikimedia Commons.



21:15 Jesus said: “*agapao me*/lovest thou me?” . . . Peter answered: “*philo se*/I love thee”

21:16 Jesus said: “*agapao me*/lovest thou me?” . . . Peter answered: “*philo se*/I love thee”

21:17 Jesus said: “*phileis me*/lovest thou me?” . . . Peter answered: “*philo se*/I love thee”

Did the author mean to communicate this subtle, but meaningful difference? After studying each use of love by John and the rest of the New Testament, I think the answer is yes, and so do other Greek scholars.⁴³ Perhaps Peter did not initially understand the Lord’s “love,” but the author communicated a difference. Even in his second language, the author was consistent.

A list of all references to “love” in the Gospel of John shows that “*philo*” is used one-fourth of the time, and always out of the mouth of someone else other than Jesus (with the one exception of this verse here John 21:17).⁴⁴ We find that Jesus consistently uses the Greek word for love—it is always *agape*—both as a verb, *agapao*, and as a noun, *agape*. Everywhere that is, except here. Some have argued that the two words meant the same thing but were used for variety. Yet, throughout all of the rest of the Johannine literature, whenever “love” is used together three and four times, the author does not feel the need to change the Greek word, but always uses, *agape*.

John 21:16–17 “Feed my lambs . . . Shepherd My sheep . . . Feed my sheep” (BSB) The second request is also literally “tend my sheep.” By repeating His request three times, is Jesus giving Peter a gentle chastisement? President David O. McKay suggested that in this threefold questioning of Peter, the Lord let him make good his error. “It purged his soul with reaffirmation of loyalty and energetic action.”⁴⁵ Elder Jeffrey R. Holland suggested the Lord corrected Peter’s priorities and put him back into the saddle.

“Then Peter, why are you here? Why are we back on this same shore, by these same nets, having this same conversation? Wasn’t it obvious then and isn’t it obvious now that if I want fish, I can get fish? What I need, Peter, are disciples—and I need them forever. I need someone to feed my sheep and save my lambs. I need someone to preach my gospel and defend my faith. I need someone who loves me, truly, truly loves me and loves what our Father in Heaven has commissioned me to do.”⁴⁶

Whatever the motivation, Peter internalized these specific words of council as we read in his later writings to other young leaders, “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; . . . neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:2–3).

Jesus Prophecies of Peter’s and John’s Future

John 21:18–19

John 21:18–19 “when thou art old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee” This is looked at as Jesus’ prophecy of Peter’s death. Eventually, Peter did lay down his life for God’s sheep as a martyr

in Rome under Nero. According to the early Christian, Origen (AD 184–253): “Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downwards, as he himself had desired to suffer.”⁴⁷ The tradition says he did not feel himself worthy to die as the Lord had done, so he hung upside down.

John 21:21–23 “went this saying abroad . . . that disciple should not die” John did not have to die because the Lord answered his wish to continue to serve the Lord in this world until the Lord’s Second Coming. We have a second and third witness of this in 3 Nephi 28 and D&C 7. John the Beloved and the three Nephites, received some sort of change to their body so that they are now translated beings. The Lord promised all four that in a twinkling they will be resurrected (3 Nephi 28:6–8, 36–40). The Prophet Joseph Smith explained that “translated bodies are designed for future missions.”⁴⁸

John’s Final Testimony

John 21:24 “this is the disciple testified of these things” The author finally identifies himself as the disciple who leaned on Jesus’ breast at the Last Supper. He identified himself earlier only as “the beloved disciple,” or one of the disciples.

John 21:25 “Many other things . . . if they should be written . . . the world itself could not contain the books” John closes with the need for more scripture (just like Mormon and Moroni)! Through the Urim & Thummim, Joseph received D&C 7, from John’s parchment. Also, we are told in D&C 93:6 that more of John’s record is coming.

Jesus’ Post-Resurrection Appearance in Galilee

Matthew 28:16–20; Mark 16:15–18

Matthew 28:16 “the eleven disciples went away into Galilee into a mountain . . .” The designated meeting place was a mountain, perfectly in keeping with the usual Temple parallel, a high place for a holy meeting. Much of the forty-day ministry literature includes prayer circles and similar parallels to modern temple ritual.⁴⁹ We also see remnants in the New Testament Epistles: “Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:11); “give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10); “Honour unto the wife . . . and as being heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Peter 3:7).

Matthew 28:17 “. . . they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted” Was the doubting account harkening back to when they doubted the women’s witness and to Thomas, or did it relate to doubts at Jesus’ appearance? We have scriptural examples of others doubting an angel’s witness, such as Zacharias in the temple, and Laman and Lemuel in the Book of Mormon. Perhaps some apostles fell into that category.

Matthew 28:18 “all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” Jesus’ atonement sacrifice qualified Him to

receive even more power over this earth and the redemption of the children of God. Jesus shared, or promised some of that power as He sent forth the apostles with keys to baptize and “all things” (Matthew 28:20).

Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15 “Go . . . and teach all nations” This was a vastly different mission call and focus than Jesus’ three-year mission, where the teaching, healing, and miracles witnessed of His Messiahship to the Jews. Jesus looked forward to the time when the disciples would preach His gospel to all the “nations” or gentiles. They would not realize this until after Peter’s vision in Joppa, but Jesus was opening the door, here. The early Christians were expecting the end and had been instructed by Jesus to watch until the end.

Mark 16:16–18 “And these signs shall follow them that believe . . .” Mark’s account includes more examples of Jesus’ power shared with all of His disciples in the form of the gifts of the Spirit: casting out devils, speaking in tongues, healing, and protections from poisons and serpents. The requirement for these gifts or “signs” is belief.

Matthew 28:20 “Observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always”

In the birth narratives in Matthew Jesus is introduced as Emmanuel or “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). Now at the end of that Gospel, Matthew restates this as He departs after His resurrection: “I am with you always” Each of the five sections of Matthew ends with the concluding phrase “When Jesus had ended his saying . . .” (Matthew 7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1, and 26:1). But here, if His disciples will obey, Jesus promises a continuation of revelation.

Header Image: Image by TC Perch from Pixabay.

Right: Ascension by John Singleton Copley, 1775. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



ENDNOTES

1. The Old English roots of the word “gospel” are derived from “good/god” and “news, a story/pel.” It refers to Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection.
2. Matthew 28:10; Mark 15:40–41; 16:7; Luke 8:2; John 20:3–18; 1 Corinthians 11:5,11;14:12; for more see footnote 14
3. For example, when churches were first established by Alma’s the Elder, he instructed them to focus solely on Jesus’ redemption and how to receive it: “they should preach nothing save it were repentance and faith on the Lord, who had redeemed his people” (Mosiah 18:20).
4. Paul Gaechter, *Literary Art in the Gospel of Matthew* Trans., Lore Schultzeiss, published in English by John W. Welch, ed. (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2013). <https://chiasmusresources.org/literary-art-gospel-matthew> (accessed 6-7-19).
5. James McClinton, *Quid Pro Quirk: A Layman’S Guide to Resolving Alleged Bible Quirks* (Bloomington, ID: WestBow press -Zondervan, 2014), 167. I found this same quote word for word in several places, but never with a footnote. I was not able to find the original source.
6. John H. Elliott, *Anchor Bible: 1 Peter* (New York City, NY: Random House-Doubleday, 1964), 568. “As roles and status were gender-specific and clearly demarcated, so was the social space that was proper to males (public) and females (domestic, private).” Then he quoted Xenophon (c.430–353 BC), an Athenian soldier: “God from the first adapted the woman’s nature, I think, to the indoor, and man to the outdoor tasks and cares. For he made the man’s body and mind more capable of enduring cold and heat, and journeys and campaigns; and therefore, imposed on him the outdoor tasks. To the woman, God assigned the indoor tasks”
7. *Mishnah, Moed: Shabbath*, 7:4; 8:3, 8.5, 10.5, 6. The oral laws functioned as a buffer zone around the Torah to avoid any chance of breaking one of the laws of Moses. For example, from the commandment to keep the Sabbath day holy came thirty-nine definitions of work, which then developed into hundreds of oral laws detailing forbidden work on the Sabbath.
8. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 6. 9,3. Jerusalem that usually houses between 20,000 to 30,000 people, explodes during the time of the annual pilgrimage feasts. Josephus claimed, 2,700,200 Jews one year who came to worship. Scholars assume his numbers are exaggerated by a large degree. But even if we cut the number in half, or even take off one zero, the city would be bursting at the seams.
9. W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible Series–Matthew* (New York: Doubleday, 1971).
10. *Mishnah Ketuboth*, 4.4; quoting Rabbi Judah (born AD 135 and codified the *Mishnah*). The *Mishnah* recorded the prescribed precedent for husbands who lost a wife: “Even the poorest Israelite should hire not less than two flutes and one wailing woman.” A hired “wailing woman” cried and shrieked to dramatize sorrow. The hired mourner dressed in sackcloth, wept overtly, howled for hours, and threw dirt on her head. The mourning was at its height on the third day according to Rabbi Bar Kappara about AD 200 (Raymond E. Brown, *Anchor Bible: John XIII-XXII* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 982. Also see 1 Maccabees 2:14, 3:47.
11. Kent Brown, *BYU New Testament Commentary: The Testimony of Luke* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015). The angels refer

to Jesus with a new title and name (by using the accusative singular article). Note how Luke includes an array of meaningful names for Jesus in this chapter.

12. GOD'S WORD® Translation
13. *Mishnah, Avoth* 1:5. Talk not much with womankind . . . they said this of a man's own wife: how much more of his fellow's wife!" Also, "Do not speak excessively with a woman lest this ultimately lead[s] you to adultery!" And, "He that talks much with womankind brings evil upon himself, neglects the study of The Law and at the last will inherit Gehenna [hell]."
14. Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA. GP, 2015), chs 2–4.
15. Raymond Brown, *Anchor Bible: John XII-XXII*, 984.
16. Josephus, *Against Apion*, II. 25. "A woman is inferior to her husband in all things." Also, from Josephus, *Antiquities*, IV.8:15; "Let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex . . ." along with a list of others. Josephus felt that Adam was cursed in the Garden of Eden: "Because he weakly submitted to the counsel of his wife." *Antiquities of the Jews*, I.1.4 A beloved Jewish writer, Ben Sira, from the century the New Testament write many statements like: "Better is the iniquity of a man, than a woman doing a good turn, and a woman bringing shame and reproach" (*Ecclesiasticus*, 42:140). Women were to receive counsel and not give it. "Give not to son or wife, brother or friend, power over thee while thou livest; . . . In all thy works keep the pre-eminence" (*Ibid.*, 33:20, 23).
17. *Mishnah, Shebuoth*, 4:1; claims that women should not be trusted because Sarah lied (Genesis 18:5). The *Mishnah, Shebuoth*, 4:1, includes a list of unacceptable witnesses in Judaic courts of law including ten classes of people: women, slaves, minors, lunatics, deaf, blind, wicked, contemptible, relatives and interested parties. Shepherds fell among the wicked as they grazed their flocks on other's lands.
18. Paul Gaechter, *Literary Art in the Gospel of Matthew*. <https://chiasmusresources.org/literary-art-gospel-matthew> (accessed 6-7-19). The two fronts are 1) women are allowed to touch Jesus and 2) when the women talk to the eleven apostles in the other gospels, there is no mention of seeing Jesus before Mary Magdalene. Paul Gaechter argues that Matthew 28:9–10 is a latter addition to the original text because of the interruption to the chiasmus and lack of logic: "It can be made plain that this little periscope was not part of the original version of the Gospel of Matthew. The content is a vague generalization of Jesus's appearance to Mary Magdalene as reported by John (John 20:11–18)."
19. Kent Jackson, Robert Millet, eds., *Studies in Scriptures: The Gospels* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1986), 5. 454.
20. Peter's personality is similar in Luke's writings of the Book of Acts of the Apostles. He becomes the main character in the first half of Acts. Luke includes Peter doing the same miracles in Acts, that Jesus did in His ministry. It demonstrates parallel accounts to teach that the same miracles/authority/teachings/church were passed down from Jesus to Peter, and then repeated for Paul.
21. The Gardener is a powerful image of the Lord. As He works with His disciples to help them grow and bring forth fruit, as He prepares the soil, pulls out weeds, and prunes our lives, He is a master gardener. Sometimes we wish God were a Superman, but more often than not, He is a Gardener.
22. Early on a spring morning in Fayette New York. After Mary Whitmer milked the cow, and left the barn, she was met by Angel Moroni who showed her the plates. See <https://bookofmormoncentral.org/blog/5-women-who-are-witnesses-of>

- the-physical-golden-plates (accessed 6/7/19).
23. Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 369.
 24. The title is not found in the Old Testament, but a form of the extended title was used outside of the New Testament in the first center for the great master ruler and teacher, Gamaliel. <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12494-rabbi> (accessed 6/8/19).
 25. <https://biblehub.com/kjv/john/20-17.htm> (accessed 6-8-19). Another interpretation is that Mary fulfills a type and shadow give from the Mosaic temple ritual. “Jesus speaks to Mary as the High Priest fulfilling the day of atonement (Leviticus 16). Having accomplished the sacrifice, He was on His way to present the sacred blood in heaven, and that, between the meeting with Mary in the garden and the meeting of Matthew 28:9. He had so ascended and returned: a view in harmony with types.”
 26. Brown, *Anchor: John XIII-XXI*, 1117.
 27. Names in the New Testament are often with different spellings and even languages. At a time when three languages were often know by common people, and spelling was not standardized, there is often variation in names (i.e. see James and Joses interchanged in Matthew and Mark).
 28. This is especially plausible if Mary the wife of Clepas were one of the women preparing and serving the meal.
 29. Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Learning the Language of the Lord: A Guidebook to Personal Revelation* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2018), chapter 1. The Lord gave Joseph Smith guidelines on how to identify the Spirit—starting with D&C 5:16; 6:14–15; 22–23; 8:1; and 9:7–9—well before most other teachings.
 30. We learn that Jesus appeared to the Nephites just under a year after the great destruction at His death by comparing 3 Nephi 8:5 with 11:18.
 31. Definition given by Dr. John Perry, Cardinal Stritch University class, 2003.
 32. Fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23). Paul’s list of the gifts of the Spirit include, wisdom, knowledge, faith. Healing, miraculous powers, to another prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues” (I Corinthians 12:8–10). Perhaps the lack of the Spirit is emphasized because the final editors of the New Testament had a trinity view?
 33. *Mormon Doctrine*, 294.
 34. Patrick Mason, *Planted* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 2015).
 35. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, *General Conference*, “Come Join with Us,” October 2013.
 36. Andrew Ehat and Lyndon Cook, eds. *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990),10; also 9, 42, 110, 210, 327–331.
 37. John 21:1–16 shares about 10 similarities with the apostles fishing in Luke 5:1–11, but the timing is completely different).
 38. Brown, *Anchor Bible: John XIII-XXI*, 1072.
 39. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: The Order of St. Benedict, 1988), 102.
 40. Brown, *Anchor Bible: John XIII-XXI*, 1074. Some suggest the number points to the fullness of church’s perfection. They

derive this from 17 cubed. Seventeen is made from combining two symbolic numbers: seven representing complete, whole, or perfect, with ten, the number for the Decalogue (7+10=17). I think this is a stretch.

41. Ibid., 1102.
42. Most common Greek words for love: 1. n. *agape* / v. *agapao*: of persons: to welcome, to entertain, to be fond of, to love dearly; of things: to be well pleased, to be contented at or with a thing; 2. *phileo*: to love; to approve of; to like; sanction; to treat affectionately or kindly, to welcome, befriend, brotherly love; 3. *stergo*: form of romantic love; 4. *aspazomai*: form of romantic love; 5. *eros*: form of romantic love (root for erotic).
43. Richard C. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel 11–21* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 2008, reprint), 1419. The verb “*agapan*” is the love of intelligence, reason and comprehension, coupled with the corresponding purpose; in this its content it vastly outranks the other type of love. . . . Jesus never asked us to love our enemies in the sense of “*philein*”; he never himself loved his enemies in this way. But “*agapan*”—yes, with this love, did God love the world, and we can love our enemies, comprehending all that is wrong, sanctifying the world, converting our enemies. Compare John 3:16 and every other passage in which either of the verbs is used in this Gospel. Only in a few cases, where either type of love would apply, either verb might be used; but even then the great distinction would remain—the two are never equal. . . . The wrong kind of emphasis is placed on “*the third time*” by those who fail to see the force of the third question because they confuse “*agapan*” and “*philein*”. What went to Peter’s heart was this verb “*philein*” in the final question, “Hast thou affection for me?” When Jesus twice asked about the higher love, once as to its degree compared with others and then about its very presence, Peter with all due humility ventured to assert only the lower form of love. But now in this third question Jesus probed even for this lower love
44. LOVE=AGAPE
 - John 3:35 “The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.”
 - John 11:5 “Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister . . .”
 - John 12:43 “For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”
 - John 13:1 “. . . having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.”
 - John 13:23 “Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.”
 - John 19:26 “When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith . . .”
 - John 21:7 “Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. . . .”
 - John 21:20 “. . . the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper”
 - 1 John 2:10 “He that loveth his brother abideth in the light”
 - 1 John 2:15 “Love not the world, neither the things . . . in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him”
 - 1 John 3:10 “Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”
 - 1 John 3:11 “. . . we should love one another.”
 - 1 John 3:14 “. . . we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.”
 - 1 John 3:18 “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”
 - 1 John 3:23 “love one another, as he gave us commandment.”

1 John 4:7 “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God . . .”

1 John 4:8 “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.”

1 John 4:10 “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son . . .”

1 John 4:11 “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”

1 John 4:12 “If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.”

1 John 4:19 “We love him, because he first loved us.”

1 John 4:20 “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother . . . how can he love God?”

1 John 4:21 “. . . he who loveth God love his brother also.”

1 John 5:1 “Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.”

1 John 5:2 “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.”

2 John 1:1 “THE elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth”

2 John 1:5 “. . . that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.”

3 John 1:1 “unto the well beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.”

Revelation 1:5 “. . . Unto him that loved us, and washed us . . .”

Revelation 12:11 “. . . they loved not their live”

Revelation 20:9 “. . . the saints about, and the beloved city.”

LOVE=PHILEO

John 11:3 “Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.”

John 11:36 “Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!”

John 20:2 “. . . the other disciple, whom Jesus loved.”

John 21:15 “. . . son of Jonas, *agapao* thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.”

John 21:16 “. . . *agapao* thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.”

John 21:17 “. . . lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.”

Revelation 22:15 “For without are dogs, and sorcerers, . . . whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.”

45. Jackson and Millet, eds., *Gospels*, 466.

46. Jeffrey R. Holland, *General Conference*, October 2012 The quote from, “The First Great Commandment” continues: “Ours is not a feeble message. It is not a fleeting task. It is not hapless; it is not hopeless; it is not to be consigned to the ash heap of history. It is the work of Almighty God, and it is to change the world. So, Peter, for the second and presumably the last time, I am asking you to leave all this and to go teach and testify, labor and serve loyally until the day in which they will do to you exactly what they did to me.”

47. Origen, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis III*, quoted by Eusebius his *Ecclesiastical History* (III, 1).

48. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (1844; Reprint Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1980), 4:425. Transfiguration is different than the change made to become a transfigured being.
49. Hugh Nibley, "The Early Christian Prayer Circle," *BYU Studies* 19, no. 1 (Fall 1978): 4–78. David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 573. Hugh Nibley with Don E. Norton, ed., *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present* (Salt Lake City, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1992), 313.



ACTS 1–5

THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH HEALS, PREACHES,
BAPTIZES, AND LIVES IN UNITY

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Following the writing of Christ’s life, the author Luke continued to write a second parchment to cover the early history of the apostolic church. His second volume acts as a companion to the first and shares its message, style, and size. Both volumes were initially untitled, but some early Christians (“Church Fathers”), from at least the second century used the name “Acts of the Apostles.”¹ At the time biographies of famous men often used: “Acts of . . .” in their titles (i.e. Acts of Hippolus, Acts of Peter, etc.). These early Christians and many others identified “[Luke] the companion of Paul,” as the author of the third Gospel and Acts of the Apostles. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland suggested an alternate title that focuses on its central theme: *The Acts of the Resurrected Christ Working through the Holy Spirit in the Lives and Ministries of His Ordained Apostles.*²

Luke's characteristic writing style sets him apart as the author of both volumes. He wrote the best Greek prose in the New Testament, and he adapted his writing to the characters. His Greek is even better in Acts than in his Gospel (probably due to his freer text—as he no longer follows Mark or Matthew).³ Also, both Luke and Acts are addressed to “Theophilus,” meaning, “lover of God.”

LUKE 1:1–4 (BSB)

Many have undertaken to compose an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by the initial eyewitnesses . . . it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know . . .

ACTS 1:1–3 (BSB)

In my first book, O Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach . . . After His suffering, He presented Himself to them with many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a span of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

Both volumes also demonstrate reverence without showing much of their human nature when referring to Jesus and the apostles. Both use parallels with nearly every story (i.e. Gabriel comes to Zacharias and then Mary in Luke 1, and the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son in Luke 15). Combining this information with the biographical information in the epistles from Paul, the thematic literary styles, and textual analysis both conclude that the books share the same author. Furthermore, literary style, vocabulary and stylometry statistically give conclusive data of single authorship.⁴

Who Was Luke?

The name Luke appears three times in the New Testament, each in a letter attributed to Paul.

1. Colossians 4:14 “Luke, the beloved physician”
2. Philemon 1:24 “. . . and Luke, my fellow workers” (NIV)
3. 2 Timothy 4:11 “Only Luke is with me”

These passages suggest that Luke served as a companion to the Apostle Paul. In the last half of the book of Acts, the author changes from “Paul” or “he,” to the plural, “we,” four times—as if the author were present. These passages have been studied carefully to find when and where the author joined Paul. The text also gives hints to the fact that the author was not a Jew, nor from Palestine, but probably a Greek convert to Christianity raised in the Diaspora.⁵

In the second century, a manuscript of the Gospel of Luke included an extra prologue which read:

Luke was a Syrian of Antioch, by profession a physician, the disciple of the apostles, and later a follower of Paul until his martyrdom. He served the Lord without distraction, without a wife, and without children. He died at the age of 84 in Boeotia, full of the Holy Spirit. Though gospels were already in existence, that according to Matthew, composed in Judea, and that according to Mark in Italy, he was prompted by the Holy Spirit and composed this gospel entirely in the regions about Achaia. He made very clear in the prologue that other [Gospels] had been written before him, but that it was necessary to set forth for Gentile converts the accurate account of the (new) dispensation that they might not be distracted by Jewish fables or deceived by heretical and foolish fantasies, and so miss the truth itself. From the very beginning [of his Gospel] we have received as of no little importance [the story of] the birth of John, who is the beginning of the Gospel. He was the Lord's precursor, the one who shared in the articulation of the good news, in the ministering of baptism, and in the company of the Spirit. Of this dispensation a prophet among the Twelve makes mention. Later the same Luke wrote the Acts of the Apostles.⁶

In addition to Luke's pursuit as a theological historian, the JST of Luke 1:1 identifies him as a "messenger of Jesus Christ." A fourth century source includes Luke as a member of the Seventy.⁷

When did Luke Write Acts

The book of Acts begins by telling us that Luke first wrote his Gospel and then the Acts of the Apostles (1:1). As Acts does not mention the martyrdom of Paul, both books were probably completed before that event (ca. 64–67 AD).

Themes in Acts:

1. God is still in charge; Jesus has just changed locations from earth to heaven.
2. Witnesses of Jesus as the Son of God and Redeemer of humanity.
3. Bridges the life of Jesus and teachings of the apostles by giving examples of the apostles performing the same miracles and teaching the same message that Jesus did.
4. All (Jew and Gentile) may receive the Gospel.
5. Delayed Second Coming of Jesus as King.

Outline of Acts:

I. Acts 1–12 is centered in Jerusalem with Peter (1–5 Apostles miracles & preaching 6–12 Stephen, Philip, Paul, and Cornelius).

II. Acts 13–28 is centered in Antioch with Paul (conversion and three apostolic missions).

Acts typically gives examples of doctrines that were first introduced by Jesus in his Gospel, then followed by Peter and Paul in Acts. This illustrates that Paul taught what Jesus and Peter taught. It also provides a second and third witness to the truths presented.

CHAPTER 1

Text: The Prologue

Acts 1:1–5

Acts 1:1 “**In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about . . .**” (NIV) Luke is writing to “*Theophilus* / lover of God.” which may be one person or a whole congregation. At the time, authors often dedicated their books to a single person who contributed the costs to allow the book to be available for public use. Luke does the same at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke (see above).

The prologue proposes that Theophilus may have been a Roman patron or official. This theory is supported by Luke’s positive portrayal of Rome throughout both volumes. Luke needed a way to present Christianity to the literate Greeks. Luke also describes the honorable and law-abiding nature of Christianity (e.g. they pay their taxes, they come when called to a census even if difficult, they are peacemakers, etc.).

Christianity in the first century AD, vied for legal status as a religion in the Roman Empire. Rome allowed only ten legal religions. Judaism was not only one of the ten, it was also one of the six largest religions in the Empire. The population of Rome was about 10% Jewish; Antioch, the third largest city, was 20% Jewish.⁸ Luke (and Paul, etc.) try very hard to prove that Christianity is the natural extension of Judaism. Luke portrays Christians as law-abiding citizens that are worthy of legal recognition.

Acts 1:2 “**He was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles**” (NIV) Just as Jesus did before, even after His death and resurrection, He continues to communicate with His apostles, but now through the Spirit. The subject is still the Lord. The Spirit is relaying His “instructions,” to those chosen. The verse demonstrates that the gift of the Holy Ghost was functioning before Pentecost. This work of the Spirit as the vehicle of revelation is one of the major themes in this volume. Many Christians refer to the apostolic church as the beginning of the “Dispensation of the Spirit” (after the AMPC translation of 2 Corinthians 3:8). Unlike the Gospels, discussion about, and evidence of the Spirit fills the book of Acts and the Epistles.

Acts 1:3 “. . . being seen of them forty days” The 40-day ministry literature is filled with closely knit teachings,

miracles, rites, ordinances and prophecies of persecution that lay ahead for the apostles.⁹ Remember that from the time of the Law of Moses, forty was used for a duration of purification (Leviticus 12:2–6) and further back, for a learning and teaching period (Genesis 7:17; Exodus 34:28; Numbers 14:34). During this time, Jesus demonstrated “convincing proofs” (ISV) that He was indeed alive, and that they needed to learn to follow Him.

Acts 1:4–5 “while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift’ . . . baptized with the Holy Spirit” (NIV) JBpst’s prophecy was about to come to pass. John the Baptist came to baptize with water, but the Messiah would baptize with fire (Luke 3). Luke includes the command to wait in Jerusalem for this experience. The timing is not clear between this promise and the timing of other events during the 40-day-ministry. John 21:1 describes six apostles fishing in the Sea of Galilee when they see the Lord again. The baptism of fire is when the Spirit purges one’s soul. Elder Bednar explained, “The Holy Ghost is a sanctifier who cleanses and burns dross and evil out of human souls as though by fire.”¹⁰

Delayed Second Coming

Acts 1:6–11

Acts 1:6–7 “It is not for you to know the times or the season” This phrase acts as a bridge between the two volumes. Notice the similarities with the closing remarks in the four Gospels. Especially in Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32, we find Jesus repeating the same message with different words. The apostles repeated this same idea throughout the book of Acts and several Epistles. It became a theme as the apostolic church had to address the disappointment of the Lord’s delayed Second Coming.

Acts 1:8 “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes” (BSB) The disciples received power as the gifts of the Spirit were poured out. Luke wrote previously about this when the disciples stood beside Jesus at His ascension on the Mount of Olives toward Bethany (Luke 24:48–51). Jesus told them to stay in Jerusalem “until ye be endued [or ‘endowed’] with power.” Most English translations use, “clothed with power” (NIV, ESV, BSB, etc.). What was this endowment of power? Jesus had already taught them much of our modern endowment in the Sermon on the Mount. The three apostles had received keys on the Mount of Transfiguration. This endowment was connected with clothing. It would also prove to be an outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit (Ac 2). These gifts are available to all seeking believers. Joseph Smith also connected the Gifts of the Spirit with the priesthood—offering the overarching definition that God’s priesthood is the power of God.¹¹ The early apostles’ goal was to witness, not set up a long-term church. This verse foreshadows Peter’s vision in chapter 10.

Acts 1:9–10 “he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him . . . They were looking intently . . . when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them” The two angels who came after Jesus and ascended in a cloud are unnamed, but they gave more instructions. They looked like men, which is consistent with other descriptions of angels in the restoration as they will be or have been mortal, as “no angels who min-

ister to this earth but those who do belong or have belonged to it” (D&C 130:5; also see JS—H 1:31). Some Jews at the time, including the Pharisees, accepted the concept of angels as personal intermediate beings, but others, like the Sadducees, did not. Across the Gospels, angels are only found in the birth and death narratives, but in the second half of the New Testament, we find many angels’ interactions with the early saints of the apostolic church.

Acts 1:11 “Jesus . . . will come back in the same way you have seen Him go” (BSB) The angel’s message reinforced the reality of the Second Coming, albeit by the time Luke wrote the book of Acts, it was delayed longer than the early saints had expected. Coming to grips with the fact that the delayed eschatology was part of God’s plan was very challenging and it was important to keep the saints’ faith—hence Luke uses this as a theme throughout Acts.

120 Disciples Meet—Matthias Called as New Apostle

Acts 1:12–26

Acts 1:12 “Then returned they unto Jerusalem a sabbath day’s journey” A Sabbath’s day journey was just over a half mile (1 km). For the Old Testament derivation see Exodus 16:29 and Numbers 35:5.

Acts 1:13 “they went up into an upper room” Is this the same room where the Last Supper was eaten? Or could

Image of Pentecost from St. Paul Churchh. Photo by Ted via Flickr.



it have been in John Mark's mother's home where the saints gathered in Acts 12:12? The list of eleven apostles is consistent with the lists found in Matthew 10, Mark 3, and Luke 6, but now without Judas Iscariot.

Lists of Apostles in Gospels

MATT 10:2-4

Simon Peter
Andrew his brother
James Zebedee's son
John his brother

Philip
Bartholomew
Thomas
Matthew the publican
James Alphaeus' son
Lebaeus / Thaddaeus
Simon the Canaanite
Judas Iscariot betrayer

MARK 3:13-19

Simon named **Peter**
James Zebedee's son
John Zebedee's son
 "The sons of thunder"
Andrew
Philip
Bartholomew
Matthew
Thomas
James Alphaeus' son
Thaddaeus
Simon the Canaanite
Judas Iscariot betrayer

LUKE 6:14-16

Simon Peter
Andrew his brother
James
John

Philip
Bartholomew
Matthew
Thomas
James Alphaeus' son
Simon called Zelotes
Judas brother of James
Judas Iscariot, traitor

ACTS 1:14

Peter
James
John

Andrew
Philip
Thomas
Bartholomew
Matthew
James Alphaeus's son
Simon Zelotes
Judas brother of James

Acts 1:14-15 "all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women" Luke has included a group of women traveling and working alongside the Twelve since Luke 8:2-3, "Mary called Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Herod's household manager Chuza, Susanna" (BSB), and John 19:25 identifies some of the "other women," as Mary (Jesus' mother), her sister, and Mary the wife of Clopas. The group united in prayer included three additional men as well. For the first time, Jesus' half-brothers are listed with the believers: "James, Joseph, Simon and Judas," the sons of Mary and Joseph have joined the believers (Matthew 13:55). This addition makes me wonder if Mary and Joseph's daughters may have also been included "with the women." Previously in John 7:5, he shared the sad news that during Jesus' ministry, "even his own brothers did not believe in Him" (BSB).

Acts 1:15 "Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples" Peter spoke to a gathering of 120 saints in Jerusalem. The fraction of Jesus' disciples post-resurrection was a far cry from the thousands that had thronged Him at His Triumphal Entry, only six weeks earlier. Jesus' death had a devastating effect on many followers. Yet, the unified group gathered in faith and prayer were "persons known by name" as the Anchor Bible translates this verse. Peter's leadership is clear.

Acts 1:16–20 “. . . he [Judas] was numbered with us” Either the Lord during His 40-day ministry probably showed the disciples the Old Testament scriptures that prophesied of Judas’ betrayal, or else the Spirit led Peter to these verses (Psalms 41:9; 69:25; 109:8). The book of Psalms was cited more often than any other Old Testament book in the New Testament.



Pentecost by Stephan Dorfmeister, 1782.
Image via Wikimedia Commons.

“The field of blood” The author Luke was not present, but he quoted eye-witnesses (Luke 1:2–3), yet this story differs from Matthew 28:3–10. Both accounts explain why the field was nicknamed, “field of blood.”

Acts 1:21–22 “must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection” Luke outlines the requirements for apostleship including a special witness of Jesus’ resurrection and calling. However, the apostles are not Jesus’ successors. “There is only one successor to the Lord mentioned in the Bible and that is the Holy Ghost . . . A successor is one who comes after and takes the place of another . . . one must hold his identical office... the scriptures never call the apostles Christ’s successors.”¹² Jesus describes His successor during the Last Supper as the Comforter and Spirit of Truth (John 13–16). After the Quorum of the Twelve was complete again, the Lord sent an outpouring of the Holy Spirit as described in Acts 2:2–6.

Acts 1:23 “they appointed two, Joseph . . . and Matthias” With a small pool to choose from, and with the rigorous demands of the calling, only two names were considered to fill the quorum of the Twelve Apostles. I believe the Spirit directed the prayerful selection of these two even before they cast lots to determine the Lord’s final choice. Ancient Israelites cast lots as a means of receiving revelation to learn the Lord’s will (Joshua 18:6–10; Joshua 21:8; also see Nehemiah 10:34; 11:1; Jonah 1:7; etc.). Edersheim explains they cast lots in Herod’s Temple each morning for the Lord to select which priest would serve in each station (also see Leviticus 16:8).¹³

Acts 1:24–26 “They prayed . . . which of these two you have chosen? . . . lot fell to Matthias” (NIV). The words of the prayer spoke to their belief that Jesus continued to run the church, just from the other side of the veil. Luke uses the word “apostle” far more often than the other New Testament authors: six times in his Gospel (6:13; 9:10; 11:49; 17:5; 22:14; 24:10), and 25 times in the book of Acts. In contrast, Matthew and Mark only use it once each (Matthew 10:2; Mark 6:30). Luke also writes with great respect when he refers to the important position of

an apostle (which the New Testament uses as a title for others, “sent” like Paul and Barnabas, who are not always included in the Twelve).

CHAPTER 2

Pentecost

Acts 2:1 “when the day of Pentecost was fully come” The first Pentecost celebrated Moses’ return to Mt. Sinai with the children of Israel after they left Egypt. The word comes from “fifty” as the fiftieth day after Passover. The feast is also known by two other names:

- “the Feast of Weeks,” for a week of weeks, $7 \times 7 = 49$, with the the next day being Pentecost, and
- “First Fruits of Labor” as the first barley harvest came in late May or early June (Leviticus 23:16–21 and Deuteronomy 16:10).

Since the time of the Second Temple, the feast of Pentecost was one of the three main week-long feasts each year that brought Jewish pilgrims (mainly men) to the Temple from around the Roman Empire.

“the believers were all together in one place” (BSB) This translation expands the KJV, “they,” from beyond the Twelve to possibly the whole group of 120 disciples (Acts 1:15). It may be a group gathered in the same upper room in Jerusalem (Acts 1:13). Luke says they sat in a house (Acts 2:2), not the Temple. (Nor is it the “house of the Lord” as Luke consistently uses a different word for Temple.) The saints gathered possibly to pray (Acts 1:14–15), or possibly to partake of the sacrament, if it were the first day of the week—or Sunday—to worship together in a sacred space (Acts 20:7). Pentecost, like Passover fell on different days of the week.

Gift of the Holy Ghost

Ac 2:2–3 “a sound like the roar of a mighty windstorm” (ISV) In both Hebrew and Greek, one of the words used for wind is the same word for spirit, “*ruach/pneuma*,” which occasionally results in confusion, *but not here*. Luke uses “*pnoe*/breath or wind.” Some have argued that it was Satan’s attempt to stop the work as he did before Joseph’s first vision. Yet, because the Prophet Joseph asked for the same, “let thy house be filled, as with a rushing mighty wind, with thy glory” in the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple, I doubt he referred to a Satanic experience (D&C 109:37). Rather than a violent raging tempest that would have interfered with the saints’ work, it sounds more like a physical manifestation of the God’s power.

Acts 2:3 “They saw . . . fire that separated and came to rest on each of them” When the Holy Spirit came it became a baptism of fire as promised. English translations each described it differently, including, “dividing tongues as of fire” (BLB), and “cloven tongues like as of fire” (KJV). This powerful Spirit enabled the disciples to

speak with the gift of tongues. Hoyt W. Brewster Jr., explained:

Some spiritual outpourings, which evidently is manifested in a physical, visible form, is what has been described as “cloven tongues as of fire.” It occurred on the day of Pentecost, when the ancient disciples first received the personage of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:3–4). Similar manifestations are mentioned in the Book of Mormon, although the term cloven tongues is not used (Helaman 5:22–24, 43–45; 3 Ne[phi] 19:13–14). An official declaration of the First Presidency has stated that “the cloven tongues of fire were the sign of His [the Savior’s] coming.”¹⁴

A similar description is also part of the inspired dedicatory prayer for the Kirtland Temple. The Prophet asked the Lord if “cloven tongues as of fire” could bless the dedication as it did on Pentecost (D&C 109:36). That same day, the apostle Brigham Young and others spoke in tongues, and from the outside, the temple appeared to be on fire to the local neighbors.¹⁵

Gift of Tongues

Acts 2:4–13

Acts 2:4 “**They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues**” During His Last Supper, the Savior had promised His disciples a farewell gift (John 14:26; 16:7–15; also see Acts 1:8). That gift came in abundance just 51 days later day on the day of Pentecost. The “Gift of the Holy Ghost” was a greater endowment of power than the witness and fruits of the Spirit had been experienced at that time. Because the “Gift of the Holy Ghost” is confirmed by the higher priesthood, and that priesthood had been removed from the general population of Israelites living in the old world between Moses and Jesus, only a few received the gift of the Holy Ghost during that time.¹⁶ Even so, during that time, God sent His Spirit in the form of several fruits including peace, love, faith, hope, etc. (D&C 20:26).

The Prophet Joseph Smith spoke about this day of Pentecost when the early Christians experienced an outpouring of the Spirit. His scribe recorded his spontaneous sermon: “At one time God obtained a house where Peter was hed [sic] and ano[inte]d & c [sic] on the day of Pentecost.”¹⁷ This sounds as though Peter and the primitive saints may have also experienced the ordinance of anointings. Some even suggest the apostles received their endowment.¹⁸

The gift of tongues is one of many gifts of the Spirit listed in the scriptures. Each book of canonized scripture includes a similar list, though none are exhaustive (D&C 46:10–29; 1 Corinthians 12:3–8; Moroni 10:8–18; Article of Faith 7). Joseph spoke most often about the need to seek the gift of discernment.¹⁹ He also taught that when one receives the Holy Ghost one has received revelation.²⁰

The gift of tongues was first heard by Joseph Smith in the fall of 1832 when he met Brigham Young for the first time, and Brigham spontaneously spoke in tongues for his first time, followed by Joseph.²¹ The prophet encouraged the gift in 1836 at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple;²² but by June 15, 1842, he wrote an editorial for the *Times and Seasons*, warning against glossolalia: “The gift of tongues is the smallest gift perhaps of the whole, and yet it is one that is the most sought after. . . . Be not so curious about tongues, do not speak in tongues except there be an interpreter present; the ultimate design of tongues is to speak to foreigners . . .”²³

Acts 2:5 “ . . . staying in Jerusalem . . .” It sounds as if the location has changed from the “house” of Acts 2:2 to either a crowded area in Jerusalem or at the temple. The text suggests that the disciples had the Spirit and gift of tongues “rest” (JST) upon them and upon them in the house, and then they went out to preach. For five hundred years since the diaspora that followed the Babylonian captivity, Israelites (all of whom are called Jews in the New Testament) had moved into every corner of the Empire. The pilgrimage feast of Pentecost brought them to Jerusalem to worship at the temple.

“God-fearing Jews” is a term used specifically for converts who believed in the teachings of monotheism and the Law of Moses, but did not undergo circumcision as it was often a fatal operation for adult men.²⁴ These men were not considered Gentiles as they worshiped and lived most of the Laws of Moses. (The gospel was still only preached to Israelites until Acts 10.)

“Every nation under heaven” references the entire Roman Empire or civilized world. Many of these men were Jewish converts.

Acts 2:6 “a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language” (NIV) This is extraordinary, because almost everyone spoke and understood Greek in the Roman Empire. News of the linguistic phenomena was “noised abroad,” in part because it was an extraordinary event, and in part because of the extraordinary message.

Acts 2:7 “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?” (BSB) The Anchor Bible translates this question differently. Rather than the question being about Galileans, their translation speaks of the audience’s awareness that these men were “*followers of the Galilean.*” We know that Jesus had caused quite a stir six weeks earlier. The heated debates over His death and resurrection were still probably going on. We also know from Matthew 26:23, that the locals at the high priest’s palace accused Peter because his accent set him apart as a Galilean. Now that same voice was clearly speaking foreign languages and defending Jesus’ divinity with a powerful, strengthened witness.

Acts 2:8–13 “How do we each hear our own language” (BLB) Sixteen different peoples or countries are men-

tioned. By looking at a map of the Roman Empire, we find these pilgrims had traveled from Europe, Africa, Asia and the Arabian Desert. Palestine was known as the crossroads of the East. This fulfilled part of the charge to take the gospel to the world. Did the witnesses to this miracle understand the significance of how and why God interacted in this manner with his children? It gives one pause to think of how many miracles are around us.

Peter's Sermon

Acts 2:14–36

Acts 2:14 “Peter, standing up with the eleven” Peter spoke as the mouthpiece, but all eleven of the apostles were together and were speaking in tongues.

Acts 2:15 “. . . not drunk . . . it is only the third hour” The third hour was 9 a.m. (The day was measured from 6 a.m. until 6 p.m., and the night was divided into four watches.) Traditionally, they would not have eaten their first meal of the day by the third hour, let alone have become drunk. Peter changed the tables and asked if they were crazy.

Acts 2:16–20 “spoken by the prophet Joel . . . I will pour out my Spirit on all people” Peter quoted Joel 2:28–31 as being fulfilled. Though Moroni told Joseph Smith four times that it still was “not yet fulfilled” (JS—H 1:41). However, scripture can be fulfilled in many ways and times. Early Christians saw themselves living in the “last days” (Acts 2:17) and expected the end because Jesus had instructed them to watch until the end (Matthew 24:14; 28:19–20; Luke 21:32). The apostles could not meet their end (death) until the gospel was witnessed to their world. Paul taught in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3, Hebrews 9:26–28, and Acts 20:29 that there would be a falling away and an apostasy as did Peter in 2 Peter 3:3–9. After Peter’s death came the anti-Christ of 1 John 2:18.

“signs and wonders” Luke repeats this phrase from Joel 2:30 nine times between Acts 2–15, but not again.

“The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood” (NIV) Peter finished quoting Joel 2:31 that prophesies of the judgment day (also see D&C 29:14; 34:9; 45:42; 88:87; Revelation 6:12).

Acts 2:22–24 “Jesus of Nazareth . . . ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified . . . God hath raised up” Peter bore a great testimony of the premortal existence.

“foreknowledge” other translations read: *definite plan* (RSV), *set purpose* (NIV), *predetermined plan* (NAS).

“prison” is changed in the JST from, “*hell*.” When did Joseph make this change? Did he know about Spirit Prison in 1831? It appears that Peter was quoting from the LXX (Septuagint or Greek translation of the Old Testament) of Psalms 16, from memory (or inspiration) that foreshadowed the resurrection.

Peter's sermon in Jerusalem. Painting by Benjamin West via Wikimedia Commons.



Acts 2:25–28 “. . . David says . . . I saw the Lord always before me . . . dwell in hope . . . fill me with joy” (BSB) After quoting Joel, Peter quoted the beloved King David’s Psalms 16:8–11. It references God restoring one’s spirit from hell (which the JST changes to “prison” in 2:27), and one’s body to hope. Specifically, the Psalms pointed out that “Your Holy One” who will not “see decay” (2:27).

Acts 2:29–30 “Brothers and sisters” (CSB) the KJV reads “Men and brethren,” and NIV “Fellow Israelites.” Many words in the Bible can be read as gender-specific or more generally for humanity. Titles such as “brethren,” often refer to both genders of believers. In Joseph Smith’s writings, he specifically pointed out “when we say brethren we mean those who have continued faithful in Christ: men, women, and children.”²⁵

“the patriarch David . . . sepulchre is with us” Peter referred to David’s tomb to prove that the scriptures were not fulfilled in his life. At the time of Jesus, there was a great interest in tombs of Old Testament kings and prophets.²⁶ Peter referred to David as both a patriarch and prophet. These are loose titles not applied to David in the Old Testament, but after a millennium of honoring him, have been added in the New Testament to mean he was a noble ancestor who spoke prophetically and testified of the coming Messiah/Christ (i.e. Psalms 16 and 132).

Acts 2:32 “of this we are all witnesses” (AB) In Greek “witness” is actually, “*eye witness*.” But the commission of the Twelve includes more than that. Peter and the other apostles standing there, witnessed Jesus “alive” (Acts 1:3), but 500 others did too. The things that set the Twelve apart were that Jesus called them to testify of the experience and be a witness of Him by their lives. They were now carrying out Jesus’ assignment from Acts 1:8, “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem” (NIV).

Acts 2:33 “received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father” (BLB) The disciples have received the great promise of the Spirit that cleanses, enlightens, heals, and gives one a new tongue. The entire crowd could now become witnesses of the works of the Spirit in the lives of the disciples.

Acts 2:34–35 “THE LORD JEHOVAH said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand’” (Aramaic Bible) Peter quoted Psalm 110, but explained that it did not refer to David, because his bones were still in the tomb, rather it was Messianic.²⁷ Peter heard Jesus ask the same question about this Psalm (Matthew 22:41–46). Jesus silenced His Pharisaic questioners, but Peter, now explained the passage. Jesus is the One who is exalted at the right hand of God.

Three Thousand Believe

Acts 2:37–41

Acts 2:37–38 “They were cut to the heart . . . What shall we do?” The crowd of the international Jewish pilgrims gathered for the Feast also felt the Spirit and wanted to follow. Luke emphasizes their belief, “what shall we

DO?” Meaning what is next, how do we join you?

Acts 2:38–39 “Repent and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness” Repentance is more than stopping bad behaviors; it is turning towards Jesus for His Redeeming forgiveness and sanctification. That returning requires a change of one’s heart, mind, and behaviors. The Spirit then becomes the cleansing agent to enable the Savior’s atonement to work in one’s soul. Peter’s message extends to believers who need continued sanctification as we grow line upon line, precept upon precept (2 Nephi 28:30). We start with repentance and then keep coming back to it over and over again. President Russel M. Nelson taught, “Nothing is more liberating, more ennobling, or more crucial to our individual progression than is a regular, daily focus on repentance. Repentance is not an event; it is a process.”²⁸

Acts 2:40 “Be saved from this corrupt generation.” (BSB). I prefer this translation because it continues to keep God as the source of our salvation. Most others share the KJV language, “Save yourself,” which encourages active individual accountability for our actions and salvation. Yet, I never want to lose sight of the source of that salvation, “For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23). Peter’s counsel was repeated in a revelation through Joseph Smith to our generation (D&C 36:6). “Untoward” means crooked, perverse, or wicked.

Acts 2:41 “They that gladly received his word were baptized . . . three thousand souls” It makes sense that these converts had already been followers of, or at least interested in, Jesus prior to hearing Peter. In either case, the Spirit’s witness had a powerful impact.

The Fellowship of Believers

Acts 2:42–43 “They devoted themselves to . . .” (BSB) The devoted disciples maintained a fourfold focus:

1. Teaching “apostles’ doctrines” (which we trust were the Lord’s teachings initiated through Jesus or the Spirit)
2. “Fellowship” meaning “contributory help, participation, sharing in, or spiritual fellowship.”
3. “Breaking of bread” a phrase used for the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, as well as a meal together.
4. “In prayers” The NT examples of prayers are not recited, but spoken spontaneously from the heart.

This faith-filled lifestyle enabled manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit to bless the saints. It appears they prayed for the gifts of the Spirit as they are received “many wonders and signs.”

Acts 2:44–45 “all that believed were together, and had all things common” The saints in Jerusalem lived the Law of Consecration, meaning they all worked and shared what they had under the direction of the church.



After they “sold their possessions and goods,” everyone’s needs were met. “Parted them” is also translated, “distributed/sharing/gave.” The Lord restored the same law in Kirtland Ohio in 1831 (D&C 42; 105:29). We too must live this law to fulfill temple covenants. Zion is built on this principle (Moses 7:18).

Acts 2:46–47 “from house to house” The early saints met for worship and possibly for meals in members’ homes. They were known as “house churches.”²⁹ The key to their harmony was their “singleness of heart.” The apostles may also have been having the sacrament daily in different houses, but more likely they “shared their food” (JB), or “ate together” (NIV). The temple was a central part of their worship as is described next.

CHAPTER 3

Peter and John Go to the Temple at the Hour of Prayer

Acts 3:1

Acts 3:1 “. . . into the temple at the hour of prayer” The hour of prayer was 3:00 pm each day.³⁰ This was the same hour as the evening sacrifice and second lighting of the incense.³¹ The time of incense or hour of prayer developed from Exodus 30:7–8 when God instructed Aaron to burn incense “every morning . . . and at even . . . a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations.”³² The incense symbolized Israel’s continual prayers. This time became the most reverent hour at the temple each day.

The hour of prayer began once the priest lit the incense. The rising smoke from the sanctuary signaled the priests to line up in front of the Holy Place to recite or sing the priestly prayer from Numbers 6. As the priests gathered in a line, Jewish worshipers in the Court of the Women reverently bowed down and spread their hands on the ground in silent prayer (Numbers 24:26). Edersheim describes the special priestly prayer:

Priests . . . lifted their hands above their heads, spreading and joining their fingers in a peculiar mystical manner. . . [A] priest repeated in audible voice, followed by the others, the blessing from Numbers 6:24–26 “Jehovah bless thee, and keep thee; Jehovah make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: Jehovah lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.” To this the people responded, “Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.”³³

Luke includes Peter’s worship at the temple to show his readers that the temple was central to the apostles’ worship, prayer, miracles, and teachings.

Peter Heals Lame Man

Acts 3:2–10

Acts 3:2 “a man lame from birth . . . laid daily at the gate of the temple . . . to ask alms” (ESV) Having just described the earliest saints sharing all they had with each other, Luke now adds the contrasts of a crippled beggar relying on the mercy of temple worshipers. Most ancient Jews misunderstood birth defects and blamed them on sin (John 9:2; Leviticus 21:21, 17–23).³⁴ In addition to the challenges of living with disabilities in the ancient world, this cultural baggage added emotional and spiritual scars on top of their physical challenges.

Acts 3:3–5 “Peter and John about to go into the temple . . . said, Look on us” It sounds as if the lame man requested money from everyone he could. It appears that he did not know enough about faith or the apostolic missionary companionship to ask for healing. However, Acts 4:22 and 3:10 lets us know he was over forty years

old, and came regularly enough that people knew him. If that were the case, I presume he had heard about Jesus of Nazareth and possibly even seen Him. Nevertheless, the Spirit inspired Peter to heal this man, because God wanted him to witness of His power and to open up a wonderful missionary opportunity.

Acts 3:6 “Silver and gold have I none; but . . . In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise . . .” Again, Peter emphasized that the power of healing comes from the Savior. Through the name of Jesus, he was not the source of power or running the show but Jesus was. When we honor our Lord and exert our faith, His name has power. Peter exemplified President Russel M. Nelson’s counsel to “minister in His name, with His power and authority, and with His loving-kindness.”³⁵

Acts 3:7 “he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up” The right hand was the clean hand and only used to perform clean functions. Everywhere in holy writ, the right hand is the covenant hand.

Acts 3:8–10 “he entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God” The joyful entrance attracted plenty of attention and the onlookers were “filled with wonder and amazement.” The Court of the Gentiles covered about 35 acres, and with all the Pentecost pilgrims much of that space would have been filled with people. Peter and John went straight into the more sacred space in the Court of the Women where a crowd gathered around them.

Peter Preaches to Onlookers at the Temple

Acts 3:11–26

Acts 3:11 “the man was hanging on . . . all the people, completely astounded, ran together to . . . Solomon’s Portico” The happy healed man “clung to Peter” (BSB) as they moved into the area known as “Solomon’s porch.” It was a covered area with four rows of marble columns on the eastern side of the Court of the Women, where Solomon’s palace stables once stood.

Acts 3:12–16 “Why are you surprised by this? . . . as if by our own power . . . through faith in His name hath made this man strong” Peter made completely sure that everyone understood—he did not heal the lame man—the healing power was God’s power administered through faith on Jesus’ name. Luke uses unique titles for Jesus as the “Just” or “Righteous One” (Acts 3:14, NIV), and “Prince of life.”

Acts 3:17 “Fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance as did your leaders . . .” (NIV) Peter referred to his audience in a friendly manner and opened the way for those who killed Jesus to repent. The New Testament has several references to forgiving them (Acts 13:27; Luke 23:34; 1 Corinthians 2:8).

Acts 3:18 “God fulfilled . . . all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. Repent, then, and turn

to God” The early Christians found signs of Jesus foreshadowed all over the Old Testament (i.e. 1 Corinthians 10:1–6). The typology was later communicated in the artwork in their churches by placing Old Testament stories on top of New Testament stories of Jesus (i.e. Noah’s ark paired with Jesus’ baptism, Adam and Eve’s fall with the Good Samaritan,³⁶ etc.).

Acts 3:19–20 “Repent, then, and turn to God . . . that times of refreshing may come” (NIV) This is the only mention of “refreshing” in the entire New Testament. It is also translated as “the times of rest” (ABPE), and “when the Lord will give you fresh strength” (CEV). It is similar to the idea mentioned in Matthew 19:28, “. . . the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory” (also see the 10th Article of Faith). Peter had great hope that the Jews would turn around, repent of their sins, and receive Jesus as their Messiah. He heard Jesus testify that His gospel must be preached to all the world before the Messianic age (Matthew 24:14; Acts 1:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7). And Peter’s firsthand experience with repentance must have given him even greater hope and appreciation of the gift. Repentance is the way God established for Jesus to blot or wipe away our sins. Jesus was “appointed” for that very purpose (NIB, RSV, NEB, rather than KJV “preached” Acts 3:20).

Acts 3:21 “Heaven must take Him in until . . . the restoration of all things” (BSB) or a “restitution of all things” (KJV) or “the time comes for God to restore everything” (NIV). Early Christians found the timing of the Lord’s Second Coming especially confusing. In hindsight we realize “a restoration of all things” was needed because an apostacy occurred first (Acts 20:29; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 4:1; etc.). We see a fulfillment of this prophesy from Peter in the spring of 1820, when God and His Son came down from heaven, called a young prophet to restore all things, and restored revelation and the nature of the Godhead.

“since the world began” Wilford Griggs pointed out that “this phrase could just as well have been translated ‘from eternity.’ Should we understand the text to mean that holy prophets should speak only those things that they learned ‘from eternity,’ or in heavenly councils?”³⁷

Acts 3:22–23 “A prophet like unto [Moses] . . . every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed” The parallels between Moses’ and Jesus’ lives are numerous. Like Moses, Jesus also taught a new-higher law (Matthew 5–7), fed the masses (Matthew 14:21; 15:38), offered living water (John 4:14), and led a way for all God’s children to enter the Promised Lands—Moses had led them into Israel, but Jesus had led them to kingdoms of glory with immortality and potentially Eternal Life (John 14:6, 2).³⁸

These two verses have special significance to our dispensation. On September 21, 1823, when the angel Moroni visited Joseph Smith, he quoted these two verses precisely as they are here. Moroni explained, “That prophet was Christ; but the day had not yet come when ‘they who would not hear his voice should be cut off from among the people,’ but soon would come” (JS—H 1:40). That day is sooner, as President Nelson warned, **“Time is running**

out.³⁹ The assignment to prepare the world for that day is shared by latter-day saints.

Acts 3:24 “All the prophets . . . have foretold these days” Both the Jews and early saints searched their scriptures to find prophecies of their Messiah.⁴⁰ The Pharisees and many other Jews believed in a resurrection. Jewish rabbinical writings affirm that “all of the prophets prophesied only concerning the days of the Messiah.”⁴¹

Acts 3:25 “Ye are the children of the prophets and of the covenant” Jesus explained who this meant when he visited the Nephites. The covenant seed is not necessarily through birth lineage. It includes those who believe God, live His commandments, and spread His gospel blessings (3 Nephi 20:25–27). In the ancient world and now, those who follow in the footsteps of the prophets and live as they lived are the children of the prophets (D&C 84:33–34).

Acts 3:26 “God, having raised up his Son Jesus . . .” The KJV is unique in this translation. Most English translations change “Son” to “servant.” (The Greek word is used ten times in the New Testament. In the KJV, eight of those are translated “servant.”) When servant has a capital “S” it only points to Jesus, but lower case broadens the meaning to include God’s prophets and even disciples. Jesus is our great exemplar as the Servant of servants, and those who follow Him join in servitude.

CHAPTER 4

Peter and John Testify to the Sanhedrin

Acts 4:1–21

Acts 4:1 “as they spake . . . the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came” The exuberance of the healed man and the large crowd of 5,000 men (verse 4) that gathered to hear Peter preach after the miracle, must have created enough of a stir to draw the attention of the temple police. The temple guard and police were Levites.⁴² Luke also mentions that priests (or descendants of Aaron), a Captain of the Temple (usually a close friend and family member of the reigning high priest), and Sadducees (politically tied to the temple, but not necessarily priesthood holders), all came out in force to check out the situation. These men would have all been part of, or at least aware of, Jesus’ trial and concerned about more problems as a result.

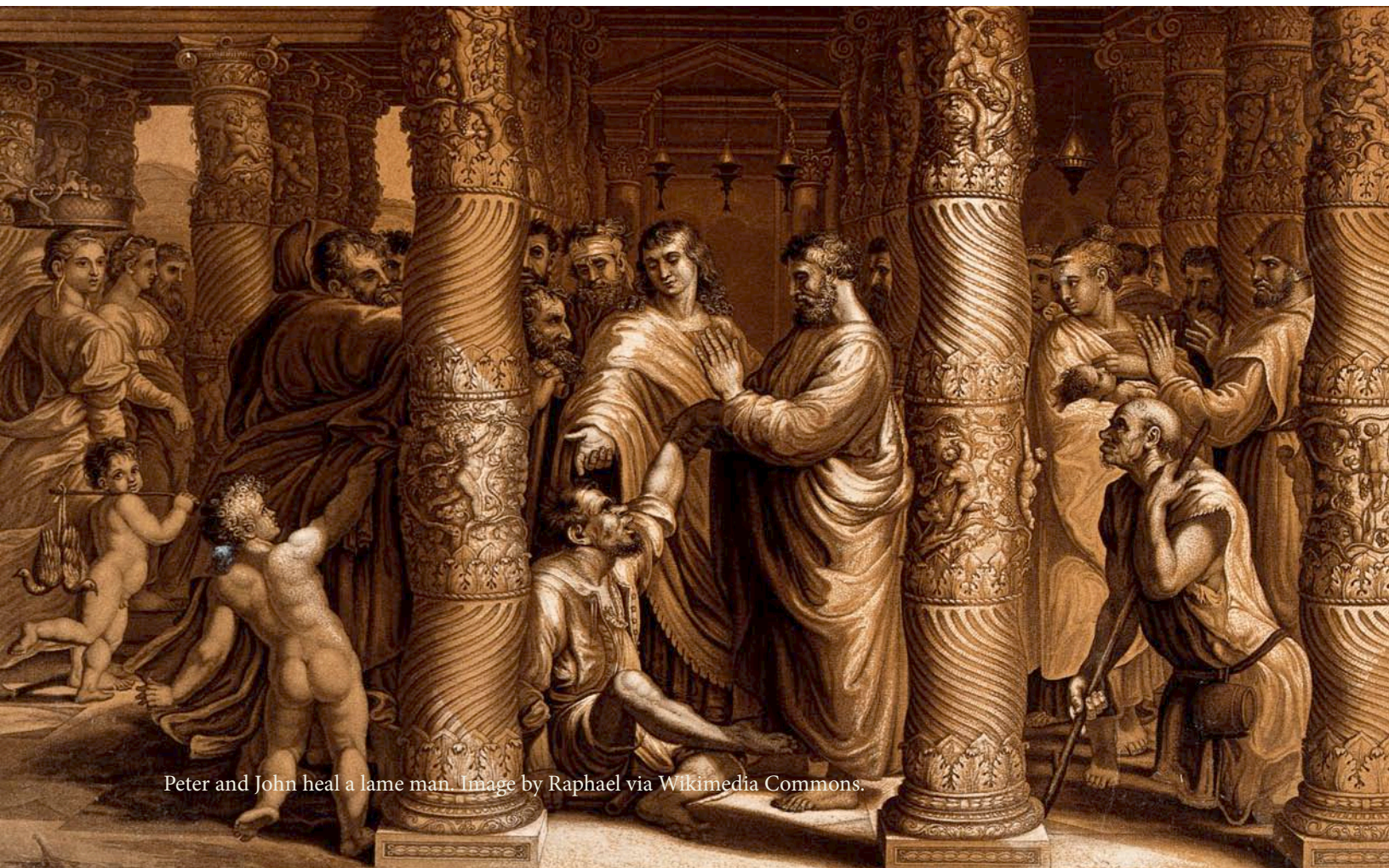
Acts 4:2 “Being grieved that they taught . . . Jesus” It is interesting that the Sadducees are mentioned among those angry about the evangelizing of Peter and John because they did not believe in the resurrection—which is exactly what Peter preached. In addition to the Levitical Temple police who watched over the sacred spaces, Roman soldiers also kept law and order in the Court of the Gentiles and throughout Jerusalem.

Acts 4:3 “they seized them and took them into custody” Peter, John and possibly the healed man (see verse 14) were arrested and thrown into a prison for the night. What do you think Peter and John taught the healed man that night in prison? The reference to “evening” suggests that Peter preached for at least an hour, if not two.

Acts 4:4 “many of them which heard the word believed . . . about five thousand” The number 5,000 may be the number who crowded into the Court of the Women to hear Peter, or the total number of Christians (or followers of “The Way” or “Sect of the Nazarene”).

Some scholars question whether these remarkable numbers are exaggerated, because Paul reports that “the Jews . . . persist in their unbelief” (Romans 11:23). Yet, Paul did not convert and begin his preaching until after the first fruits were harvested or baptized. The numbers are consistent with the size of crowds that followed Jesus.

Acts 4:5 “On the morrow . . .” It sounds like the leaders were worried about what had happened and pulled together a portion of the Sanhedrin for Peter and John’s trial. A similar group is listed as Jesus’ accusers (elders, scribes,⁴³ see Matthew 26:3). The Sanhedrin met within the precincts of the temple in a stone chamber on the south wall of the Priest’s Court.



Peter and John heal a lame man. Image by Raphael via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 4:6 “the high priest . . . and kindred of the high priest were gathered” Annas had reigned as the High Priest from AD 6–14. From AD 18–37, his son in law, Caiaphas served, followed by Annas’ son, John in AD 37. (Five of Annas’ sons acted as the high priest.) Alexander’s position is unknown to modern readers.

Acts 4:7 “By what power . . . what name?” Nearly the same question had been asked of Jesus by the same group just seven weeks earlier (Matthew 21:23). Latter-day saints also answer that question each week as they partake of the sacrament and renew their baptismal covenant.

Acts 4:8–10 “Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said . . . it is by the name of Jesus” Peter had the opportunity to testify of Jesus the Christ in front of many of those who had plotted to kill Jesus just weeks before. His testimony now carried a stronger power not only from His experiences and knowledge, but also with the power of God’s Spirit.

Acts 4:11 “the stone you builders rejected” (NIV) Peter quoted Psalm 118:22. This is the most frequently mentioned Psalm in the New Testament. Corner stones were usually the foundation and principal corner of a building. Pilgrims sang this as they walked up the mountain to Jerusalem. It applies to the Messiah.

Acts 4:12 “Neither is there salvation in any other . . . name” Again Peter emphasized the name of Jesus as the key word given by heaven for salvation. God bound our universe together by an oath from the foundation of the world. The ancient rabbis who wrote the Hekhalot literature recorded: “the name through which the heaven and the earth were created, and all the orders of creation of the world . . . were sealed by it.”⁴⁴

Acts 4:13 “when they saw the boldness of Peter and John” The leaders knew these men had been Jesus’ disciples and were amazed by the strength of their convictions knowing that they were “unlearned in the Law and laymen” (AB). This does not mean illiterate, as most Jewish boys learned to read and write starting at age five.⁴⁵

Acts 4:14–18 “What shall we do to these men? . . . let us straitly threaten them . . .” The Council or Sanhedrin’s decision was to threaten Peter and John to stop talking about Jesus. But that did not go over very well with bold Peter and John.

Acts 4:19–20 “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him?” (NIV) Peter no longer had any fears of the Sanhedrin’s position or threatenings. His intimidation at Passover is completely gone by Pentecost. All disciples need to hearken more to God than to cultural norms or what is politically correct. We also need to examine the way we think, act, speak, and keep the Sabbath, to make sure it is in keeping with God’s will not a social parodical. (Luke includes Peter repeating the same message in a different setting Acts 5:29.)

Acts 4:21–22 “for many glorified God for that which was done” (JST) Just as with the trial for the Lord, the leaders “could not decide how to punish” Peter and John because of the miraculous healing. Luke includes many parallels between Jesus and the apostle’s healings to demonstrate that they were carrying on the same work.

Believers Pray for Wonders and Receive an Earthquake

Acts 4:23–31

Acts 4:23–24 “they lifted up their voice to God with one accord” The disciples prayed or sang with the Holy Spirit. They were filled with gratitude—rather than complain about the Sanhedrin and unfair imprisonment. Their grateful attitude decreased the pain of the night’s punishment. Their prayer confirmed their belief and eternal perspective that all will be well because Jehovah their Creator, is Jesus.

Acts 4:25–26 “Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?” David’s royal Psalm 2 (royal because it was used at Solomon’s coronation) was quoted in part. This Psalm as well as many Old Testament scriptures have at least a dual meaning. This one applies to Peter and John’s experience, to Jesus’ trial and now. (Remember the word Christ/Messiah, from verse 26, means “anointed one,” and thus can be applied to all who have been anointed to serve God.)

Acts 4:27–30 “grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word” In addition to asking for confidence to declare God’s word, they also prayed for other gifts of the Spirit including miracles and wonders. Later Paul (and Joseph Smith and Mormon) directed the saints to seek the best gifts of the Spirit, “with all the energy of heart” (Moroni 7:48).

Acts 4:31 “The meeting place shook. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (CEV) Whether the room shook from an earthquake or local jolt, the saints saw it as a sign of God’s power. The miracle was in the timing. There were many earthquakes in that region, but this followed a prayer asking for signs and wonders and was accompanied by the Spirit of God. We know that God uses natural laws to accomplish all his great works. The miracle was in the timing of the shaking (just like Alma’s and Paul’s earthquakes).

Second Reference to Living in Financial Unity

Acts 4:32–37

Acts 4:32–33 “the believers were one in heart and soul . . . they shared everything” (ISV) Luke repeats the wonderful unity they shared as they lived the Law of Consecration and adds that their financial generosity empowered them to preach and receive God’s grace. This higher law requires hard work and supreme economic selflessness. It is the consummation of the laws of obedience, sacrifice, and of loving God and our neighbor.⁴⁶ The challenges of living the laws of chastity and sobriety fade, but the challenge of being generous remains. The bulk of the Old Testament is filled with economic obligations. The New Testament has stories such as the rich young

man who could not leave his wealth to follow Jesus (Mk 10:21). President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “The law of consecration [was] not done away with and is still in effect.”⁴⁷ In an earlier General Conference Mark E. Peterson said: “The Law of Consecration is the most important, specific and sacred law.”⁴⁸

Acts 4:35–37 “those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money . . . [to] the apostles” The church is still small enough in Acts that the Twelve are taking care of all financial responsibilities of the church. The Levite, Joseph or Barnabas, is the example of a generous homeowner who is singled out because of the important role he will play as an apostle later in Acts.

CHAPTER 5

Ananias and Sapphira

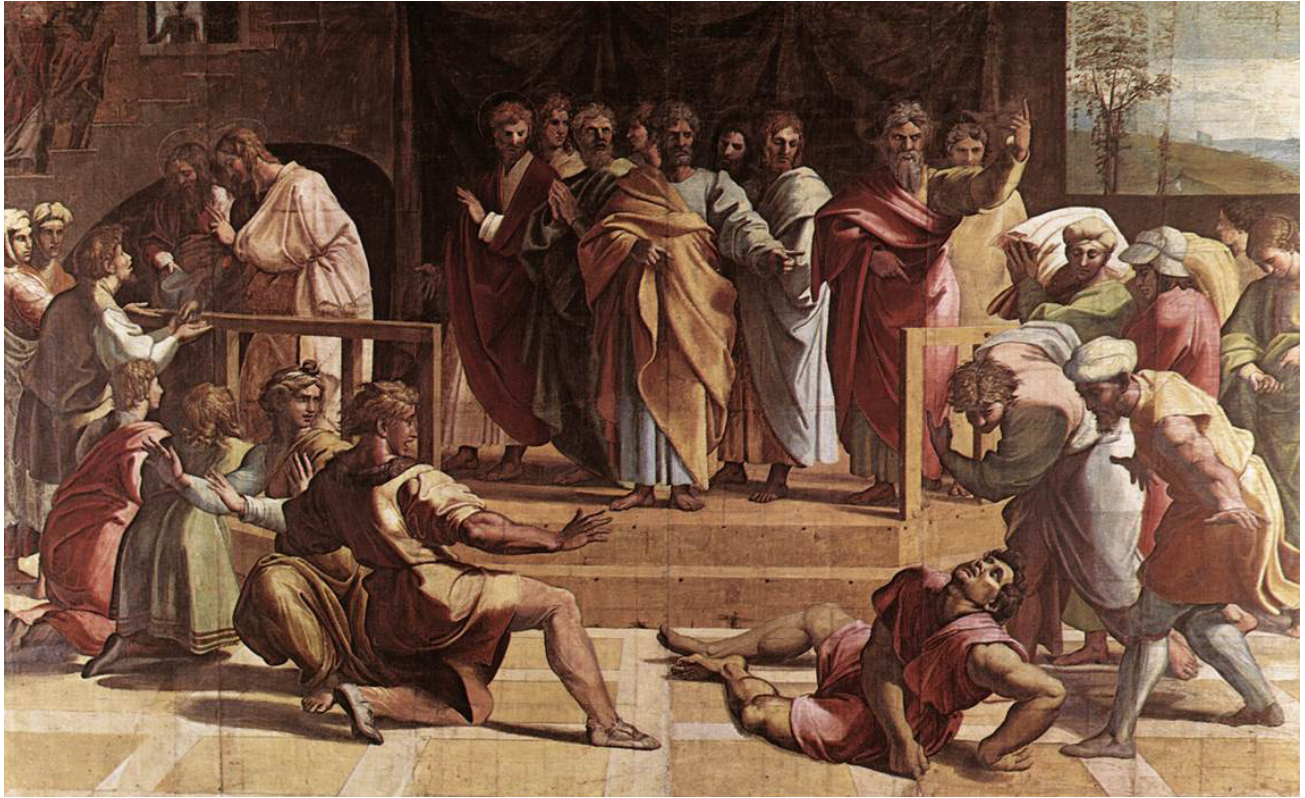
Acts 5:1–11

Acts 5:1–2 “. . . sold a piece of property. With his wife’s full knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds”

In contrast to Barnabas the Cyprus Levite’s generous example, we now have the premediated greed of Ananias and Sapphira (both commonly used names at the time). Even though Sapphira did not sell the property, because she knew about it and later lied, she is equally responsible (NIV, RSV, NEB). To understand the depth of this problem, it helps to realize that when we live the law of consecration, we do not claim anything as our own. All is God’s and therefore, keeping back some is equated to stealing from God as well as breaking a very serious covenant. The story echoes Achan and his family who were likewise unfaithful to “devoted things” and were killed (Joshua 7:1, BSB).

Acts 5:3–4 “Peter said, ‘Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit . . .?’” The selfish nature of Ananias initiated the problem, but his sin was far greater. By lying under a covenant, he has lied to God. Lying after one promises to be honest multiples one’s sin. Our actions are judged on a different level after making sacred promises and knowing what we know. “For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation” (D&C 82:3). Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught, “unrepentant liars will be damned.”⁴⁹ Yet, when Ananias “lied to the Holy Spirit,” it was not the same as the unpardonable sin of perdition, as outlined in Matthew 12:31–32.⁵⁰

Acts 5:5–6 “When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all . . .” This immediate death did not leave Ananias time for any repentance. Luke recorded this story as a warning to all who have made covenants and receive the Gift of the Holy Ghost. He also used the story to show “how God works through the apostles, and especially through Peter.”⁵¹ The text says, Ananias was immediately carried out to be buried. This was a common practice so one could be in the tomb before one’s body began to decompose.



The Death of Ananias by Raphael, 1515. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 5:7–10 “... his wife came in . . . ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘that is the price’ . . .” (NIV) Just three hours later, Peter questioned Sapphira about the sale price, and she too answered “Yes.” The Bible records that the early saints replied, “yes” or “no,” for questions about their covenants. In this case though, it was a false answer. Luke included the story to teach the need for covenants to have no shades of grey or doubt.

Acts 5:11 “Great fear seized the whole church” (NIV) Luke’s story telling added to the impact of the story. It shocks us into the seriousness of covenant making, the seriousness of sin, and seriousness of Peter’s prophetic leadership. This is the first time in the New Testament that the word “church” is used. As the chief apostle, Peter eradicated the impurity in the church by receiving the gift of discernment. But it was God’s judgment that came upon the couple and shortened their lives.

Apostolic Healings

Acts 5:12–16

Acts 5:12 “The apostles performed many signs and wonders” (BSB) The apostles and disciples continued to meet in the temple regularly—even in Solomon’s Porch where Jesus had taught and Peter had been arrested (John 10:23; Acts 3:11). The stern threatening from the Sanhedrin did not slow them down especially with the apostles performing healings and other miracles.

Acts 5:13 “the rulers durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them” (JST) The JST change of “rest” to “rulers,” helps us to understand this verse. It clarifies that there are two groups of people: the Jewish leaders who worked in opposition to the apostles, and “the people [who] magnified them.” Unfortunately, the leaders kept their distance for only a short time, and then they were back causing problems by 5:18.

Acts 5:14–16 “more and more men and women believed” (NIV) Their immediate missionary success was phenomenal. The apostles continued to do Jesus’ work as they followed the same pattern that Jesus did—healing and preaching. God’s power is manifest through His servants.

“people brought the sick into the streets . . . so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some” (NIV) These Jews’ who sought healing from Peter exerted their faith and were richly rewarded. Peter had already taught that he was not the source of healing, but it was all through God’s great power. There was a similar outpouring of healing on two specific days when the resurrected Jesus visited the Nephites (3 Nephi 17:7; 26:15), and when the Prophet Joseph Smith healed hundreds of the saints who were encamped as refugees in tents and old army barracks on either side of the Mississippi River, suffering from malaria on July 22, 1839.⁵²

Second Imprisonment Apostles Imprisoned

Acts 5:17–28

Acts 5:17–18 “The high priest and all his associates, . . . were filled with jealousy” or “indignation” (NIV, KJV). Their envy led them to imprison all of the apostles this time. The translations of “common prison” or “public jail” is used most often in English and avoids too precise a definition.

Acts 5:19–20 “an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out” (NIV) An angelic release is all the more ironic as the Sadducees (5:17) did not believe in angels. The angels instructed the apostles to return to the temple court yards preach “about this new life” (NIV). Undaunted, the apostles returned to the courtyards around the temple to preach—the very place of their two previous arrests. These Galilean apostles had no respect or fear of the Jewish leaders.

Acts 5:21–23 “the officers came, and found them not in the prison” The high priest had gathered the Sanhedrin to discuss the case of the apostles’ preaching, but their prisoners were nowhere to be seen. The high priest and leaders “doubted” or were “perplexed,” “wondered,” “baffled,” or “puzzled” (KJV, BSB, NIV, HCSB, NET). Their anger probably blinded them from believing.

Acts 5:25–26 “Look! the men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts, teaching” (NIV) The rumor or report that the apostles were preaching again in the temple was confirmed by a very important figure in the Sanhedrin, the captain of the officers (one of the chief priests, who was over the temple police or Levites). Just as

with the arrest of Jesus (Luke 22:6) the officers took care not to arouse the crowd who honored the apostles. We get a better feel for how deeply the apostles were honored by the locals from the next phrase. The guards took care because they “feared lest they should have been stoned” by the people for taking the apostles.

Acts 5:27–28 “Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name?” The Lord’s name had powerful implications. This second attempt of the Sanhedrin to silence the Apostles was in vain.

Peter’s Defense

Acts 5:29–32

Acts 5:29 “We ought to obey God rather than men” Peter gave the same answer that he did at his first hearing (4:19). Luke mentions that “the other apostles” joined Peter in the defense. If modern disciples can internalize the apostles’ rebuttal, it can become a source of strength to refute the world’s constant volley of compromises to faith and obedience. From the ancient commands of Sabbath and Chastity to modern prophets’ direction on limiting social media and diet, Christians can replay, “we ought to obey God rather than man.”

Acts 5:30–32 “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew” Peter directly attacked the high priest and Sanhedrin for their part in condemning and killing Jesus. They must have felt quite defensive. But there was no question in Peter’s mind who was to blame for Jesus’ death. Peter referred to Jesus’ death as “hanging on a tree.” The Law of Moses includes, “cursed is a man who hanged on a tree” (Deuteronomy 21:22–23). Yet, hearing that Jesus was exalted to the “right hand” position to God must have been very offensive to the Sanhedrin (Perhaps there was one with a soft heart, like “Alma,” in the group of wicked). The first Adam ate from the forbidden tree, now the second Adam hung on a tree to free us from sin.

Acts 5:32 “We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit” Peter testified powerfully with wonderful promises of the Spirit’s inner witness. He also taught that God will give His Spirit to all whom “obey him.” The Spirit acted as a second witness to the Apostles’ testament that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

Gamaliel’s Advice

Acts 5:33–42

Acts 5:33 “Cut to the heart” is also translated, “enraged” (RSV) or “furious: (NIV) or “infuriated” (JB). Some of the leaders became so angry that they wanted to kill the apostles.

Acts 5:34 “Gamaliel, a doctor of the law” The hero of the hour was Gamaliel (Saul’s previous teacher, Acts 22:3). Gamaliel was a Pharisee, a distinguished member of the Sanhedrin, and grandson of the famous rabbi Hillel. Gamaliel had a tradition of being tolerant, kindhearted, and of emphasizing the humanistic considerations of the law (including supporting the humane treatment of women in divorce laws, relaxing the demands of the

Sabbath, etc.). His voice was also the first time a Pharisee has been mentioned in Acts. Since the Lord's death, no Pharisees have been included in the groups opposing the followers of Jesus. Here it is just the opposite— a Pharisee advocated tolerance for them. This may have been a Sadducee-versus-Pharisee battle as well.

Acts 5:35–39 “if their purpose or endeavor is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop them” Luke recorded Gamaliel's advice (which also sounds like an old Greek proverb from Euripedes). Some of the details have been garbled, nevertheless Theudas persuaded a large crowd to follow him to the Jordan promising them that he would divide the waters, but he was killed and his supporters dispersed.⁵³ Judas protested the census of Quirinius (Luke 2) and became the father of Zealots (anti-Roman rule in Palestine).⁵⁴

Acts 5:40 “They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them” Gamaliel's advice carried the day. But his cautionary tone did not stop the angry leaders from having the apostles scourged, just as Pilate had ordered for Jesus a few months earlier (Luke 23:16-22; John 19:1)

Acts 5:41–42 “they departed . . . rejoicing . . . to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple . . . ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” The apostles' ability to see their pain in an eternal perspective allowed them to rejoice through their sufferings. Fortunately, the tacit Sanhedrin ignored their continual efforts to carry out Jesus' commission to preach the Good News. And they felt the best spot to do that was in the Temple.

Header Image: Image of Pentecost by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay.

ENDNOTES

1. Paul J. Achtemeier, *Harper Collins' Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1996), "Luke," 629. Joseph A. Fitzmyer *The Anchor Bible: The Acts of the Apostles* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1998), 49–50. The Church Fathers included Irenaeus of Lyons France, Clement of Alexandria, Origen of Alexandria, and Tertullian of Carthage.
2. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Ensign*, January 2003. First given at a Church Educational System conference at Brigham Young University on 8 August 2000.
3. Joseph A. Fitzmyer *The Anchor Bible: The Acts of the Apostles* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1998).
4. Achtemeier, *Harpers Dictionary*, 583, and Fitzmyer, Luke, 36; John L. Hilton unpublished Stylometry studies.
5. Luke's knowledge of Palestinian geography and customs are written as a foreigner. He makes minor mistakes when describing some traditions or temple customs—like, confusing Mary's required 40-day purification offering at the temple (Leviticus 12:2–6) and presenting the first born (Exodus 13:2; Numbers 18:15) in Luke 2:22–24.
6. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX, The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 38–39.
7. Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion* II. 51.11. He claims that both Mark and Luke were members of the Seventy. https://archive.org/stream/EpiphaniusPanarionBksIIIIII/Epiphanius%20-%20_Panarion_%20-%20Bks%20II%20%26%20III%20-%20I_djvu.txt. (Site accessed 6-17-19.)
8. Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1983), 10. The religions in the Roman Empire included: Traditional pagan, Mystery religions, Stoicism, Epicureanism, Judaism, and Judaic sympathizers.
9. Hugh Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 10–167.
10. David Bednar, General Conference, April 2016.
11. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1844. Reprint 1980), 5:555. "The Holy Ghost is God's messenger to administer in all those priesthoods (HC, 5: 555; a reciprocal relationship between the workings of the Spirit and Priesthood is also found in: 1.85; 3.384; 4.610; 5.30–31; 6.74). Also see Andrew Ehat and Lyndon Cook, eds, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990), 327–336.
12. Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, p. 273; see John 14:26; 16:7–15
13. Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services, as They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, reprint, 1976, 1881), 132, 137.
14. Hoyt W. Brewster Jr., *Doctrine and Covenants Encyclopedia* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 2012). 89.
15. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:428 "President Brigham Young gave a short address in tongues, and David W. Patten interpreted, and gave a short exhortation in tongues himself, after which I blessed the congregation in the name of the Lord, and the assembly dispersed a little past four o'clock, having manifested the most quiet demeanor during the whole exercise. . . . George A. Smith arose and began to prophesy, when a noise was heard like the sound of a rushing mighty wind, which filled the Temple, and all the congregation simultaneously arose, being moved upon by an invisible power; many began to speak in tongues and prophesy; others saw glorious visions; and I beheld the Temple was filled

with angels, which fact I declared to the congregation. The people of the neighborhood came running together (hearing an unusual sound within, and seeing a bright light like a pillar of fire resting upon the Temple), and were astonished at what was taking place.”

16. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that all prophets had the higher priesthood and their endowment. We also see examples of the witness and fruits and gifts of the Spirit scattered throughout the Old Testament and New Testament Gospels, even without the higher priesthood confirming the gift on most people.
17. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph*, 285. Joseph’s sermon was given years after he administered the first washings and anointings in January 1836.
18. *Temples in the Ancient World*, 56–57.
19. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph*, 21. “There was no point upon which the Prophet Joseph dwelt more than the discerning of Spirits.”
20. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6.58.
21. Dahl and Cannon, *Encyclopedia of Smith*, “Tongues, Gift of,” 669–670. “Brothers Brigham and Joseph Young and myself [Heber C. Kimball] went to Kirtland, Ohio. We saw Brother Joseph Smith and had a glorious time, during which Brother Brigham spoke in tongues, this being the first time Joseph had heard the gift. The Prophet rose up and testified that it was from God. The gift then fell upon him, and he spoke in tongues.” Dean Jessee found references in Joseph’s handwritten journal from Oct 25, 1835, “The Lord poured out His Spirit, and some glorious things were spoken in the gift of tongues and interpreted concerning the redemption of Zion” (Dean C. Jessee, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1984), 64–65; also 139; and Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:292; 2:376).
22. *Ibid.*, 2:428; “. . . all the congregation simultaneously arose, being moved upon by an invisible power; many began to speak in tongues and prophesy; others saw glorious visions; and I beheld the Temple was filled with angels . . .”
23. *Ibid.*, 5:31–32; also 2:141.
24. Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1990), 105. W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980), 121. “Now the process by which a man was made a proselyte was threefold: it consisted of circumcision, immersion in water (i.e., baptism), and the presentation of an offering in the temple. Of these rites baptism assumed a growing importance.”
25. Joseph Smith wrote a letter while this confined in Liberty Jail, December 16, 1838, page 7 (accessed 6-19-19): <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/search?query=brethren&sort=alphabetical&page=1&perpage=50&startdate=1837.12.31&enddate=1838.12.31&transcripts=false&issuggestion=false&types=documents-papers|documents-papers-administrative|documents-papers-documents|documents-papers-legal|documents-papers-journals|documents-papers-histories|event>
26. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, VII. 15.3; 1 Kings 2:10. As mentioned previously, weeks before every Passover, the grave sites were white-washed to easily mark and avoid them to remain clean for the Passover.
27. For more information on David’s eternal status, see *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 339.
28. Russell M. Nelson, General Conference, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” April, 2019.
29. Acts 1:14; 9:36; 16:1, 36; 17:4, 12, 34; Romans 1:8; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Philippians 4:3; etc. In the New Testament, four

- house-churches are mentioned by the women's name who opened their homes for regular worship: Mary, the Mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12), Lydia the seller of purple (Acts 16:14, 40), Chloe in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:11), and Priscilla/Prisca the wife of Aquila (Acts 18:2–3, 18–19, 26; Romans 16:3–5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19).
30. Jewish calendars started their days with the dark hours (as the Genesis creation account began with darkness before light). Their day began with approximately twelve-hours of darkness. The hours of 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. were divided into three or four watches of the night (depending on where and when they lived). The twelve-daylight-hours began at 6:00 a.m. as the first hour, and twelfth hour as 5:00 p.m. The hour of prayer was 3:00 p.m.
 31. Each day at the Temple there was a sacrifice offered and incense lit at sunrise and at 3:00pm. It became incorporated into a twice-daily ritual of temple service. It was also known as the “time of incense.” The priests met together and used lots for the Lord to assign a certain priest to lay the incense on the golden altar once in their life's service (age 30–50). A “cloud of odors rose up before the Lord” as prayers (Edersheim, *The Temple*, 167).
 32. This hour is found in the Old Testament as an important time for other prophets. Angel Gabriel visited Daniel “about the time of the evening oblation” or 3:00 p.m. (Daniel 9:21). At the same time, “at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice” Elijah prayed for fire to come down from consume his burnt sacrifice on mount Carmel before the priests of Baal (1 Kings 18:36 also see Judith 9:1).
 33. Edersheim, *The Temple*, 141.
 34. Avraham Steinberg, ed., *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics* (Jerusalem Israel: Feldheim, 2003), 34, “Any illness may result from sin.”
 35. Russell M. Nelson, General Conference, “Ministering with the Power and Authority of God” April 2018.
 36. John W. Welch, “The Good Samaritan: Forgotten Symbols, *Ensign*, 02/2007.
 37. Wilford Griggs, *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1986), 193;
 38. For more see for more see Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism*.
 39. Russell M. Nelson, “Come Follow Me,” General Conference, April 2019. The full quote reads: “Do the spiritual work to find out for yourselves, and please do it now. Time is running out.”
 40. One collection of prophecies of the coming Messiah is the Psalms of Solomon, but it does not include any scripture about a suffering servant or Messiah from Isaiah 42:1–7; 49:1–6; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:1.
 41. Max Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind* (Binghamton NY: Global Publications, Binghamton University, 1952, reprint 2001), 363.
 42. By the time of the late Second Temple, the Mosaic Priesthood were all descendants of Levi and Aaron, and divided into the following offices:
 - A. The one reigning High Priest (since King Herod I, this became more political, as was no longer lifelong nor by lineage. Roman and Jewish leaders chose who and how long one held that office)
 - B. The Chief Priests: The captain of the temple, director of weekly course, director of daily course, Temple overseer, treasurer
 1. Cultus: The leaders of the 24 weekly divisions or “courses.”
 2. Custody of the Temple: Temple overseers

3. Temple finances: Three treasurers
- C. The Priests: 24 weekly courses each of four to nine daily courses with about 7,200 priests
- D. The Levites (about 9,600): 24 weekly courses, each divided into:
 1. Singers and musicians
 2. Temple servants and guards with
43. After the temple's destruction in AD 70, scribes are known as rabbis.
44. Donald W. Parry, ed., *Temples of the Ancient World* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 457.
45. *Mishnah, Avoth* 5:21.
46. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, FARMS, 1989), 422-485.
47. Gordon B. Hinkley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1997), 640.
48. Mark E. Peterson, General Conference, October, 1978.
49. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 2:58.
50. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:1976; "What must a man do to commit the unpardonable sin? He must receive the Holy Ghost, have the heavens opened to him and know God, and then sin against him ... he has got to deny Jesus Christ when the heavens have been opened unto him and to deny the plan of salvation with his eyes open to the truth of it....many apostates." <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/348> (accessed 6-20-19); or in *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 358.
51. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: Acts*, 317.
52. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:18. Wilford Woodruff recounted a day of miraculous healings: "Joseph . . . commenced to administer to the sick in his own house and door-yard, and he commanded them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to arise and be made whole; and the sick were healed upon every side of him. Many lay sick along the bank of the river; Joseph walked along up to the lower stone house, occupied by Sidney Rigdon, and he healed all the sick that lay in his path. . . . After healing all that lay sick upon the bank of the river as far as the stone house, he called upon Elder Kimball and some others to accompany him across the river to visit the sick at Montrose."
53. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XX.v.1; Theudas lived in AD 44.
54. Josephus, *Wars*, II.8.1; Judas liv



ACTS 6–9

THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH GROWS IN THE MIDST OF PERSECUTION

INTRODUCTION

The early disciples used the same teaching patterns as Jesus in His ministry—preaching and healing. The Holy Spirit accompanied their efforts as they reenacted the same miracles and taught the same message. In this scriptural section, Luke includes examples from Stephen, Peter, and Saul demonstrating how Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses.

The Book of Mormon authors shares the same witness, “To this end hath the Law of Moses been given for the typifying of him” (2 Nephi 11:4). Disciples from both books testified that God gave “types and a shadow of things which are to come” (Mosiah 3:10; and Alma 25:15). As they did so their persecution grew, which ironically also grew the church membership.

CHAPTER 6

The Seven are Called

Acts 6:1–7

Acts 6:1 “the number of the *disciples* was multiplied” Conversions continued to grow through the Spirit’s witness to the apostles’ preaching and healing. Those Israelites who accepted Jesus as their Messiah and Redeemer and were baptized in His name were first called, “*disciples*.” The name, “Christian” was not initially applied to the believers because, at that point, all the converts were Jewish and they used the word Messiah, rather than the Greek word Christ. The title Christian was not identified until after the Greek-speaking Gentiles began to receive the gospel (as we will discuss in Acts 11:26).

“the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews” (NIV). The KJV of the Bible does not clarify that all the disciples were Jewish, as the NIV does. Israelites lived all over the Roman Empire but were identified by different names. The Hellenistic or Grecian Jews, were Greek-like in their culture, manners, customs and language (though educated Jews in Jerusalem spoke Greek, too). “Hebrews” may refer to a group of disciples who spoke the Hebrew language.¹

A quarrel arose between these two factions of Jews because Greek speakers felt that the Hebrew-speaking widows were not receiving enough daily food or attention. Previously in Acts 2:44–45, 4:32–33, Luke described the disciples living together in Jerusalem sharing all things in common (probably governed by some sort of Law of Consecration). Fighting minorities are often seen across cultures. Yet, this may have not been a matter of selfishness, but of time management.

Acts 6:2–4 “Brothers and sisters, choose seven men . . . full of the Spirit and wisdom . . . [to] turn this responsibility over to them” (NIV) The Twelve needed to delegate in order to continue their preaching. This event echoes Exodus 18:13–27, when Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, suggested that Moses find others to help him settle disagreements. The Twelve set out the requirements for the new assignment. Notice the difference between the requirements for the seven and for the Twelve. The seven needed to be honest, wise, and full of the Spirit. Although they had different callings, both groups were needed to serve in order to grow the kingdom and to take care of each need.

Acts 6:5 “This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose . . .” (BSB) The disciples practiced common consent as well. Interestingly, this came about when the Hellenistic Jews voiced their concern and each of the seven men chosen had Greek names: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas. The latter is mentioned as a proselyte or convert to Judaism before converting to become a disciple of Christ.

As the church grew, Luke includes this as the first example of different callings or positions of responsibility in the early church. The ability to live in a united order came about because the early saints were willing to work together as well as work toward financial unity.

Acts 6:6 “when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them” Priesthood ordination was involved in the calling of the seven. This became an important part of the Restoration as the Prophet Joseph highlighted in the fifth Article of Faith: “We believe that [all] must be called of God by prophecy and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority.” These Seven were not Melchizedek priesthood holders, though, as we learn in Acts 8.

Acts 6:7 “a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” Priests refer to descendants of Aaron. Luke features them as a large group who were baptized into the Church. This may have been assisted by the fact that Peter and the Apostles (and Jesus before them), taught in the Temple courtyards where Priests could have heard them and seen their miracles. (In Acts 4:36 we learned that one of those priests was Barnabas who became Paul’s first companion.)

Stephen Preaches and is Arrested

Acts 6:8–7:1

Acts 6:8 “Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles” The first of the seven was a man named Stephen who exemplified magnifying one’s calling. In addition to his sensitive service to the widows, Luke shares that he was a great missionary, and through the power of the Lord’s Spirit, he performed miracles and wonders. His short service was a blessing to the early church! He appears only in one episode in Acts, but it is a significant example of the theological and historical movement of the Hellenistic Jewish Christians.

Acts 6:9 “Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen” (NIV) Some Jewish men who shared a common station or values created a synagogue for themselves. They met either in homes or separate buildings depending on the number and wealth of the group. Luke describes one such group of who were freed slaves who returned to live in Jerusalem. Male Jewish slaves were given their freedom after seven years, and the Romans released their slaves at age 30 or 35.² (Jewish females usually served for life as they became the owner’s concubine and bore his children, Exodus 21:7–11). The KJV uses the Latin word *Libertines* (KJV), though they would have all spoken Greek. This group of freed slaves were initially from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia.

Acts 6:9b–12 “disputing with Stephen . . . They could not stand up to his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke...” The group of Freedmen did not receive Stephen’s preaching. He may have assumed that freed slaves would be humble—but it appears not. Yet the Spirit confounded them so that they resorted to lies and false witnesses. Just as we saw with Jesus’ trial, a few Jews spread rumors about Stephen until he was seized and taken to

the Sanhedrin or council. Stephen's defense followed a similar pattern that was used by Alma and Amulek to the Zoramites (Alma 32–24) and Alma to Corinaton (Alma 39–42).

Acts 6:13–14 “For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place” Three charges stood against Stephen: 1. Blasphemed against God and Moses, 2. Attacked the Law of Moses, 3. Saying that Jesus would destroy the Temple and the Mosaic customs. Even though the Sanhedrin had implicitly decided to grudgingly tolerate Christians, they would not tolerate any attacks against their temple.

Acts 6:15 “Stephen[’s] . . . face was like the face of an angel” The Spirit of the Lord shone through Stephen's face and his message. Matthew described an angel at the tomb: “his countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow” (Matthew 28:3). Luke added that the angels looked like “two men [who] stood by them in shining garments” (Luke 24:4). Joseph Smith described angel Moroni as: “his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning” (JS—H 1:30–32).

CHAPTER 7

Acts 7:1–2 “the high priest asked Stephen, ‘Are these charges true?’” (NIV) Stephen would have an opportunity to defend himself against the charges that he has blasphemed against the temple and Mosaic Law. It was very similar to those questions asked of Jesus, but Stephen was inspired to speak rather than to remain silent.

Stephen's Defense: The History from Abraham to Moses

Acts 7:2–17

Acts 7:2 “Men, brothers, and fathers, listen!” (BSB) “Fathers” means older authority figures. In his defense, Stephen repeated twelve references to “[y]our fathers.”³ We also saw a repeated reference coming from the Samaritan Woman at the well in John 4:12 and 20. This is the first example that some scholars use to suggest that Stephen may have been a Samaritan.⁴ The native tradition claims Stephen as a Samaritan too.

Unlike the Gentiles, the Samaritans were first taught by Jesus following Jesus' conversation with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, “many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified . . . And many more believed because of his own word” (John 4:39–41). The first branch of disciples grew during the three days that Jesus taught them. Many of these Sarmatian disciples joined themselves with the Jerusalem church as Jesus instructed His apostles, “be my witnesses . . . in all Judea and Samaria” (Acts 1:8).

Acts 8–9 explores missionary work among the Samaritans. I wonder at the claim that Stephen was a Samaritan, as a Samaritan would have received terrible persecution if he were preaching and living in Jerusalem (John 4:9).

Acts 7:2b–5 “The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham” Stephen rehearsed the faithful account of Abraham’s obediently following God’s direction to repeatedly relocate across Mesopotamia and into the Promised Land. The text Stephen recited is closer to the Samaritan scriptures than the Hebrew. (“*Charran*” is a different spelling of “*Harran*.”)

St. Stephen before the High Priests and Elders of the Sanhedrin by Mariotto di Nardo, 1408. Image via Wikimedia Commons



Acts 7:6–8 “God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land . . .” Stephen recounted God’s prophecies showing His omniscience and emphasizing “the covenant of circumcision” that Abraham passed down through the patriarchs, Abraham to Isaac to Jacob. By speaking of God’s covenant to Abraham, Stephen showed respect for the Jewish customs. He reviewed the biblical history of salvation as a witness that he had not blasphemed the law. These examples of God’s dealings with the covenant people are significant to Christian history as well.

Acts 7:9–17 “. . . sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him” Stephen continued with the Israelite history emphasizing Joseph, the son of Jacob. Samaritans called themselves descendants of Joseph as Ephraimites and Manasseh-ites (Manassen?). In Stephen’s recounting of the history, he included 75 members of Jacob’s family who had come to Egypt (which is consistent with the LXX, Septuagint), but our text of Genesis claims only 70 had. The location for Jacob’s burial in Sychem (or Nabis today) was the Samaritan’s capital (and location of John 4, the woman at the well). Each detail included was mentioned for a reason.

Stephen's retells Israelite history from Moses to the Promise Land

Acts 7:18–43

Acts 7:18–21 “Moses was born, and . . . Pharaoh’s daughter took him up” Stephen continued to show his allegiance to the Mosaic tradition by retelling Moses’ call to be a prophet. As he described the political changes in Egypt, he said a new pharaoh, “exploited” (JB) the children of Israel. So God raised up a baby from Jochebed—one of our great women of faith in the Old Testament—who was later named Moses.

Acts 7:23–26 “when he was full forty years old it came into his heart to visit his brethren” The first time Moses tried to redeem the Israelites from slavery, they did not understand, and they rejected him. The number forty may be literal here, but it is also used in the Old Testament for a “purification period” (Leviticus 12:3–4; Genesis 7:17; Exodus 24:18; etc.). Stephen used “forty years” four times in recapping Moses’ history (Acts 7:23, 30, 36, 42).



The Sermon of St. Stephen by Vittore Carpaccio, 1514. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 7:27–28 “. . . Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?” The Israelites’ rejection of Moses’ first attempt to help them was repeated in Jesus’ mission too. His peers questioned His judgement, but Jesus taught: “the Father . . . hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22, also see 30; 8:16, etc.) At the end of this sermon, Jesus also connected His experience with Moses: “For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.” Hosea 12:10, explains that the lives of the prophets are in “similitudes” or types of future events, many of which foreshadowed the Messiah. The Israelites feared Moses’ intentions, so Moses left Egypt for 40 years. Stephen intentionally recited stories about when Israel was unwilling to follow God’s plan and fulfillment of prophecy to connect the ancient and modern experience with Jesus (Acts 27, 39).

Acts 7:29–30 “Moses . . . fled to Midian . . . forty years” (NIV) During the next period of purification, Moses fled to the land of Midian. There “the priest of Midian,” Jethro (also known as Reuel) took him into the family and Moses married his daughter, Zipporah. They were blessed with two sons, Gershom and Eliezer (Exodus

2:22; 1 Chronicles 23:15). The Midianites were descendants of Abraham and Keturah's fourth child (Genesis 25:2). We learn in D&C 84:6–7 that Jethro held the Melchizedek priesthood and gave it to Moses.

Acts 7:31–34 “The voice of the Lord came unto him . . . Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground” The KJV records that an angel was “in the flame,” which coincides with the light-filled fiery appearance of other angels.⁵ After the angel and the flaming bush, God's voice called Moses, who obeyed God and reverently and humbly took off his sandals.

Acts 7:35–36 “Moses . . . brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea and in the wilderness forty years” God called Moses to go back to Egypt and try again to redeem Israel from bondage or “exile.” Stephen referenced Israel in exile as a transition to the signs and wonders that Jesus and the disciples have performed. Both Moses and Jesus tried to bring Israel from a place of bondage to a state of more freedom.

Acts 7:37–38 “God will raise up for you a prophet like me” Stephen drew on several parallels between Jesus and the history of Israel, including this direction from Moses that pointed to Jesus. Stephen carefully crafted the history to highlight these parallels with Jesus: “When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than this *man* has done?” (John 7:31, BLB).

Acts 7:39–43 “Our ancestors refused to obey him . . . you didn't offer me slaughtered animals and sacrifices those 40 years in the wilderness, did you?” (ISV) Stephen quoted two Old Testament sections—the first half of verse 42 was from Psalm 81, and the second half cited Amos 5:25–27. Stephen described the children of Israel's apostasy, including the golden calf (but he does not include their fear and rejection to enter the Promised Land), so they had to wait for another purification period of “forty years in the wilderness” (Acts 7:36, 42, WEB).

Captivity in Babylon

Acts 7:44–50

Acts 7:44–46 “Our fathers had the tabernacle of the Testimony . . . [and] brought it in with Joshua”

(Remember in the KJV, “Jesus,” is the Greek name for the Hebrew, “Joshua.”) Stephen moved through the history to Joshua entering the Promised Land (again typifying Jesus who will take all the children of the covenant to an eternal Promised Land). In one quick phrase he covered 400 years of conquering the land from the Gentile nations up until Solomon's temple.

Acts 7:47–48 “Solomon built him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands” Stephen next confronted the falsehood that one must worship God in the temple, which was taught by

the Sadducees. This anti-temple theme would have enraged these Jews from across the Diaspora who moved to Jerusalem just to be near the temple. Any kind of attack on the temple was blasphemy to Jews.

Acts 7:49–50 “Heaven is My throne . . . What kind of house will you build for Me . . . ?” (BSB) Stephen recited Isaiah 66:1–2, which also echoed Solomon’s prayer at the temple’s dedication (1 Kings 8:27). Many Old Testament scriptures speak of the vastness of God’s creation and responsibilities, which kept their perspective in the context of humanity’s need for a temple (Psalms 68:33; 2 Chronicles 2:6).

Acts 7:51 “just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit!” (NIV) After Stephen’s short summary of the history of Israel, from Abraham to Solomon, he reiterated his theme. The Israelites have been, “stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears.” Their fathers rejected the prophets and they have rejected their Messiah, the Son of God Himself.

Acts 7:52 “Just One” or “the Righteous One” (BSB), was a title used often in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms, but is not found in the Gospels. Luke repeats it twice in Acts and four times in the Epistles. It is another beautiful and meaningful title for Jesus.

Acts 7:53–54 “When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him” Stephen honored the Law of Moses by saying it was “ordained by angels,” but then attacked the high priest, Sanhedrin, and anyone else in his audience with the charge that they “have not kept it.” This infuriated them. “Cut to the heart” means enraged and found guilty.

Stephen’s vision

Acts 7:55–56

Acts 7: 55 “he being full of the Holy Ghost . . . saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God” The Sanhedrin’s counterattack on Stephen was interrupted by his vision, even a throne theophany where he saw God in His glory. This is a great scripture for describing the separate nature of the Godhead. Jesus taking the place of honor, on the right hand of God, is both symbolic and consistent with Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; Joseph Smith’s First Vision, etc.

Acts 7:56 “Son of Man” was the title Jesus used when identifying Himself as the Messiah in John 1:5 and Mark 2:10. The Gospels use it 88 times to refer to Jesus. In the rest of the New Testament, it is only found in four places (see Hebrews 3:6; Revelation 1:13; 14:14). The Old Testament uses it most often for non-messianic people such as Daniel and Ezekiel (92 times). In Moses 1:12, Satan calls Moses “son of man.” Also, in Moses we learn the divine nature of the title for the Father and Son: “in the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is his name, and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man, even Jesus Christ” (Moses 6:57).



The Stoning of St. Stephen by Luigi Garzi, 17th century. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Stoning of Steven

Acts 7:58-8:2

Acts 7:58 “They dragged him out of the city and began to stone him” (BSB) The Law of Moses prescribed stoning for blasphemy (Leviticus 24:11–16). Stephen had been charged with this in Acts 6:11–13. Actually, Stephen was stoned for saying he had had a vision of God, not for preaching or even scolding the people. Stoning him was done without a trial and without Roman consent. This suggests that Jesus could have been killed by the Jews if they had wanted to take credit for it (or perhaps do it illegally).⁶ In the Old Testament times, most crimes against God (i.e. blasphemy, Sabbath breaking, idolatry, etc.) were punished by stoning. The legality of this stoning is questioned because Jerusalem was under Roman rule.

Stephen would have been dragged from the judgement hall at the temple across Jerusalem and out of one of the city gates. Outside the city, the first witness would have thrown the victim off a cliff or ramp (built about twice a man's height), so that the victim fell on his or her back. If the victim fell on his or her face, the first witness would have had the responsibility of turning him or her over. If still alive, a second witness would have thrown a large rock at the victim's heart. If the blow did not kill the victim, then other men would have taken off their outer cloaks to have more freedom to throw their stones, and then aimed their rocks at the victim until death resulted.

“laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.” Luke recorded that the witnesses of Stephen's stoning took off their outer cloaks as a sign of their participation. The role of the “young man” (probably under 30), as guardian of the cloaks was given to someone too young to be in the Sanhedrin (under 50), but who aspired to be of help and potentially have a position there someday.⁷ This is how Luke introduces his beloved Christian missionary companion.

INTRODUCING SAUL-PAUL

Luke offers a sneak preview of the next central figure in the book of Acts. We have no evidence that Saul acted as an eager listener to Stephen's testimony (as Alma the Elder), but instead, he was grouped with the persecutors. Saul is the Hebrew name for “Paul” in Greek. In the Old Testament, “Saul” was the first king of unified Israel, the star of the tribe of Benjamin. Paul was also a Benjaminite, so we assume his parents honored him and their ancestor by naming their son Saul (Philippians 3:5). Luke mentions Saul seventeen times between here and Acts 13. After that point, throughout the entire New Testament, Saul is always called, “Paul.”

Later in the text, Luke includes that Saul was a Roman Citizen, and a student of the great rabbi and Sanhedrin member, Gamaliel of Jerusalem (Acts 22:3, 25). As a member of the Sanhedrin, Gamaliel would have been aware of Jesus' and Peter's preaching. Paradoxically, Paul's writings do not include that he heard anything about Jesus during His ministry. He grew up in Tarsus, as a “Hebrew of Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee.” We assume that his family would have joined annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem (Philippians 3:5). Paul gives more autobiographical tidbits in his Epistles, which we will explore later.



The Apostle Paul by Anthonis van Dyck. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 7:59 “While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit’” (NIV) Stephen received the title of the first Christian martyr (although John the Baptist and Jesus had already been martyred). Jesus had warned the disciples in Matthew 24:9 that some would suffer martyrdom, and many disciples did (including ten of the Twelve). From this point on, Jerusalem would become the enemy of the early Christian church.

Acts 7:60 “And having fallen on *his* knees, he cried in a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not place this sin to them’” (BLB) Luke includes Stephen’s request for God to forgive those who have killed him, just as he alone included Jesus’ words, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). He then concludes with the euphemism, “he fell asleep.” This is an expression of faith in the afterlife. In Luke’s writings, it represents a belief in the Plan of Salvation.

In Luke’s parallel structure—both in his Gospel and the Book of Acts—he emphasizes that the Apostolic church carried out the same things that Jesus did. Just as the Old Testament Prophets typified the Promised Messiah, so too, the Apostles’ and early disciples’ lives were patterned after their master, Jesus.

CHAPTER 8

Acts 8:1a “Saul was consenting unto his death” Luke adds a second statement in his account to make sure that his audience understands that Saul was among those who wanted Stephen dead.

Acts 8:2 “devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him” Other disciples were allowed to honor Stephen’s body with a burial. Luke’s brief description sounds as if the saints’ mourning practices were similar to the traditional ritualized Jewish lamentations—including days of elaborate wailing, putting ashes on one’s head, and tearing one’s clothes, all to dramatize great sorrow.⁸

Further Persecution in Jerusalem

Acts 8:1b–4

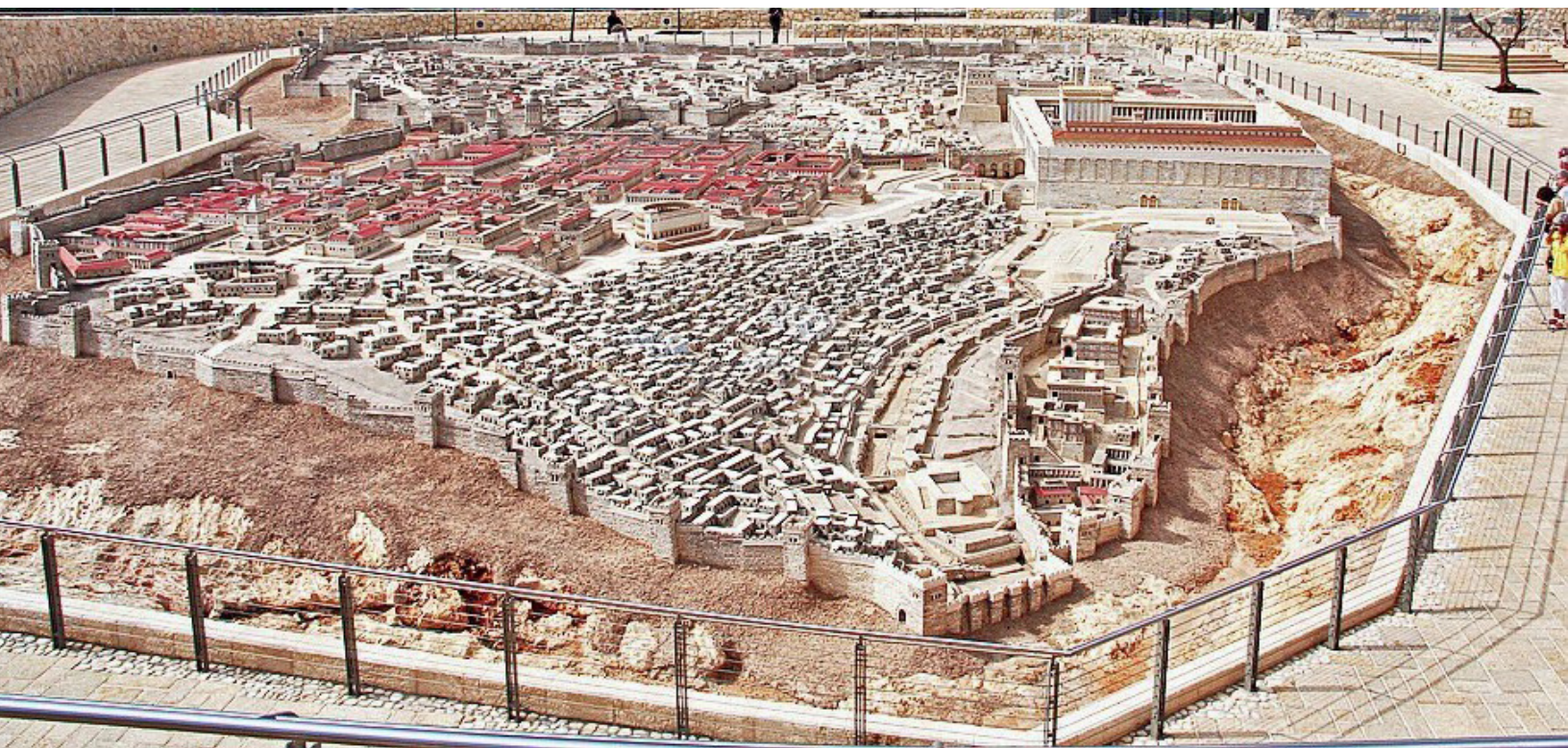
Acts 8:1b “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem . . .” The early persecutions were local, centered in Jerusalem. In a couple of decades (AD 54–68), Nero would attack Christians across the empire.

“all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria” This brings up the question of why the apostles were not scattered with their flock? Perhaps only the Samaritan and Greek Christians were persecuted not Jewish Christians. Or perhaps the apostles were unaffected because the local Jewish leaders were frightened

of their power to work miracles. In any case, the scattering would have affected their ability to share all things in common.

Acts 8:3 “Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison” (NIV) Saul is no longer portrayed as a young silent witness, but as the chief persecutor of the Jerusalem disciples. Later in Paul’s letters, he verifies this description:

- Galatians 1:13 “beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it”
- Philippians 3:6 “As for my zeal, I was a persecutor of the church” (ISV)



Model of ancient Jerusalem. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 8:4 “They that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” The Jews who tried to stop the followers of Jesus, instead ended up helping spread the Good News. God’s hand appears to have been directing the scattering as a means of spreading the gospel to allow more of God’s children to learn of His Son and trust in Him. This exemplifies how the Lord uses affliction to bring about His purposes. As the saints endured their hardships, it strengthened their faith, hope, and determination. Over time, as they witnessed the spread of the Church, they saw the hand of the Lord directing their scattering to bring about His purposes (Acts 13:38). As a result of the persecution, Jesus’ saving message spread beyond Jerusalem into other neighborhoods across Judea and Samaria.

From this point on, Luke does not speak of proselytizing in Jerusalem. Luke includes witnesses who gave their lives as martyrs in Jerusalem, and now turns to record the disciples preaching in two other regions: Judea and Samaria.⁹ Interestingly now, the Spirit took the missionaries to Samaria, in contrast to Matthew 10:5 that described Jesus instructing His apostles to not preach to the Samaritans, or at least not for the time being. Jesus had taught there, but on the whole, Samaria was not opened to proselytizing until after the Lord's resurrection as He commissioned: "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Missions in Samaria and Judea

Acts 8–12

MISSIONARY WORK BENEFITED BY THE ROMAN EMPIRE

As missionary work extended beyond Jerusalem, two things in particular helped it spread: The ease of travel and the unity of language. Travel from one end of the Roman Empire to the other was enabled by the relative political security and good roads. Romans built and maintained new roads that connected their Empire across the Mediterranean. They patrolled water ways and collected taxes at each port. This safety was unique in the ancient world.

The Greek language began spreading as early as 325 BC, when Alexander the Great began his conquering spree across the Mediterranean and beyond. By the time of the New Testament, all educated people throughout the Roman Empire spoke Greek (even though each province also spoke their own local language—i.e. in Judea, Aramaic, in Rome, Latin). With Greek so universally understood, missionary work could spread without a language barrier.

Phillip Evangelizes Samaria

Acts 8:5–8

Acts 8:5 “**Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ**” Philip was a common Greek name, including that of Alexander the Great's father. This one, who was probably Philip of the Seven, called and ordained help to ensure food and care were given to the widows (Acts 6:1–6). Just as his colleague Stephen, Philip also served as a missionary or an evangelist. We learn that later he did not have the Melchizedek priesthood to bestow the Gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 8:14–15), that he had four daughters with the gift of prophecy, and that he was a companion to Paul on his third apostolic mission (Acts 21:9–15).

“**Went down**” is always used to go anywhere from Jerusalem, regardless of the geography. Even though there are higher mountains than Mount Moriah, no place is holier to a Jew so it is figuratively the highest place on earth for worship.¹⁰

“to the city of Samaria” In Greek *“the city”* suggests he went to either to a chief city of Samaria, or “one’s native city, the city in which one lives.” This opens the possibility of Philip being a Samaritan, too. It also reaches back to Jesus’ two-day visit to the capital of Samaria, the city of Sychar. John 4:39–42 describes the conversion of many in that city, after Jesus’ conversation with the woman at the well.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ANIMOSITY BETWEEN JEWS AND SAMARITANS

The Samaritans and Jews had been arch enemies ever since the political split of Israel and Judea after King Solomon. In 538 BC, animosity flared up worse than ever as the Jews returned from Babylon. The Samaritans offered to help them rebuild their temple, but the Jewish leader Zerubbabel refused their help without proper Levitical genealogical evidence (Ezra 4:1–4 and Nehemiah 2:19–20). In retribution, the Samaritans violently and politically tried to stop the Jews from rebuilding the city of Jerusalem, the wall around it, and their temple. In the fourth century BC, The Samaritans built themselves a temple on Mount Gerizim (2,890 feet) near their capital city, Shechem. In 128 BC, acting under orders from the high priest, John Hyrcanus, Jewish activists climbed Mt. Gerizim and destroyed the Samaritan Temple. The Jews then captured the Samaritan city of Shechem. Years later the Samaritans regained their city, but the demolition of their temple could not have been more reprehensible.¹¹ A century and a half later, by the time of the New Testament, Jews would accept a Samaritan as a Jewish convert “if they denied Mt. Gerizim (as the temple site), and if they acknowledged Jerusalem and the resurrection of the dead.”¹²

The Samaritans had six main beliefs—all based on the Pentateuch—that opened their hearts to the news of the coming of the Messiah / Christ / Anointed One. We also can see evidence of these beliefs in Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well in John 4.

1. Believe in one God
2. Believe Moses was the greatest and final, or “seal” of the prophets
3. Believe the first 5 Books of Moses (Pentateuch or Torah) as the word of God, and reject all other scripture
4. Believe that Mt. Gerizim was the chosen place for God’s Temple
5. Believe that at the end of time a “Restorer” or Messiah will usher in a new dispensation, teach the law, and restore proper modes of worship
6. Believe in a final day of rewards for the righteous and punishments for the wicked

Acts 8:6–7 “the people . . . gave heed unto . . . Philip . . . seeing the miracles . . . unclean spirits . . . came out . . . palsies, and . . . lame, were healed” Signs again accompanied preaching, but now the Spirit empowered the same miracles that Jesus had performed previously. Healing physical and spiritual maladies go hand in hand. The listing of miracles is interesting knowing that Philip did not hold the Melchizedek priesthood (Acts 8:14–15). It appears that Philip was a Priest. Elder Wilford Woodruff said that he never “had more of the protection of the Lord than while holding the office of a Priest. The Lord revealed to me by visions, by revelations, and by the Holy Spirit, many things that lay before me.”¹³

All of these miracles come as gifts of the Spirit and are available through the power of God for all who seek “earnestly the best gifts, always remembering for what they are given” (D&C 46:8; also see 1 Corinthians 10; Moroni 10). Women and children are included in those to whom God pours out the gifts of the Spirit such as healing, visions, faith, hope, and charity. The prophetess Eliza R. Snow recorded, “Prest. [Joseph] Smith continued the subject by adverting to the commission given to the ancient apostles ‘Go ye into all the world’ &c.— no matter who believeth; these signs, such as healing the sick, casting out devils &c. should follow all that believe whether male or female.”¹⁴

The Hellenist Christians (who probably included Philip and the Seven called to serve, as we discussed in Acts 6:5) were ideally suited to evangelize Samaria. We assume the cultural antagonism between the Jews and Samaritans would have been less of a problem if their missionaries were from the diaspora, not Jerusalem. Whatever country the missionaries came from, the Spirit of truth was strong enough to overcome the cultural background and baggage that had separated the Samaritans and Jews for a millennium.

Acts 8:8 “there was great joy in that city” Their joy stemmed from not only the healing and preaching of the Samaritans, but also from the missionaries finding success in their labors.

Simon the Sorcerer

Acts 8:9–25

Acts 8:9 “Simon . . . used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria” Justin, from the early second century, recorded that “Simon” was “Simon Magnus,” the famous Samaritan who became the founder of the Christian Gnostics.¹⁵ He taught that sub-divinities sprang from the true God. The Old Testament creator was a junior divinity who made a physical world by mistake. Luke did not record that, but identifies him as full of pride, dissent, and satanic sources.

Acts 8:10–11 “they all gave heed . . . This man is the great power of God” Simon’s claim to be some sort of Great Power, had enchanted the Samaritans for years. However, soon the truth would prove his magic as a counterfeit stemming from the great and evil usurper, Satan himself.

Acts 8:12 “they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (NIV) The Samaritans who heard and received Philip’s witness differentiated the difference between sorcery and truth, and committed to baptism. This verse outlines the principle beliefs required for baptism: Jesus is the Messiah / Christ, and the Kingdom of God is here. I think it is also significant that Luke includes “men and women.” Luke’s inclusion shows a change from Judaism to Christianity that included women in church membership, with responsibilities, and a voice to witness.

Acts 8:13 “Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere” (NIV) Simon’s conversion seems to be linked to the miracles. Luke makes that connection in this verse, in contrast to many Jews who previously did not.

Acts 8:14–17 “When the apostles . . . heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John . . . [who] laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit” (BSB) These are exciting verses that demonstrate the different priesthoods functioning in the primitive church. As the branches in Samaria grew, two apostolic leaders traveled the two- or three-day journey north (100 km or 62 miles) to provide the new saints confirmation, and to make sure everything was in order. Completing their baptism with the confirming gift of the Holy Ghost was, and is, a Melchizedek Priesthood ordinance (D&C 84:64). The pattern in the primitive church demonstrates that the early converts felt a witness of the Spirit, but still needed the cleansing power and direction that comes from the Gift of the Holy Ghost. The second ordinance of confirmation completed their baptism of water with the potential for the baptism of fire.¹⁶

Acts 8:18–19 “when Simon saw . . . he offered them money . . . Give me also this power” The sinful practice of offering money for ecclesiastical favors is known as “priestcraft.” Because of this story, the word “Simony” is used to buy an ecclesiastical office through payment. This is one of Satan’s well-known maxims: “You can buy anything in this world with money.”

The prophet Alma in the Book of Mormon described it: “many who loved the vain things of the world, and they went forth preaching false doctrines; and this they did for the sake of riches and honor.” Alma also denounced it: “Were priestcraft to be enforced among this people it would prove their entire destruction” (Alma 1:16, 12).

Acts 8:20–23 “you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! . . . Repent” (ESV) Peter was completely disgusted with Simon’s attitude; yet he still encouraged him to change his heart and repent. Peter discerned that Simon had been poisoned by “bitterness and sin.” Luke has already explained that Simon was filled with pride (Acts 8:9). God’s forgiveness can only come if repentant sinners change their hearts and habits.

Acts 8:24 “Pray to the Lord for me . . .” (NIV) We are not told how the story ended, only that Simon recognized

that the apostles had more power than he did. His first reaction did not demonstrate much self-initiative. Yet, he knew that righteous prayer was a powerful tool.

Acts 8:25 “when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned . . .” The scene ends with Peter and John taking the long way home to Jerusalem to preach “in many villages of the Samaritans.” It appears that the early disciples held no prejudice against the Jews’ detested neighbors. They also used every opportunity to testify and teach as missionaries.

Philip and the Ethiopian

Acts 8:26–40

Acts 8:26 “an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Go south to the road . . . to Gaza’” (NIV) For his next missionary transfer, Philip received divine direction through an angel. Quite specific instructions were given, including which road to travel. The road from Jerusalem to Egypt lay along the coastal plain to the Mediterranean and south. Gaza was the Egyptian boarder then.

Acts 8:27 “he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch . . .” (BSB) This traveling Ethiopian had a position of great authority; he was in charge of the national treasury. His office was like a national cabinet member, or a court official. Often chief attendants to the king or queen were emasculated to insure they would not be seduced or abuse a woman in the court. In the Old Testament, eunuchs could not fully belong to the congregation (Deuteronomy 23:1). Yet, in Jesus’ restored higher law, and with angelic guidance, Philip had no hesitation about teaching this man.

ETHIOPIA

Ethiopians were Nubians. In the OT, the country was also called “Cush” (Genesis 2:13). Their nation was the exotic region on the Nile River, just south of Egypt (where modern Sudan is today). It was often under Egyptian rule. From 500 years before Abraham, they had a reputation for exporting gold, ivory, and spices.

“**Candace**” was not a first name, but rather a title. It was a transcription of the Nubian word for queen, “*Kntky*.”¹⁷ All Nubian queens used it, just as each Roman Emperor adopted, “Caesar.”

“**This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship**” (NIV) The Ethiopian was returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, perhaps for one of the three major feasts (Passover, Pentecost or Tabernacles). Presumably, he would have been “a God-fearing proselyte,” meaning he was converted in heart, but he was not a full circumcised member. Throughout the New Testament, and the Book of Acts in particular, this title is regularly used as a category of Jewish converts (10:7, 22; 13:26, 43; etc.).



Saint Philip Baptising the Ethiopian Eunuch by Aelbert Cuyp, ca. 1655. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 8:29 “The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go and join that chariot” (CSB) The Spirit took over the angel’s role of guiding Philip’s missionary efforts to this specific man. The Spirit continues this individual ministry as each person in each generation is cherished by God.

Acts 8:30 “Philip ran up and heard the man reading Isaiah” (BSB) The ancients commonly read aloud. Philip’s run set a great example of how to follow promptings. The timing was absolutely miraculous. The Spirit prompted Philip to run right before the man read some of the most important verses in understanding Jesus as the Promised Messiah. If Philip had not run, he may have missed that opportunity. The timing was a miracle. As Philip heard the Ethiopian reading, he asked him if he understood the Isaiah passage.

Acts 8:31 “How can I, except some man should guide me?” The Ethiopian had remarkable faith. First, he believed Philip could help him understand Isaiah and invited him to sit with him in the chariot. Then he made the leap of faith to accept Jesus as the promised Messiah. This is the first of three conversion stories in the Book of Acts (followed by Saul in Ch. 9, and Cornelius in Ch. 10). Each shows another step in the mission to the Gentiles, opened with God’s direction.

Acts 8:32–34 “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter . . . who is the prophet talking about” The Ethiopian’s question is asked by biblical scholars today about the same passage in Isaiah 53:7–8. It belongs to Isaiah’s four “Suffering Servant passages,” which Christians interpret as prophecy about Jesus’ passion.¹⁸ Philip followed the example that Jesus set for his disciples on how to interpret Scriptures. Jesus “expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” and taught that “everything must be fulfilled that is written about me” (Luke 24:27, 44–45).

Acts 8:35 “Then Philip . . . preached unto him Jesus” Philip used the scriptures to show how Jesus fulfilled the Isaian suffering servant passages; he taught the Gospel by directions from the Spirit. When we teach by the Spirit, the words just tumble out of our mouths.

Acts 8:36 “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?” (BSB) We are not told how long their discussion lasted before the Ethiopian asked Philip for baptism, but it sounds as though it was before the day was out.

Acts 8:37 “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” The first half of this verse is not presented in the best Greek manuscripts. It appears to have been added by a later editor of the Western text. The second half quoted here, is the Ethiopian’s powerful testimony of our Savior.

Acts 8:38 “. . . stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water . . .” Immersion was practiced by the earliest church as is described here by both of the men going “*down*” into the water. The Greek word also describes not only being immersed, but the process of change.¹⁹

Acts 8:39–40 “. . . the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip . . .” After the baptism, the Spirit of the Lord conveyed Philip to another area where he was needed. This spiritual transportation was also given to the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16). Philip’s next assignment was in Azotus, fifty miles north of Gaza on the Mediterranean Sea. He preached from there to Caesarea, 200 miles further north. This is also where Paul stayed with Philip in Acts 21.

CHAPTER 9

Saul’s First Vision on the Road to Damascus

Acts 9:1 “Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples . . . went unto the high priest” Now several years after Jesus’ resurrection,²⁰ the persecution against the disciples grew under the hand of the dynamic, young Saul of Tarsus. His efforts were approved by the high priest, probably Caiaphas (AD 18–36).

Acts 9:2 “. . . for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, if he found any men or women . . .” Damascus was the oldest continually inhabited city at that time. Damascus was 208 miles north of Jerusalem in what is now modern Syria. Biblical scholars question the idea that the High Priest had jurisdiction over religion in other countries, but perhaps he still directed the synagogue worship. We know that Roman law allowed ten denominations some level of “religious freedom,” and Judaism was one of those ten. This is one of the reasons why there were so many Jews scattered across the Roman Empire, especially in bigger cities.

Saul’s goal to bind “men and women” was also significant because women did not actively participate in Jewish synagogue worship, but they did as Christian disciples. House churches were organized and run by women; they prayed, prophesied, taught, and served as missionaries (Romans 16:1–2, 7 Philippians 4:3; 1 Corinthians 11:5a; Titus 2:3; etc.).²¹

“The Way” This is the first name used to identify the group of Jews who were disciples of Jesus and claimed that he is the Son of God and promised Messiah. Before they were called Christians, we find the name “The Way” to differentiate them from other Jews. The name comes from Jesus’ Last Supper, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). He is the way back to the presence of God, back to the tree of life to live forever, but through Jesus’ way, we can eat without our sins.

“The Way” was symbolically outlined as the priest’s path through the Tabernacle. First priests washed, clothed, offered sacrifices, were vicariously purified, and entered into the Holy Place where constant bread and wine were beside the tree of life, which illuminated the veil. This Way outlines the way for all disciples to return to the presence of God, which is represented as the Holy of Holies or God’s throne room (also see Isaiah 35:8; Psalm 1:6; Malachi 3:1).

“he could bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem” This would have been at least a week-long trip on horse and longer on foot to Damascus (330 km). Later when the story is retold, we learn that chief priests traveled the journey with Saul (Acts 26:12). This helps us understand how serious the threat of the disciples had become to the Jewish leaders, that they would travel over 200 miles to stop the saints from preaching. We also learn how far the disciples had spread in a couple of years if there were enough of them to attend synagogues in Damascus. Saul and his posse were determined that the distance was worth the effort to bind the disciples as heretics so that they could bring them back to Jerusalem for imprisonment or stoning.

As we look back on the story we wonder if Saul received any promptings or thoughts along the way. President David O. McKay wondered, “The travel would have taken about a week, perhaps the shining face of Stephen, or the children’s cries for their parents whom Saul bound began to pierce his soul more keenly and perhaps he wondered if the work of the Lord should make him feel so restless.”

Acts 9:3–4 “suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven . . . he fell . . . heard a voice . . . Saul, why persecutest thou me?” After days of traveling, shortly before the search party arrived, the Lord redirected Saul. Luke emphasizes how bright the light was that caused Saul to fall. In later retellings he adds that it was about noon (Acts 22:18; 26:12), and that the voice spoke Hebrew to him (Acts 26:14). In each of the three accounts that Luke includes of Saul’s first vision, he includes different details. (Saul also had six other recorded visions.²²) Just like Saul, sooner or later each of us must face the Lord. Elder Maxwell explained that at that point, “It will mean much less to kneel down when it is no longer possible to stand up.”²³

Acts 9:5 “Who art thou? I am Jesus . . . it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” The Lord follows His introduction with another reprimand. The call to repentance is perhaps the most often repeated command from Jesus and His prophets—from John the Baptist to President Russell M. Nelson (Matthew 3:2).²⁴ Jesus began His ministry as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels with repentance: “from that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent’” (Matthew 4:17; also see, Mark 1:15 Luke 5:32). We consistently find the injunction to repent. It appears 130 times in the Doctrine and Covenants and 362 times in the Book of Mormon.²⁵ It is not only numerically powerful, but also modern scripture explains how to repent and how the Savior’s atoning sacrifice can mediate and cleanse humanity.

A “prick” referred to a goad—either a sharp spear or gadget used to prick the back of animals to make them move ahead. The tendency when animals were pricked was to kick back—but that only added distress and drove the wound deeper.

Acts 9:6 “what wilt thou have me to do?” This is a good question for each disciple to include daily in our morning prayers. However, the first half of this verse, including Saul’s trembling and his question, is not found in other English translations. The Lord’s reproof turns to direction as other translations read from “don’t kick . . .” to “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do” (NIV).

Acts 9:7 “the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man” The same spiritual experiences are often perceived differently by each person, even in the same place and at the same time. Saul saw a vision, but the veil was closed over the chief priest’s eyes. Yet they heard the Lord’s voice giving directions for them to change their plans of persecution.

Acts 9:8–9 “Saul got up . . . For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything” (NIV). The three days of darkness (here and in the Book of Mormon) may symbolize the death of the carnal man, or the time the Lord was in the tomb, or the three days before a new life. The Lord caused the blindness, but Saul chose to fast as a sign of his repentance and humility before God. Likewise, we do not choose our challenges, but how we handle them.



Conversion of St Paul on the Road to Damascus by Hans Speckaert, ca. 1570. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 9:10–11 “Ananias’ . . . ‘Here I am, Lord’ . . . ‘ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying” (BSB) This local leader received divine direction for his jurisdiction. It was not solicited, but he listened. One way I like to read the scriptures is to personally answer each of the questions the Lord asks. Ananias answered, like the child prophet Samuel, that he heard the Lord and wanted to learn more. Ananias may have thought his heart was willing to obey, but when the call came, he questioned God.

Acts 9:12–14 “Lord, I have heard by many . . .” Ananias trusted his own wisdom, what he thought he knew, more than what God said. The “Ananias principle,” is learning to *ask* God rather than *tell* Him.²⁶ Ananias had no idea of the impact of God’s inspiration. In fact, he was frightened to follow it. From a logical perspective, Ananias feared that Saul’s conversion was just a “trap” to imprison more of the saints. But mortal logic can detour us from receiving revelation, as the Lord taught Isaiah, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways” (Is 55:8).

Acts 9:15–16 “Go . . . I will show . . .” This principle of following God in faith, and trusting that He “will show” us what to do can lead to miraculous experiences. The Lord revealed to Ananias that Saul had a three-fold missionary assignment: Saul would preach to the Gentiles, kings, and Israelites.

Acts 9:17 “**Brother Saul . . .**” Ananias quickly put aside his personal fears and followed the Lord’s directions. In calling him “Brother Saul,” Ananias welcomed him into The Way as a fellow disciple.

“**Receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost**” Ananias became one of the few people other than Jesus to heal the blind. Each of the miracles that Luke includes in the Book of Acts was first performed by the Lord, thus showing that the Apostolic Church followed Jesus’ example and received God’s power. In addition to his physical sight, Saul received spiritual sight from the Spirit.

Acts 9:18 “**Immediately, something . . . fell from Saul’s eyes . . . He got up and was baptized**” (NIV) We all have something blocking our vision as “we see through a glass, darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Saul’s repentant heart turned him completely around, 180 degrees. He intended to imprison the disciples, but instead joined them. We are not told if the chief priests who traveled with him were baptized, too. The new church was again following the path that Jesus prescribed: “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5, ESV).

Acts 9:19–22 “**Saul spent several days with the disciples . . . and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah**” (NIV) Luke doesn’t say how long it took Saul to gain the trust of the local disciples, nor how long he served as a missionary in Damascus, but in Galatians 1:18 Paul reports that he preached in Damascus for three years. That gave Saul some time before he had to face his former associates in Jerusalem and declare that he was wrong. (There was also a change of high priests during that period.)

Acts 9:23–25 “**the Jews took counsel to kill him . . . [so] the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket**” Ironically, Saul himself had to escape persecution from the Jews. They were so intent on killing him that he could not even sneak out of the city gate. It is interesting how the tables turn in life. We are often in the same place we vowed never to be.

Saul in Jerusalem

Acts 9:26–31

Acts 9:26–27 “**he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him. Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles . . .**” (BSB) It appears that Saul was reticent about returning to Jerusalem—as it took him three years—and even then, he only came because his life was in danger. Even though there had been no word of Saul for three years, he had had such a bad reputation in Jerusalem that the disciples were cautious about believing

his story. The saints' rejection undoubtedly reopened his pain and regret for hurting them. The Lord blessed him with one friend. A good Levite, named Barnabas came to his defense (Acts 4:36). Barnabas even requested that Saul join him as a missionary companion.

Acts 9:28–30 “they tried to kill him. When the brothers learned of this, they . . . sent him off” (BSB) Luke's retelling and Paul's memory have a few differences. Saul wrote in his Epistle to the Galatians that he only stayed in Jerusalem for fifteen days on that first trip to Jerusalem, and only met with the apostles Peter and James (Gal 1:18–19). For safety sake, he did not stay long as Luke remembered that Saul “spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians” (9:29) This is why the Grecians wanted to kill him. Whatever the cause and timing, the apostles called Saul away to serve a mission with Barnabas to Saul's hometown, Tarsus (in what is now modern Turkey). Saul did not return to Jerusalem until he reported his mission to the Twelve after five years.

Acts 9:31 “the churches [had] rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria” Over time, with a different high priest and with Saul gone, the Jews stopped their persecution against the saints in Palestine for a period. This allowed the church to grow and they enjoyed the Spirit of peace for a time.

Peter Heals Aeneas

Acts 9:32–35

Acts 9:32 “As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people” (NIV) Luke returns to spotlighting Peter. With peace restored enough to travel, he made a mission tour across Israel; the miracles he chose to incorporate into his text continue to parallel Jesus' healings.

Acts 9:33–34 “In Lydda, he found a man named Aeneas, who had been paralyzed and bedridden for eight years” Lydda was twenty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem. In the Old Testament, the town was called Lod (1 Chronicles 8:12), and then after their return from Babylon it became a western boarder for Jewish settlements. It became town of smiths or craftsmen, and by the time of the New Testament, people other than Jews lived there. Aeneas was not a Jewish name either. When Peter came across Aeneas, he had compassion on him as he had already been bedridden for eight years.

“Jesus Christ maketh thee whole” Luke carefully shows that Aeneas was not healed by Peter—but by the “name of Jesus Christ.” Luke does not forget that the apostles and evangelists were only mortal. His account always gives credit to God's power as the source of the miracle.

Acts 9:35 “all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.” This healing was not only a great blessing to Aeneas, but it also became a great missionary tool for the Gospel. As the disciples only taught

fellow Israelites (and their kin like the Samaritans), we assume that “all that dwelt” refers only to the Israelites that were in the town.

Peter Raises Dorcus

Acts 9:36 “There was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha” Eleven miles west of Lydda, along the same road from Jerusalem to the Mediterranean Sea coast, Joppa was a big city in its day. Luke highlights a virtuous woman from Joppa, who holds the distinction of being the only named woman in the New Testament referred to by the feminine form of the Greek word “disciple / *mathetria*.” (However, the Greek suggests there were others.²⁶) Tabitha (in Aramaic) or Dorcas (in Greek) is one of the forty-five named women in the New Testament (at least thirty of whom are described as devoted saints).²⁸ As a disciple, she broke the pharisaic restrictions against female learning, and became a pupil of Jesus’ gospel. She was a public figure among the Christian community in Joppa for her contributions of time and service to the needy: “always occupied with works of kindness and charity,” which included weaving and sewing clothing (BSB).



Healing of the Cripple and Raising of Tabitha by Masolino da Panicale. Image via Wikimedia Commons

Acts 9:37–38 “. . . she was sick and died” After Tabitha’s death, her loved ones prepared her body for burial, and laid her body in an “upper chamber,” or room upstairs, possibly a rooftop (as the custom was to take the body outside after sunset and then out of town for burial). Two disciples went to Lydda, eleven miles away, to find Peter and urge him to come immediately, in hopes of healing or raising her from the dead.

Acts 9:39 “the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments . . . [she] made” When the chief Apostle arrived, the local disciples flooded in to share with him all the good things that Tabitha had done for them.

Acts 9:40 “Peter having put all outside” Mourning over the dead was a dramatic display as explained in Acts 8:2 at Stephen’s burial. We do not know if the saints practiced these customs, but one rabbi recorded a prescribed precedent for widowed husbands: “even the poorest Israelite should hire not less than two flutes and one wailing woman.”²⁹

and having bowed the knees, prayed . . . ‘Tabitha, arise!’” Just as Peter had watched Jesus do at the raising of Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:40), Peter also dismissed the noisy crowd before performing the miracle of bringing one back to life. With Luke’s parallel pattern, he will also show Paul raising a young man from the dead, consistently reinforcing, with a double witness, that the Apostles followed Jesus and that God blessed them with His power and authority.

Acts 9:41–42 “he . . . called on the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa” Again the miracle had at least two purposes, the second was building faith, which assisted in their missionary work, “and many believed in the Lord.”

Acts 9:43 “Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon” (NIV) Peter’s choice of residence was unusual. Tanners had to live near water, and because of the horrendous smells associated with their profession, they often lived away from other people. In a list of “unclean” professions, tanning was shunned along with “a dung-collector . . . peddler, weaver, tailor, and bath attendant.”³⁰ The smell was so offensive that one of the very rare exceptions of when a woman could leave her husband, as listed in the Mishnah, included being married to a tanner. Yet, the chief apostle stayed with a tanner. Was he still working as a Tanner? Was it the only place available? Was Simon humbled through his profession to make him more open to receiving Jesus’ message? Or perhaps this is Luke’s habit of including the social outcasts in his record of disciples.

Header Image: The stoning of St. Stephen by Gabriel-Jules Thomas, 1863. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

1. Joseph Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: The Acts of the Apostles* (NYC, London: Doubleday, 1998), 347.
2. Bromiley, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4.545. Many were given their freedom prior to that age Campbell, *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, 135. Some sources record a release at age thirty, others thirty-five or forty. The process releasing a slave was known as manumission.
3. Acts 7:2, 11, 12, 15, 19, 32, 38, 39, 44, 45, 51, 52.
4. Frederick F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 191, 193. There are 6,000 differences between the Masoretic Torah and the Samaritan Torah (the first five books of our OT). For example, in Genesis 11:32, Abraham left Haran 60 years before Terah died, making him 205 years old. In the Samaritan OT, Terah died at 145 years.
5. “Church History,” 1 March 1842, Page 707. <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/church-history-1-march-1842/2> (Site accessed 6/25/19). Joseph described first meeting angel Moroni: “. . . a sudden a light like that of day, only of a far purer and more glorious appearance, and brightness burst into the room, indeed the first sight was as though the house was filled with consuming fire the appearance produced a shock that affected the whole body; in a moment a personage stood before me surrounded with a glory . . .”
6. Paul Achtemeier, *Harpers Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1985), 1994.
7. *Mishnah, Avoth*, 5:21. “. . . twenty for pursuing a vocation, at the age of thirty for entering into one’s full vigor, at the age of forty for understanding, at the age of fifty for counsel, at age sixty one attains old age. . . .”
8. Jacob Neusner, ed, *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), “mourning.” During the “*Shiva*,” or first seven days of mourning, “they were prohibited from conducting business or doing other work, from bathing, cutting the hair, engaging in sexual relations, wearing leather shoes, or otherwise engaging in pleasurable activities.” Jonathan A. Goldstein, *1 Maccabees: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday-Anchor Bible, 1976), 272. “They rent their garments and made great lamentation and put on ashes. They prostrated themselves upon the ground . . . and cried out to Heaven”
9. Raymond Brown, *Intro to the New Testament*, 296.
10. *Mishnah, Kelim*, 1:6–9. The rabbi’s taught that there were ten degrees of holiness:
The land of Israel is holier than all lands ...
The walled cities [of the Land of Israel]
Within the wall [of Jerusalem] is more holy
The temple Mount is more holy ...
The rampart is still more holy
The Court of the Women is still more holy
The Court of the Israelites is still more holy
The Court of the Priests is still more holy

Between the porch and the altar is still more holy than it

The sanctuary is still more holy than it ...

The Holy of Holies is still more holy than they.

11. Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: GP, 2015), 32.
12. Max Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind* (Binghamton, NY: Binghamton University Global Publ., reprint 2001), 362.
13. Wilford Woodruff, *Millennial Star* 53:629.
14. Joseph Smith, "Discourse, 28 April 1842, as Reported by Eliza R. Snow," p. [36–40], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed June 26, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-28-april-1842-as-reported-by-eliza-r-snow/2> "Respecting the female laying on hands, he further remark'd, there could be no devil in it if God gave his sanction by healing— that there could be no more sin in any female laying hands on the sick than in wetting the face with water— that it is no sin for anybody to do it that has faith, or if the sick has faith to be heal'd by the administration. He reprov'd those that were dispos'd to find fault with the management of concerns"
15. Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973, reprint 2003), 58.
16. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:500. "You might as well baptize a bag of sand as a man, if not done in view of the remission of sins and getting of the Holy Ghost. Baptism by water is but half a baptism, and is good for nothing without the other half—that is, the baptism of the Holy Ghost."
17. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: The Acts*, 412.
18. Isaiah's Suffering Servant passages include: **Isaiah** 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–7; and 52:13–53:12.
19. James Montgomery Boice, *Bible Study Magazine*, May 1989. In my CFM notes from John 1, we talked about the different Greek words as found in an ancient cookbook: 1) *bapto*, meaning to "dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge," and 2) *baptize*, meaning to transform or make a change, like a cucumber becoming a pickle.
20. The dating between AD 34 and 36, stems from references to Annas and Caiaphas as still involved from the persecution (John 18:13, 24–28; Acts 4:6). The first name of a high priest in the Gospels, Annas (also spelled, Ananus), ruled as from AD 6–15, and died in AD 40. Josephus identified five of his sons who also reigned as high priests in this order: Eleazar (AD 16–17) *Caiaphas*, son in law of Annas (AD 18–36), Jonathan (AD 36–37 and 44), Theophilus (AD 37–41), Matthias (AD 43), and son Ananus (AD 63). Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XX.224–51; *Against Apion*, 1.36.
21. Wilson, *NT Women*, chapter 2.
22. Acts 22:17–21 Christ in Temple; Acts 16:9–10 Man from Macedonia; Acts 18:9–10 Christ at Corinth; Acts 23:11 Christ in Jerusalem fortress; Acts 27:23–24 An "angel of God;" and 2 Corinthians 12:1–4 "third heaven" and paradise.
23. Neal A. Maxwell, *General Conference*, Oct, 1974, "Why Not Now?"
24. Russel M. Nelson, *General Conference*, Apr, 2019, "We can Do Better and Be Better."
25. In the D&C repent is mentioned 81 times, repentance 32 times, repenting 1, repented 2, repents 4, repenteth 10. In the Book of Mormon, repent is mentioned 207 times, repentance 99 times, repenting 3 times; repents 1 time, repented 35 times; and repenteth 17 times.
26. Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1983), 31.

27. Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, Ross Shepard Kraemer, ed. *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 159.
28. Of the 180 women in the New Testament, there are also 94 unnamed actual women, 14 unnamed fictional women, and 27 general references to women in the New Testament.
29. Mishnah Ketuboth, 4.4; quoting Rabbi Judah (born AD 135) who codified the Mishnah.
30. Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1969), 304–305.



ACTS 10–15

REVELATION LEADS EARLY CHRISTIANITY
TO EXPAND TO THE GENTILES

INTRODUCTION

This section of six chapters are filled with stories demonstrating how the early disciples dealt with day to day hard issues—most specifically the challenge of sharing Christ’s gospel with non-Israelites. The change that was required to become a Christian was only the beginning. Continued meekness and humility to foster spiritual inspiration at every level was necessary for the early saints. We see the church membership grappling with difficult issues and then grappling with the challenge of following their leaders. Acts of the Apostles continues to testify that the apostles’ actions—including missionary work, miracles, ministering, and wrestling with hard procedural changes—testified of Jesus’ organization and the Spirit’s revelation. These scriptures also find parallels in the Book of Mormon, and in our own time.

ACTS 10

Cornelius' Visitation by an Angel

Acts 10:1-8

Acts 10:1 “At Caesarea . . . a man named Cornelius, a centurion . . . [of] the Italian Regiment” (BSB) A centurion was a Roman military leader of a group of 50 to 100 soldiers.¹ A centurion's base pay was 3,750 denarii (one denarius was the daily minimum wage), which was fifteen times the pay of a private legionary. This gave centurions plenty of extra money to give to the poor. The New Testament mentions five centurions.² Cornelius, together with six other centurions, belonged to the Italian regiment or cohort. As the title suggests, it was made up wholly or partially of Italians (meaning they were Roman citizens).³

CAESAREA

Caesarea lies on the Mediterranean coast, 33 miles north of Joppa, and 60 miles north-west of Jerusalem. In 12 years, King Herod rebuilt and renamed the city. He added a magnificent port, aqueduct, hippo-drome, and amphitheater. It became the home of Roman governors, Pilate, Festus, Felix, and capital of Palestine after Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70. The population was half Jewish, half Gentile.

Photo of Caesarea Maritima by Abraham Graicer. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Acts 10:2 “He and all his family were devout and God-fearing” (NIV) In the first century BC, “God fearer,” became a technical term that specifically referred to Jews who converted to Christianity in most respects, except circumcision (as it was a life-threatening proposition for adult males). They believed in monotheism, lived most of the Law of Moses, and were often wealthy and educated. “In the Diaspora there was an increasing number, perhaps millions by the first century.”⁴ These semi-converts were welcomed as part of the synagogue (Acts 2:5). This means they obeyed the Law of Sacrifice and sought to learn more about the Law of the Lord.

Cornelius’ family and “household” included servants and slaves (the average middle-class family had eight servants or slaves).⁵ Most of the ancient households shared the same religious beliefs as those of the patriarch of the home. Cornelius and his household were generous, helped the Jews with many charity deeds, and prayed regularly.

Acts 10:3 “the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision . . .” (ESV) The ninth hour, or 3:00 p.m., was the hour of prayer and the lighting of the incense in the temple (as discussed in Acts 3:1). Other biblical angelic visitations also occurred at this hour (Daniel 9:21, and Zacharias in Luke 1:10–11). All three of these angelic visitations began with the angel calling the person they visited by name.

“an angel of God come in and say to him, ‘Cornelius’” (ESV). In the Gospels, angels come at the birth and the death of the Lord. They are described as looking like shining men. Modern revelation also sheds light on angels’ identities, roles, and what they look like.

What is an angel?

- Pre-existent spirits: Moses 5:6
- Translated beings: Mormon 8:11
- Spirits of “Just [hu]mans made Perfect”: D&C 76:66–19; 129; Hebrews 12:122–124
- Resurrected Personages: D&C 13; 110
- Righteous mortals: JST Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18

Why do they come?

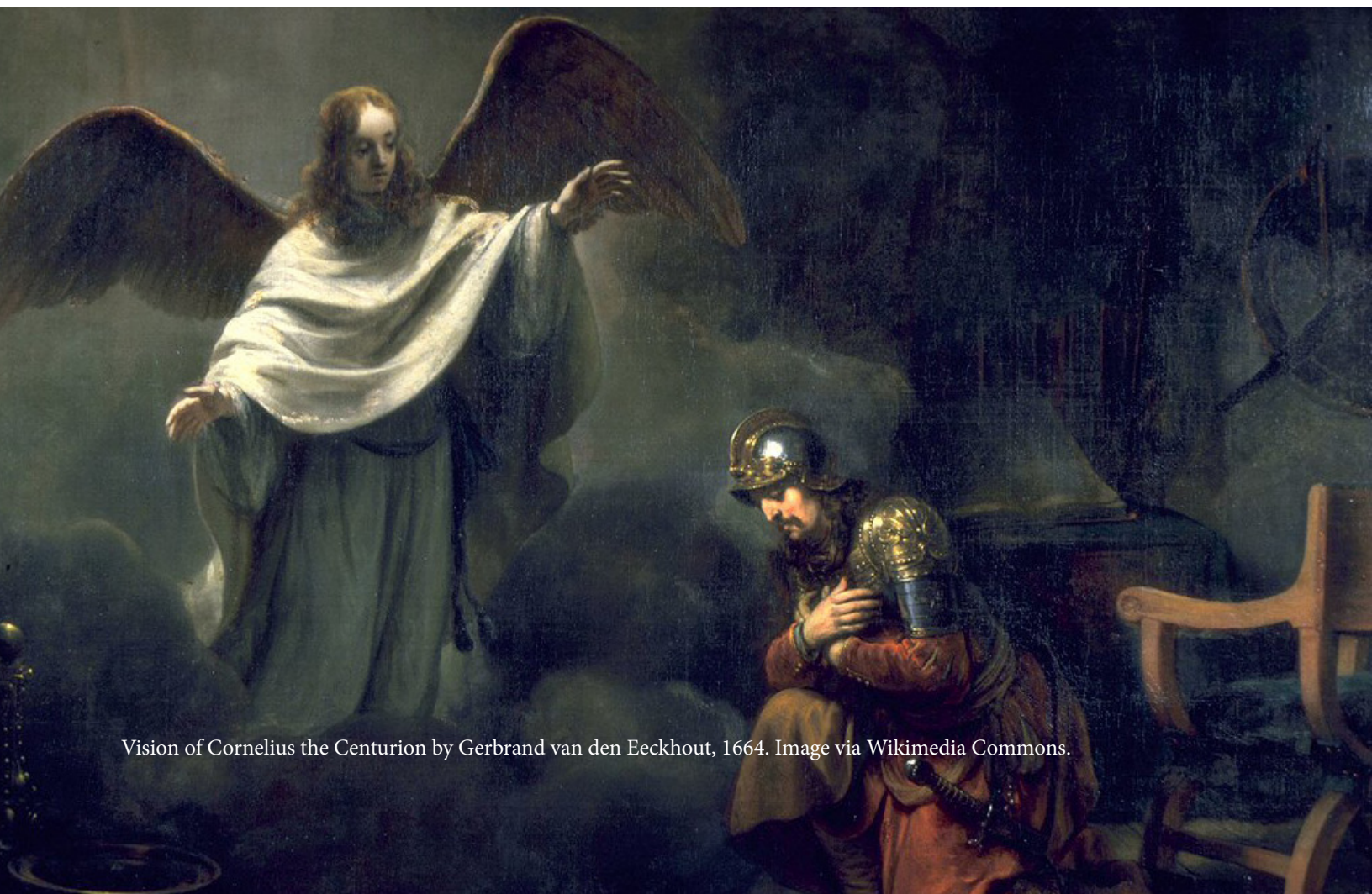
- Deliver messages: Luke 1:11–38
- Minister to mortals: Acts 10:3–8
- Teach: Mosiah 3:1–4
- Call to repentance: Moroni 7:31
- Give priesthood keys: D&C 128:20–21
- Save someone: 1 Nephi 3:29–31; Daniel 6:22

- Guide: Genesis 24:7
- Gather the elect: Matthew 13:41; 24:31, Mark 13:27

What do they look like?

- “His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow” (Matthew 28:3).
- “A young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment” (Mark 16:5).
- “Two men stood by them in shining garments” (Luke 24:4).
- “A personage standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor. He had on a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond anything earthly I had even seen; nor do I believe that any earthly thing could be made to appear so exceedingly white and brilliant. His hands were naked, and his arms also, a little above the wrist; so also, were his feet naked, as were his legs, a little above the ankles. His head and neck were also bare . . . Not only was his robe exceedingly white, but his whole persona was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning” (JS—H 1:30–32).

Acts 10:4–6 “he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? . . . call for one Simon . . . surnamed is Peter” The majority of scriptural accounts of angelic visitations begin with the fear of the recipient. The ESV translation is,



Vision of Cornelius the Centurion by Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, 1664. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

“terror,” and the NASB, “alarmed.” Even in that scared state, Cornelius knew that this was a representative of God and asked what was needed. This is another great question to ask in prayer and when trying to understand the Spirit’s promptings. The angel answered him by acknowledging Cornelius’ faithful service and honoring it as a memorial offering to God Himself (Matthew 25:40).

The angel could have told Cornelius what to do, but instead he sent him to Peter. (The Greek word for, “surname” meant: “to put a name upon, to surname; to permit one’s self to be surnamed.”) The process is part of the teaching and learning of everyone involved. God is often most concerned about our learning and growth. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained, “No wonder the angel told good old Cornelius that he must send for Peter to learn how to be saved: Peter could baptize, and angels could not, so long as there were legal officers in the flesh holding the keys of the kingdom, or the authority of the priesthood.”⁶

Acts 10:7–8 “Cornelius . . . called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier . . . to Joppa” Cornelius immediately obeyed the angel. He instructed him not to go himself, but to send “men.” We do not know if any of these three men were Jewish, but this would also require more faith on Peter’s behalf. It was a thirty-mile trip south along the sea coast from Caesarea to Joppa where Peter was staying.

Peter’s Vision

Acts 10:9–16

Acts 10:9–10 “Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour . . . he fell into a trance” While hungrily waiting for his mid-day meal, Peter went onto the rooftop to pray and fell into a trance. The Greek word for “trance/*ekstasis*” is different than a “dream/*enypniois*” or “vision/*horama*.” Trance is similar to a vision, and means, “displacement, a throwing of the mind out of its normal state, bewilderment, ecstasy, distraction or disturbance of mind caused.” Luke uses the same word for a Divine communication in describing Paul’s vision in the temple (Acts 22:17–21). Another prophet who fell into a trance was Balaam in Numbers 24.

Acts 10:11–13 “. . . saw the sky opened . . . all kinds of four-footed animals . . . a voice came to him, ‘Get up, Peter, kill and eat!’” (NASB) Peter’s trance appeared as a puzzle to him. The animals he saw descending on a sheet included unclean animals prohibited by the Law of Moses. Israel’s dietary laws are found in Leviticus 11:1–47 and Deuteronomy 14:1–21 (no pork, shell fish, blood, etc.). Since the time of their wanderings in the wilderness, Israelites had not eaten anything these scriptures defined as “unclean.” The maze of confusing ideas required Peter to grapple with the Lord’s message. Like a riddle, it was intentionally given so that Peter could grow in his understanding line upon line. The process of analyzing allowed new ideas to tumble around and allowed him to be more flexible and willing to change in order to understand the Lord’s will. As he did so, he learned that the Lord’s message was not only necessarily about foods, but also about people.



Acts 10:14–15 “I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean” As the vision or trance was repeated for Peter, the Lord taught him to change the definition of what was “unclean” or “common.” This is exactly the problem with modern revelation—it requires us to change, and grow from where we are to where the Lord wants us. We may have thought that what we knew was the whole truth, but Joseph’s restoration repeatedly taught the saints that there is always more to learn, more to change, and more to our covenants.

Acts 10:16 “This happened three times” (ESV) The Lord often does things in triplicate. Angel Moroni repeated his message three times in one night to the seventeen-year-old Joseph Smith (JS—H 1:30–47). Jesus’ allowed Peter to express his love for the Lord three times, and called him to feed His sheep three times (John 21:15–17). In 3 Nephi 11:3–5, the same voice is heard three times before it is understood. The Lord called the Israelites to appear before Him three times a year (Exodus 23:17). Repetition must be needed for our understanding and memory. Three is also is

a sign of a sure witness (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; 1 Corinthians 13:1).

Peter Welcomed a Messenger from Cornelius

Acts 10:17–23a

Acts 10:17–18 “While Peter was puzzling over the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius . . . approached the gate” (BSB) God’s timing is nothing short of miraculous. As we look at God’s timing throughout the scriptures and in our lives, we find carefully placed events and interactions that facilitate learning and growth. A significant part of God’s teaching and miracles, is the timing of the experience. Sometimes, our preparation is the key to His timing. When we have learned enough, we can see the miracle of His timing. Throughout the process, we can trust the timing of His omniscient plan. Peter’s delayed lunch became part of God’s plan for that day.

Acts 10:19–20 “The Spirit said . . . go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them” Peter did not understand his vision or trance until after he obeyed the Spirit’s prompting to follow Cornelius’ three messengers for thirty miles. Yet he received the spirit of discernment to know he could trust these men. The Lord teaches in

varied and interesting ways. He fosters ways for us to figure things out with the help of the Spirit. For example, in young Nephi's vision of the Tree of Life, the angelic guide repeatedly asked him questions such as, "What desirest thou?", "Knowest thou the condescension of God?" and "Look!" (1 Nephi 11:10, 19, 21). To understand Divine revelation requires active learning. By having to put in personal effort to see how the puzzle pieces fit into place, humans are often more invested and more determined to follow God's direction (D&C 9:7-9).

Peter's Visits and Testifies to Cornelius' Household

Acts 10:23-43

Acts 10:21-22 "Here am I . . . Why have you come? . . . A holy angel instructed him" (BSB) The messengers relayed their message with faith and were rewarded with Peter's willingness to travel with them. Still not fully understanding God's intent, Peter followed the three men with faith hoping to understand over time. Peter's willingness became a witness to the three Caesareans that they were on the Lord's errand. Jesus' command given on the Mount of Olives to teach all nations, was about to be understood in a new way (Matthew 28:19).

Acts 10:23 "he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went . . . and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him" The meal was served to the three extra guests who spent the night before they escorted Peter on their return journey. Peter also invited other male disciples, "brethren" to join the missionary trip. Peter may have felt the need for witnesses, or others to help teach the Good News.

Acts 10:24 "The following day . . . Cornelius . . . had called together his relatives and close friends" (NIV) Peter and his group made the return thirty-mile trip in one day. By the time they arrived that night, Cornelius had prepared and gathered other seekers after truth to hear Peter's message. We can see why the Lord chose and prepared the meek and influential Cornelius as the catalyst for this revelation to the early church.

Acts 10:25-26 "Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter . . . said, "I am only a man myself" (NIV) The eager convert gave an honorary greeting aligned with the customs of the day, but Peter refused any hint of worshipping another human. Cornelius was not necessarily worshipping Peter, but honoring the heavenly authority that had sent Peter to him. But Peter knew that Jesus and the Law of Moses taught: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Luke 4:8; Deuteronomy 6:13).

Acts 10:27-29 ". . . It is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile" (NIV) Peter referred to a custom that was added after the Jews returned from Babylon. The oral laws claimed that a Jew became ritually unclean if he visited the house of a Gentile, or even came "into close contact with one."⁷

"But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean" (NIV) Peter connected his vision of the unclean animals with this missionary opportunity to learn that God can change what was once unclean.

This was a blessing of the atonement that had implications beyond Peter's vision. The expansion of the gospel to all children of God restored the earlier plan given to Adam and Eve's posterity (Moses 6:3–6). God works with us in interesting ways. This tearing down of the exclusionary status quo of the Lord's elect from birthright to a willingness to follow Him had far reaching implications. The Lord's message, just like His atonement, was not limited (as Calvin taught), but opened the doorway for all humanity to learn of Jesus on either side of the veil.

Acts 10:30–31 “four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed . . .” Before Luke recorded the Cornelius' account for the second time, he wrote text that sounds as though the seeking centurion was still fasting—but only in the KJV and four other less-used translations.⁸ In contrast, twenty modern English translations all explain that he was “praying.” This leaves readers to question if Cornelius were actually without food (and possibly drink) for that extended period of time.

“. . . we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God” Cornelius and his interested colleagues put their total trust in the Lord's anointed, just as the angel had directed two days before. Their hearts were open, soft, and ready to learn. This is a motivating example on how to prepare for every divinely-called meeting. With such meekness and yearning to learn, the Spirit of the Lord can be poured out in other gatherings of saints.

Acts 10:34 “God is no respecter of persons” Peter's statement has interesting implications in Greek. The word roots suggest that God is no acceptor of the “mask” or outward appearance.

Acts 10:35 “in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (ESV) The universality of the atonement is one of its most beautiful aspects, especially when this truth is added to the restored doctrine of vicarious ordinances and teaching for those who did not have a chance to understand the gospel during their life. We in the Restoration are alone among Christians who believe this scope of God's grace.

Acts 10:36–37 “the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ” (NIV) Peter began teaching how God used the Israelites as his servants to first carry the news of God's peace through the Savior. This is the first time that the Book of Acts has attached peace to the gospel message of Christ's mission. Yet, John the Baptist hinted at it when he said the Messiah would come to baptize with fire (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16). That referred to the baptism of the Spirit, and a witness of the Spirit is peace: “did I not speak peace to your mind? . . . What greater witness can you have than from God?” (D&C 6:23). Additionally, the timing of Peter's emphasis of peace was fitting. The peace of God's plan corresponded to the opening of all nations and peoples to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. This Good News had the potential to bring peace to those nations that may join in the spreading of the gospel to all peoples.

Acts 10:38 “You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good . . .” (NASB) Peter referred to God the Father’s divine “anointing” of Jesus, with the Spirit. But as the same word means Messiah and Christ it also speaks of God endowing the Messiah with the power of the Spirit. Jesus received this anointing by the Spirit in full measure, which facilitated His many miracles and fostered His messages of truth. Anointings are also mentioned in Acts 4:27; Hebrews 1:9; and Psalms 45:7.

Acts 10:39 “We are witnesses . . .” Peter, as an eye witness, had an extremely powerful witness. His fellow disciples from Joppa may have also been eye-witnesses. All who receive the Spirit’s witness can testify with faith that Jesus is the anointed Son of God who became our Redeemer.



St Peter and Cornelius the Centurion by Bernardo Cavallino, 1640s. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

“they put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree” The phrase was discussed before (Acts 5:30). It refers back to Deuteronomy 21:22–23, “And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged [is] accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee [for] an inheritance.” This type of death was an unclean death for a Jew, because the blood stayed in the body. Is this significant? Christ suffered the most humiliating death possible for a Jew and the most painful for a Roman, so that He could go below all things.

Acts 10:40–41 “us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead” (NIV) Peter’s testimony emphasized the physical nature of Jesus’ resurrected body—He was not just a spirit because he ate and drank. This was an important differentiation at that time because philosophers taught that the spirit was purer than the body. It was good to leave the body behind and become a spirit again after death. They felt anything corporal was not eternal. Yet Jesus came back with a body. To a Greek that did not make sense. Why would one want to remain tethered to and punished with a body? These ideas had infiltrated much of the world including the Epistles (1 Corinthians 7–10).

Acts 10:42–43 “He [Jesus] commanded us to preach . . . that he is the one whom God appointed as judge . . . [and] everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness” (NIV) Not only were all the OT prophecies fulfilled concerning the Promised Messiah and the Suffering Servant, but now Jesus has become the Judge for the living

and the dead to determine how well humanity believed the prophets' witness. Peter also added the qualifier, that forgiveness comes from "belief/*pisteúō*," which is defined as "conviction and trust to which a man is impelled by a certain inner and higher prerogative."⁹

God Gives the Holy Ghost to Gentiles

Acts 10:44-48

Acts 10:44-45 "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all . . ." The Spirit again acted as God's agent to testify of truth. Peter's group of Jewish disciples, and Cornelius' group of eager converts received an outpouring of the Spirit witnessing that the Spirit of God had poured out blessings and gifts upon the meek Gentile disciples. Both groups had been praying to know God's will, and both received God's witness at that time.

Acts 10:46 ". . . speaking in tongues and exalting God" (BSB) Peter's colleagues were astounded. The Spirit that the Roman converts felt was a great witness of one of the gifts of the Spirit. After years of working with the Lord, the Apostles received the gift of tongues while preaching at the Temple, 50 days after Jesus' death, on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:3-4). Yet God gave the gift to Cornelius and his kin before their baptism! In our dispensation, the first time Joseph Smith heard the gift was when he met Brigham Young for the first time in 1832.¹⁰

Observing this miracle broke down a segregating wall that had come from a misunderstanding of God, His people, and their neighbors. Jesus cut down all false traditions and thoughts throughout His mission, and continues to help disciples do the same as we draw to Him. The gift of tongues was such a visible gift that it could not be denied. The chief Apostle discerned that the gift was from God.

Acts 10:47-48 "So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (BSB) Peter admitted that as God had blessed the Gentile investigators with the Spirit, how could they be denied the first baptism by water? The experience was so beautiful that Cornelius invited Peter and his fellow disciples to stay in Caesarea for a few days. The disciples no doubt used that time to nurture the faith of Cornelius' group. The disciples added to their understanding of the ancient Law of Sacrifice and teach them Jesus' higher laws as part of the Law of the Gospel.

ACTS 11

The Gospel Spreads to the Gentiles

Acts 11:1 "Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God" News traveled quickly and the disciples in Jerusalem were aghast. Peter had moved forward with unhesitating faith in the divine manifestation, but his colleagues of the circumcision did not share his enthusiasm. They were appalled that Peter had eaten with "uncircumcised" men.

ORAL LAWS

Oral Laws interpreted and micromanaged the Mosaic Law. They were developed by rabbis who claimed they were first given to Moses orally, but were not written down until centuries later. Thousands of extra laws grew as a figurative fence or buffer zone around their beloved Law of Moses. In addition to the 613 commandments in the Torah (first five books of the Old Testament), rabbis systematized ten thousand commandments to govern Jewish life. For example, the fourth commandment includes a prohibition against work on the Sabbath. So, rabbis itemized thirty-nine definitions of work, which then grew into hundreds of applications.

*Right: Moses with the Tables of the Law by Pieter Gaal, 1803.
Image via Wikimedia Commons.*



Acts 11:2 “Uncircumcised men” referred to any non-Jewish male, and “circumcised” meant covenant people. By the time of the New Testament, Jews who followed the *oral law*¹¹ would not eat with anyone “unclean,” which was interpreted as “uncircumcised.” The title had taken on a broader use and was used for all other infractions of the Mosaic Law that made one unclean (i.e. not washing hands was labeled, “uncircumcised”).

Eating a meal with someone was nigh unto making a covenant with them. (This is in part because, without silverware, they touched the same foods from the same serving dishes.) Jewish table fellowship had been carefully crafted into their culture for centuries. Originally, Exodus 12:48, commanded that no uncircumcised male could eat the Passover. But the overzealous had expanded its application into hundreds of oral laws by the time of the New Testament.¹²

The immediate implication meant that Gentile converts joined the disciples for their weekly reenactment of the Lord’s Supper (the sacrament was a meal at the time). This unified table of fellowship was difficult for some of the disciples because it breached deeply ingrained social and racial segregation in the Jewish society. The problem grew into one of the major concerns for early disciples who welcomed Gentiles into the fold, and which was discussed at the Jerusalem Council a few years later (Acts 15).

Acts 11:4–15 “Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story” (NIV) or “gave them details point by point” (JB). Luke’s version that nearly identically repeats Peter’s vision account signals that this is of pivotal importance. In chapter 10, the story following the vision with Peter traveling to Caesarea and meeting Cornelius is much shorter in the retelling. Also, the first time Luke wrote the first account was in third person, and in chapter 11 he wrote it in first person.

Acts 11:16 “I remembered what the Lord had said . . .” Peter recalled that the Lord told them in His forty-day ministry (Acts 1:5), that they would be baptized with the Spirit. Luke repeats it again as a second witness to testify that when Cornelius’ family and friends received a dramatic gift of the Spirit, it was God’s sign or witness that they were worthy of baptism.

Acts 11:17 “What was I that I could withstand God?” Peter was able to say this now after learning a very hard lesson. He did not feel this way at the Last Supper when he did not believe Jesus’ should to be killed nor that he could ever deny Him. But after both happened, his heart softened. As the chief Apostle, he responded to this prompting with complete faith, even without understanding how. He stood up to his peers defending God’s witness. The young boy Joseph described his feelings with similar words: “who am I that I can withstand God” (JS—H 1:25). Cornelius and the other converts believed the same.

Acts 11:18 “When they heard these things, they held their peace and glorified God” What a great example of following counsel! As the Jews had had centuries of feeling that they were the chosen people, it was new for them to realize that God would grant repentance and Eternal Life to the Gentiles too. Unfortunately, some of them did not remain submissive as we read in Acts 15–26.

The Church in Antioch

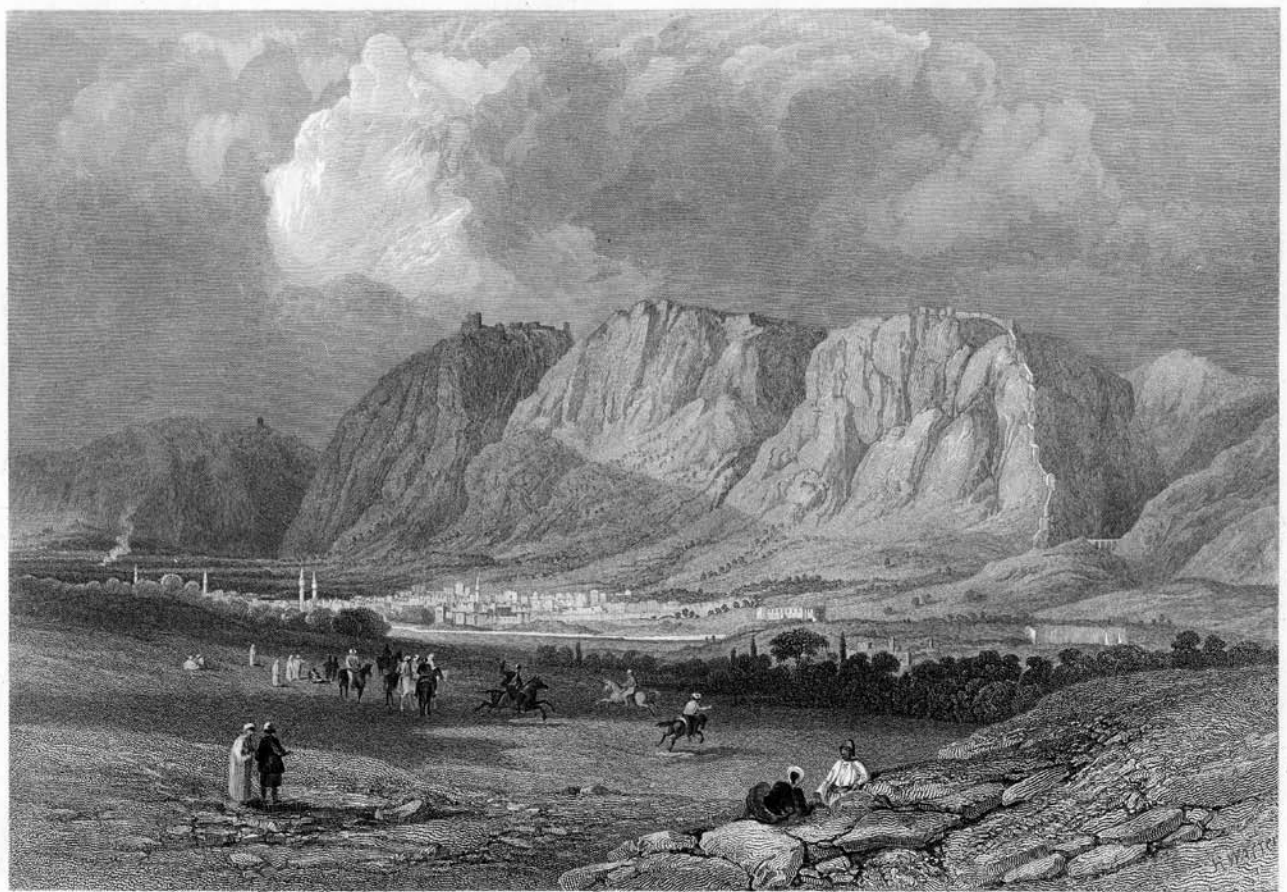
Acts 11:19 “Meanwhile, those scattered by the persecution . . . sp[oke] the message only to Jews” (BSB) The early persecution of the Jerusalem saints that initially seemed like a devastating set back became a blessing in disguise. With Peter’s new revelation, all those scattered disciples were in the best places possible to spread the gospel to the Gentiles. Ironically, Antioch at the time was the third largest metropolis of the Roman world. It was 350 miles north of Jerusalem, the imperial Legate of Syria, and the capital city with a population of 800,000 people. The well-to-do city lay on the northern slope of Mt. Silpius, 16 miles from the coast, with a winding river plain, lots of trees, and 15% of its population were Jewish. Jews congregated there when King Antiochus gave them security.

Herod the Great rewarded the people of Antioch for their kindness toward the Jews by paving two and a half miles of street with white marble blocks (ca. 10 BC). The Jewish donations for the Temple from Antioch showed their wealth. Josephus records that one of their synagogues was adorned with the spoils from the Solomon’s

Temple. One of Antioch's missionaries was Saul, who contributed to the Christians' scattering. He then served in his home town of Tarsus as a missionary to his fellow Israelites (Acts 9:30). At this point, all the preaching through the Diaspora, was still only to the Jews and Samaritans (Acts 1:8; 8:1). But that was soon to change.

Antioch, Syria was the third largest metropolis in the Roman world. It was a wealthy city on the northern slope of Mt. Silpius, 16 miles from the coast and 350 miles north of Jerusalem. The city included a winding river plain and lots of trees. It was the imperial Legate and capital of Syria, with a population of 800,000 people. Fifteen percent of the population were Jewish. As Greece conquered the Mediterranean King Antiochus gave Jews security there. In ~10 BC, King Herod the Great thanked the people of Antioch for their kindness toward Jews by paving two and a half miles of street with white marble blocks. The Antioch Jews donated generously for the Temple. Josephus records that one of their synagogues was adorned with the spoils from Solomon's Temple.

Below: Antioch in Syria from the North West engraving by William Miller after H Warren from a sketch by Capt. Byam Martin R.N. published in The Imperial Bible Dictionary. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Engraving by H. Warren from a sketch by Capt. Byam Martin R.N. published in The Imperial Bible Dictionary.

Acts 11:20 “But some of them . . . went to Antioch . . . to the Greeks as well, proclaiming the good news” (BSB) Jewish-Christians from Cyprus and Cyrene (capital of Libya) opened the missionary work to the Gentiles in Antioch. Another translation for “Grecian” is gentile. Over the centuries since Israelites were relocated by the Assyrians and Babylonians, the Jews (which referred to all Israelites at the time of the New Testament¹³), incorporated themselves into the Hellenized society while remaining a distinct people.

Acts 11:21 “a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord” Proselyting to the Gentiles prospered in Antioch, because the “hand of the Lord” was with them. As a result of the success, the church sent an apostle there to confirm the gift of the Holy Ghost. In the New Testament, not every apostle is a member of the Twelve, so we do not know for sure if Barnabas was this apostle or not. Also, the word “apostle” in Greek means “one sent” so here it could refer to someone with a mission call, someone with an apostolic calling, or one of the Twelve. It appears that the New Testament uses the word apostle for more than the Twelve. Paul and Barnabas are not called apostles until Acts 14:14, and 1 Thessalonians 2:6.

Acts 11:22 “the church . . . in Jerusalem . . . sent forth Barnabas to . . . Antioch” Luke introduces the generous Levite, Joseph Barnabas from Cyprus, and tells of when he gave land to the church in Jerusalem for their united order (Acts 4:36–37). His surname meant, “son of exhortation,” obviously a great missionary title. Being a native of Cyprus, he would have already been familiar with customs in the Diaspora.

Acts 11:23–24 “he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord . . .” (NIV) Barnabas found the Gentile converts full of the Spirit. Luke regularly reminds his audience that it is the Holy Spirit that directs the leaders of the church through revelation, not the brethren initiating their own ideas. Barnabas’ advice applies to all disciples in every dispensation: “cleave unto the Lord” (KJV) or be “steadfast,” with “full purpose” (RSV) to build the kingdom. Barnabas served as a type of mission president in Antioch (Acts 11:26).

Acts 11:25 “Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul” (BSB) Barnabas was the one who initially accepted Saul when other disciples were reticent to believe the sincerity of one who had persecuted the church. Barnabas had introduced Saul to the Apostles. Now Barnabas wanted his help in Antioch. Barnabas had to travel about 90 miles to Tarsus to call Saul to the Antioch ministry as either a missionary companion or counselor. Their reunion must have been sweet for both of them.

Acts 11:26 “for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people” (NIV) It is in Antioch with *Barnabas* that Christians are first called by that title (at least in that dispensation—it was used earlier in the new world in a different language in Alma 46:13–15). Paul served with Barnabas for a year-long mission.

Acts 11:27 “in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch” The word “prophet” had a broader definition in the New Testament than in the Old Testament or in modern times. In the second half of the New Testament, John calls anyone a prophet who has a testimony of Jesus as the Messiah and Savior (1 John 4:2–3; Revelation 10:19), and Luke calls one who has the gift of prophecy a prophet (Acts 11:28). Throughout the New Testament, the Greek word used for “prophets” such as Isaiah and Jonah means a “foreteller, an inspired speaker.”

Acts 11:28 “Agabus . . . through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius)” (NIV) Agabus was a Jewish disciple from Jerusalem who also prophesied of Paul’s imprisonment (Acts 21:10). This famine was confirmed by Josephus in approximately AD 46–48, which coincided with Claudius Caesar’s reign from AD 41–51.¹⁴ Famines and droughts hit Jerusalem especially hard because it was land-locked and food prices were three to six times higher in the city

than in the country. Profiteers exploited the desperate situation and prices soared.¹⁵ Furthermore, the famine and shortages coincided with the political change from Roman rule to a Jewish kingdom that persecuted Christians (AD 41–44 King Agrippa I—the father of King Agrippa II who speaks with Paul in Acts 25:13–26:32). All of this confirms that it was a blessing for most of the disciples to have left Jerusalem earlier, and that God loves and protects those who understand that He is omniscient and chose to follow Him.

Acts 11:29–30 “The disciples . . . provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea . . . by Barnabas and Saul” (NIV) The generous Christians in Antioch gathered funds or perhaps supplies for the suffering Saints in Jerusalem. They also suffered from political changes at this time from Herod Agrippa I. It sounds like our Fast Offerings, humanitarian aid programs, and the Perpetual Education Fund. This extra welfare trip to Jerusalem cut Barnabas and Paul’s mission to only one year. The 350-mile one-way trip journey probably took nearly three weeks. We call this Paul’s first Gentile mission, though he had already been serving in Tarsus.



ACTS 12

James Killed and Peter Imprisoned

Acts 12:1-5

Acts 12:1 “King Herod reached out to harm some who belonged to the church” (BSB) King Herod Agrippa I ruled Palestine from AD 41–44. For the Jews in Jerusalem, it was a “golden era.” It was the first time in forty years, that they did not have a Roman governor. However, it was not a golden era for Christians as they were harshly persecuted. Herod Agrippa’s son (Agrippa II) ruled parts of Palestine after AD 50 (Acts 25).¹⁶

HEROD AGRIPPA I

Herod Agrippa I was the grandson of King Herod the Great (builder of the temple) through his Jewish wife Mariamne I. To avoid the sword that fell on most of King Herod’s offspring, his guardians sent him to Rome at age six shortly before his grandfather’s death. He was educated in Rome, and grew up accustomed to luxury. He was constantly in debt and known as a notorious spendthrift. In AD 37, one of his close friends, Caius, became Caesar Caligula. That relationship opened a way for Herod Agrippa I to receive a position in the Middle East. Four years later, in AD 41, when Claudius became the emperor, Agrippa I was given charge over the same kingdom that his grandfather Herod the Great had ruled (BC 37-1AD). Palestine had not been unified under a Herodian king in over 40 years. Agrippa I was a pious Jew and an advocate of the Law of Moses. The Pharisees praised this rule, but it led to violent Christian persecution. He died in AD 44.



Agrippa I, from “Promptuarii Iconum Insigniorum”, Published by Guillaume Rouille (1518?-1589). Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 12:2 “he killed James the brother of John with the sword” The New Testament includes three men named James:

1. James the Son of Zebedee and Salome, the brother of John the Beloved, and one of Jesus’ Twelve Apostles.
2. James the son of Alphaeus, also a member of the Twelve Apostles.
3. James son of Joseph and Mary, the half-brother of the Lord, and author of the Epistle of James.

The first James, son of Zebedee, became the second Christian martyr after Stephen. He was probably beheaded. As an endowed Apostle, we believe he was not killed until his life's work was finished.

Acts 12:3 “because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also” Peter was imprisoned for the second time. It was a busy time in Jerusalem, as Luke includes, that it was during the feast of “Unleavened Bread,” meaning the week after the Passover. This must have been poignant as the Jews took Jesus at the same springtime holiday nearly a decade earlier. The young church felt the renewed pain of the Lord's departure due to James' death and the fear that Peter's imprisonment would lead to his death as well.

Acts 12:4 “guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out to the people after the Passover” (BSB) Agrippa I, must have heard about Peter's miraculous deliverance from prison the first time (Acts 5:19), because he placed a heavy guard of sixteen men to watch his cell. (A squad was four guards—one for each watch of the night). Usually one squad was sufficient—one watched while the other three slept—but apparently, they were worried about Peter escaping again. “Passover” comes from the Greek word, “*Pascha*.” The KJV translated it as Easter, but those celebrations did not begin for years to come.

Acts 12:5 “Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying” (NIV) There is extra power in unified prayer. We assume that the persecution associated with James' martyrdom (the son of Zebedee and Salome), affected the Christians pilgrimage to Jerusalem that Passover. We know that later Paul often arranged his travel to return to Jerusalem in time to join the Jewish feasts. But due to the heightened persecutions, the Christians may have stayed away that spring. There must have been some members of the church still in Jerusalem, though, who may have gathered together for prayer and possibly their safety (Acts 12:12).

Peter's 2nd Miraculous Rescue from Prison

Acts 12:6-19

Acts 12:6 “Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance” (NIV) The night before Herod had hoped to bring Peter to trial, God sent another angel to change the course of history. No matter how tight the security, God will protect His anointed ones.

Acts 12:7-9 “an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. ‘Quick, get up!’” (NIV) Peter must have been very, very tired to sleep through the angelic light and physical jostling. Even then, he thought it was a dream. (For more on angels see Acts 10:3.)

Acts 12:10 “They passed the first and second guards . . . the iron gate . . . opened for them by itself . . . When they . . . walked the length of one block, the angel suddenly left him” (BSB) The Lord's intervention is inter-

esting, as it is restricted to the minimum of what is needed. Once Peter was out of harms' way, he was expected to walk on his own. Divine intervention fosters the most growth possible. Humans are expected to do our part and learn from our own experience.

Acts 12:12 “he came to the house of Mary the mother of John . . . Mark; where many were gathered together praying” This Mary is the mother of John Mark (who is mentioned eight times in the New Testament). She was wealthy enough to house a large group of saints in Jerusalem. This was probably the “house church” where the saints met to reenact the Lord’s Supper. John Mark is traditionally thought of as the scribe of the Gospel of Mark. He was the cousin of Barnabas (Col 4:10), junior companion of Paul and Barnabas who went home early from his mission (Acts 13:5, 13), and Peter’s companion later (1 Peter 5:13, “very useful in serving me ... my son”).



Liberation of St. Peter by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, 1665.
Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 12:13–16 “he knocked at the door . . . Rhoda . . . Recognizing Peter’s voice . . . ran in and reported . . . But Peter continued knocking” (ESV) While the group of praying saints were dumbfounded with Rhoda’s report of hearing Peter’s voice, with their sleep deprivation, and the darkness of the night, it took them awhile to think of going out to the front gate. This story of Peter knocking for help and the maid forgetting to open the door, reminds me of the way I communicate in prayer sometimes. Sometimes I do not listen long enough to open the door and get the full answer.

Acts 12: 17 “Peter motioned with his hand for silence, and he described . . .” (BSB) The group must have broken into pandemonium with cheers and praises. Peter motioned for them to be quiet so that he could get a word in edgewise. He was still wisely cautious about disturbing other Jewish captors. He recounted the miracle and left instructions.

“Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this” (NIV) Peter wanted James, the brother of Jesus, to be notified. By studying across Acts and the Epistles, it appears that James was serving in a role similar to a Dis-

strict Leader or Bishop in Jerusalem.¹⁷ As a local authority, he had jurisdiction even then. Not all the saints were gathered together, but Peter wanted both the men and women of the church informed of this saving miracle.

“he left for another place” (NIV) The saints communicated with each other and knew where they were. But we are not told where Peter went. Tradition claims he left Jerusalem, but he was back in Jerusalem by Acts 15. Peter’s apostolic call included traveling as we read in Acts 10:23–24; 1 Corinthians 9:5, Galatians 2:11. This is the end of Luke’s discussion of Peter and the missions in Judea and Samaria in the book of Acts.

Acts 12:18–19 “there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. . . Herod had [them] put to death” Herod’s action to execute the guards who lost their prisoner was standard Roman protocol—as harsh as it sounds.¹⁸ Peter escaped, but the guards were killed because of it. Without trusting in a better afterlife, this seems unfair. However, God prepared a place for these guards to learn and continue progressing in the next world (D&C 138). God’s love motivates all he does (Moses 1:39; Romans 8:35–39).

Herod’s Death

Acts 12:20–24

Acts 12:19b–20 “Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon . . .” Herod Agrippa I went to visit the beautiful costal city and sumptuous palace that his grandfather built. Luke illustrates the cantankerous nature of Agrippa I, with this short account of his cruelty to Gentiles as well as to Christians. According to Josephus, Agrippa I placed an embargo from Egypt. Even though Tyre needed to import their food, Agrippa would not allow it. Josephus also described an envoy from Tyre being turned away.¹⁹

Acts 12:21–23 “Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he...died” (NIV) Luke’s story of Agrippa’s death dates the death of James and Peter’s second imprisonment to 44 AD.

Barnabas and Saul Sent Off

Acts 12:24–25

Acts 12:24 “the word of the Lord grew and multiplied” It is significant that even in times of persecution and great tribulations, the Lord moves His work forward. We grow when we trust in Him during our trials.

Acts 12:25 “Barnabas and Saul returned . . . and took . . . Mark” When Barnabas and Saul finished their “ministry” in Jerusalem, they returned the 350 miles back to Antioch. Luke wrote as if Barnabas were the senior companion. He also brought a third companion from Jerusalem, his nephew John Mark, the son of the wealthy Jerusalem homeowner, Mary. As we know that Barnabas donated land for the Jerusalem saints to live the united order, it is feasible that Mary’s home was part of that family property (Acts 4:36–37).

It was important for Saul and Barnabas to be in Jerusalem at that time. Did they visit their families, or did their families relocate to Antioch? Was the 700-mile round-trip needed to pick up their new missionary companion, John Mark? In addition to these potential reasons, one thing stands out in the text. It was important for them to be in Jerusalem at the death of James and imprisonment of Peter. This may have been the time when Barnabas and Saul were called to the apostleship. We do not know if either were ever members of the Twelve. (They may have served as “Assistants to the Twelve” as repeated in the mid-twentieth century.)

From that point forward, the Book of Acts moves ahead to Paul’s next three missions to the Gentiles as an “apostle” or “one sent” to witness of Jesus Christ. They are called Paul’s three Gentile missions, but he has already served in Tarsus and Antioch. We do not know if they are included as part of his three apostolic missions. The text does not number them that way, but most maps and commentaries refer to the next mission as Paul’s first.

BARNABAS AND PAUL’S MISSION

Acts 13–15

Return to Antioch

Acts 13:1 “in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers” The list begins with Barnabas and ends with Saul for emphasis. None of these people were mentioned earlier with the prophets who came from Jerusalem (see notes on Acts 11:27). They appear to act as local church leaders and were well known to the writer: “Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch.”

Acts 13:2 “While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul’” (NIV) The five as “prophets and teachers” fasted for direction and received inspiration to send Barnabas and Saul to proselyte in Cyprus. When Jesus was on the earth, He told His disciples they did not need to fast while He was there (Matthew 9:14), but now that He is gone, they do fast for further revelation—and Luke highlights it twice in two sentences. We learn in Acts 13:5 that John Mark also went with them to Cyprus.

Acts 13:3 “they . . . prayed, and laid *their* hands on them . . . [and] sent *them* away” This is the second example in the Acts of using the laying on of hands as an example of setting someone apart with authority (Acts 6:6).

Cyprus

Acts 13:4 “they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed . . .” Barnabas and Saul had to travel about sixteen miles to the coast, and then sail approximately 100 miles to the port town of Seleucia, in eastern Cyprus. As Cyprus was Barnabas’ homeland, he knew the local language, or dialect, and customs (Acts 3:36). Cyprus was



The conversion of Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus, 1542.
Image via Wikimedia Commons.

the home of many Jews, and Barnabas probably had contacts there.

Acts 13:5 “they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews” Luke uses the phrase “the word of God,” 26 times in the New Testament. The phrase usually can be substituted with the word “gospel” or the gospel message of Jesus. Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark established a pattern as they arrived at each new town. They began their missionary efforts at the Sabbath services in the local Jewish synagogue. They felt it was important to give their Jews the first chance to hear the gospel message in each town. This was in keeping with Jesus’ prophecy, the “first shall be last; and the last first” (Mark 10:31).

“and they had also John to *their* minister” or “to assist them” (ESV), or “helper” (NIV). This is John Mark, introduced in Acts 12:12.

Acts 13:6 “They traveled through the whole island . . . [and] met a Jewish sorcerer” (NIV) The missionaries started at the largest city on the east side of the island and moved 100 miles west across the island to the Roman capital of the west, Paphos. The sorcerer and “false prophet,” Bar-jesus, was the Greek name of “son of Joshua,” who also used the name, Elymas (Acts 13:8).

Acts 13:7 “The deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus . . . desired to hear the word of God” The Greek word for “deputy” is also translated, “proconsul” (RSV, NIV, JB, NAS) and “Governor” (NEB). Luke describes this government official as a seeking prudent man who asked for the missionaries. The order of Barnabas’ and Saul’s names suggests Barnabas was still the senior companion.

Acts 13:8 “The sorcerer . . . opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith” (NIV) Peter also encountered a sorcerer, Simon Magnus, in Acts 8:9–20. Did Luke include this story to show that Paul is doing the same thing that Peter did? If so, then it may also pattern Jesus’ miracles of exorcism (Luke 4:31–37; 8:26–39; 11:14–23). Luke’s structure opens up more meaning to his message. The repeating examples testify that they are all working with God’s direction and power.

Acts 13:9 “Saul, (who also *is called Paul*), filled with the Holy Ghost . . .” Luke makes the change from referring to Saul by his Hebrew name, to the name he used as Roman citizen, the Latin transliteration, Paul. The timing of this event in the text follows Saul’s efforts to proselytize a Governor named Paul. From this point on, he is only referred to by his Roman name, Paul, including by his own epistles.

Acts 13:10 “O child of the devil and enemy of all righteousness! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery” (BSB) Whenever the Lord has an important work, Satan’s tries to counterfeit and confuse it. The sorcerer, Elymas, was a puppet for Satan to “pervert the way of the Lord.”

Acts 13:11 “the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind . . . for a season” The Lord’s punishment given through Paul’s voice had an interesting history for him (Acts 9:9). Paul knew exactly what it felt like to be blind “for a season.” When he experienced this same proof of God’s hand, it had a powerful effect on changing his heart. We are not told the effect it had on Elymas though, only that he went to find “some to lead him by the hand.”

Acts 13:12 “the deputy . . . believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord” The deputy/proconsul/governor already had faith (Acts 11:7–8). He was not seeking a sign, but the miracle strengthened his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Image of the coast of Cyprus by Dimitris Vetsikas from Pixabay



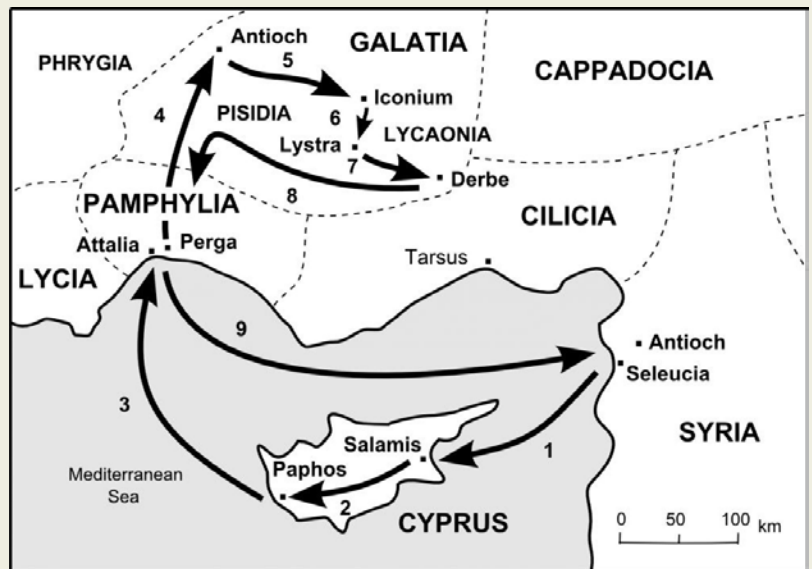
Paul and Barnabas Leave Cyprus for Galatia

GALATIA

Galatia: A landlocked region of Asia Minor made up of a collection of cities with separate political governments. This became an advantage to the Apostles, as they could escape from one jurisdiction to another. The Galatians' population migrated from three European-Gaul tribes in 278 BC. Other peoples joined them, including Israelites. In 25 BC, Caesar Augustus annexed the province into the Roman Empire.

ANTIOCH

Antioch (Pisidia): A garrison town built on the Anthios River in central Asia Minor just north of Lake Limnai. It was also the hometown of Paul's Christian convert, Serguis Paulus, in Cyprus.



Acts 13:13 “After setting sail from Paphos, Paul and his companions came to Perga” (BSB) From now on Luke refers to Paul first, as if he were the leader. None of the timing of this chapter is clearly attached to an historical event so we estimate that these events occurred sometime between AD 44 and 48 AD. We never know how long they stayed in one place or another. Luke is not writing a history, but a theology laced with vignettes from history. Geographically, this verse covered a lot of space and conversely, must have taken a lot of time. The map of the eastern Mediterranean shows that they left the island of Cyprus and sailed north to modern day Turkey.

“John departing from them returned to Jerusalem” The important message in this verse is that something happened to Barnabas’ young cousin, John Mark, in Cyprus so that he needed to return home early from his mission. We did not know what caused his departure—illness, family needs, persecution. As a Jew raised in Jerusalem, preaching to the Gentiles may have been a struggle, too, and certainly a complete paradigm shift. Whatever the cause was, the New Testament follows the young John Mark growing and becoming a beloved companion of Paul’s and Peter’s in the future.

Acts 13:14 “they came to Antioch in Pisidia” Paul remains in modern Turkey of ancient Galatia for the rest of his mission. In two short sentences Luke traces their dangerous 240 mile boat ride from Cyprus to Perga, a port in modern day Turkey, and then inland, traversing the next 180 miles due north to Galatia, stopping at a small town also named, Antioch (not to be confused with the huge city Antioch in Syria that was their mission headquarters).

If we do not pause and reflect, we may take for granted how integral the Roman organization and network of ports, harbors, roads, lodging, and availability of foods were that made the missionaries’ travel possible. Paul and Barnabas became familiar with the eastern Mediterranean and beyond. Sea travel was facilitated by the creation of an amazing water-proof cement and sea going cargo ships.

Yet all travel was still very dangerous and costly. Physical ailments plagued travelers—including, hunger, thirst, dysentery, blisters, cracked calluses, sun burn, diseases carried by bug bites, and, long term, dehydration, lameness, and cataracts. The New Testament rarely even mentions the cost, but we see a glimpse of the financial sacrifice that missionary work required from snippets like these: “These women were ministering to them out of their own means” (Luke 8:3; also Matthew 27:55), and “because [Paul] was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked” (Acts 18:13; also 4:35). Paul’s and Barnabas’ wealth was spent in the service of God.²⁰

Antioch Synagogue Service

Acts 13:14b–15a “went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. And after the reading . . .” In Jewish weekly synagogue worship they stood to read the weekly section of scripture (both from the Law and the Prophets) and then, sat to discuss them. (Their seated position showed respect to the higher nature of the text than their own opinion.) We saw an example of this in Luke 4:16–21.

Acts 13:15b–16 “, “Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak” (NIV) Paul and Barnabas, as visitors, would have had a chance to speak or give their opinion on the scripture passages. Paul carefully addressed two groups in his audience:

“Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, (1)Men of Israel, and (2)ye that fear God, give audience” (parentheticals added) Paul referred to the (1)native Jews, and the (2)worshipping proselytes who were not circumcised. As mentioned earlier, at this time the title, “God fearers” or those who “fear God,” was a technical term. Paul repeated both groups carefully in the middle of his sermon as well (Acts 13:26). The separation was crucial to the missionaries’ message—that all can share the same history, all are alike to God, and all can receive full blessings through Jesus’ atonement.

Paul's Synagogue Sermon

Acts 13:17-41

Acts 13:17 “**The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers . . .**” This begins the longest synagogue speech of Acts (28 verses). Luke did not write a micro-history of Israel, but instead recorded examples of history incorporated into sermons that pointed to Jesus as the Messiah. (Similar sermons probably occurred in conjunction with each of the summary verses, Acts 13:5, 46). Luke's type of writing could only work in a church with consistent doctrines and practices.²¹ Paul recounted the mighty and divine power that led the children of Israel out of Egypt.

Acts 13: 18 “**He endured their conduct for about forty years in the wilderness**” (BSB) This brief summary of Israel's 40 years in the wilderness emphasized Moses' suffering, as “bore with them” (RSV), and “endured their conduct” (NIV). In review, the number 40 was a general statement in Hebrew of much time and was symbolic of a purification period (i.e. 40 days fasting, 40 days of rain for Noah, purification period 40 days after a male is born, etc.)

Acts 13:19–23 “**. . . God gave them judges until the time of . . .**” (NIV) Paul covered 450 years of Israelite history from when they entered the Promised Land and were organized under judges, until Samuel called King Saul. In Paul's historical run through, King David was not the usual stopping point, but only quickly referenced as “of this man's [David's] seed” as introduction for the great message of “a Saviour, Jesus,” as the promised “son of David.”

Acts 13:24–25 “**John preached repentance and baptism . . . there is one coming after me**” (NIV) This reference to John the Baptist allows us to see how far his influence was that even a Jewish audience in Galatia knew him. It also suggests that a text of John the Baptist's saying had been distributed before the Gospels were written.

Acts 13:26–30 “**. . . they knew him not . . . yet desired . . . that he should be slain . . . But God raised him from the dead**” By condemning Jesus, the Jews fulfilled the Psalms and Isaian prophecies related to the promised Messiah.

Acts 13:31 “**He was seen for many days by . . . witnesses**” (NHBT). This refers to Jesus' multiple appearances during His “forty-day ministry” that followed His resurrection. During that time the Lord taught His leaders and disciples how to carry on and build His church.

Acts 13:32–35 “**God hath fulfilled . . . as it is also written in . . .**” As a strict Pharisee and student of Gamaliel, Paul would have known his scriptures well (Acts 22:3). After his conversion, he had a keen interest in finding scriptures that were fulfilled by Jesus as the Savior of the World. As the Law as given to lead them to Jesus, the scriptures were filled with typology (Galatians 3:24).

Acts 13:36–37 “David . . . was buried . . . But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay” (NIV) Paul went back to their beloved King David to remind them that even their greatest king “died” and was “buried” (JB), but God restored Jesus to a perfect incorruptible resurrected body.

Acts 13:38–39 “. . . through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed” (BSB) Some Jewish rabbis taught that obeying the Law was the means of redemption; other rabbis held to the saving graces of their blood line as children of Abraham. Yet their scriptures had taught that salvation comes from outward and inward cleansing (i.e. Leviticus 16:30; Psalm 51:2; Jeremiah 33:8; Ezekiel 36:25).

Acts 13:40–41 “Beware therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken in the prophets” (ASV) Paul ended with a warning from previous prophets who foretold the destruction of those who reject the Redeemer: Isaiah 29:14; Ezekiel 33:9; Habakkuk 1:5; and Malachi 3:1; 4:1.

Acts 13:42–43 “The Gentiles sought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath” (AKJV) Paul’s sermon was especially appreciated by the “God fearing” Gentiles who wanted to hear more. There were also Jews who “followed Paul and Barnabas” after the meeting, and the missionaries “urged them to continue in the grace of God” (BSB).

Acts 13:44–45 “The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord” (ESV) Every missionary’s dream: a church service full of investigators! Unfortunately, the large crowd triggered envy and the Jews contradicted Paul and Barnabas. Their envy came from pride. Rather than meekly listening, it led them to competitiveness. One sin seems to lead to a worse sin, and theirs’ moved from envy to “blaspheming.”

Acts 13:46–47 “Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles” (NIV) Paul and Barnabas got fed up with the prideful Jewish closed-mindedness and focused their efforts on the Gentiles.

Acts 13:48 “As many as believed were ordained to eternal life” (JST) Joseph Smith changed the order of two words, “believed” and “ordained.” By putting *belief* first, it created a very different doctrinal message. Everyone can choose to be chosen. In over 30 English translations, belief is a byproduct of God’s decision: “as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (KJV). This stems from the Calvinistic bent of exclusionary election and predestination. The order of those two words is fundamental to the restoration. Individuals have the power to act and believe. We can choose to believe in Jesus’ atonement. If we exert enough belief, whether in this life or in the next, it will lead to faith strong enough to act and internalize God’s teachings. Then the Savior’s cleansing power becomes efficacious and allows disciples to return to the presence of God. Eternal Life is another way of saying God’s life (D&C 132:24; Moroni 7:41; etc.).

Acts 13:49–50 “The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. But the Jewish leaders incited . . . **persecution**” The opposition always works harder against important causes. This missionary work was paramount to the history of the world and after-world. We need not fear though. God knows the end from the beginning and He will always conquer. Satan and his devils will be bound by the righteousness of the saints when Christ comes to reign.

Acts 13:51 “they shook off the dust of their feet against them” Paul and Barnabas were following Jesus’ instructions which we discussed previously in Matthew 10:14; Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5; 10:11. This sign was used early in this dispensation, D&C 24:15, but is discouraged now.

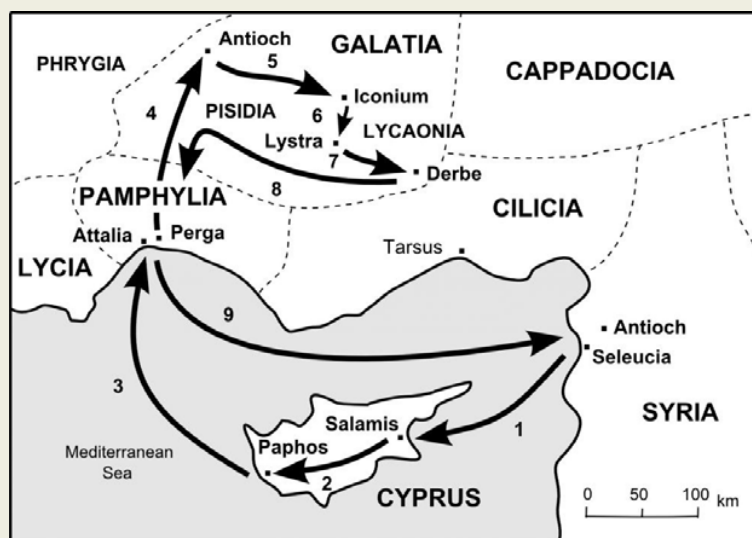
Acts 13:52 “the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost” In spite of trials, God blessed the disciples with joy and an internal penetrating witness of the Holy Ghost.

PAUL FINISHES THE GALATIA MISSION WITH BARNABAS

GALATIA

1. **Iconium:** A city built up around an oasis in the midst of 80-miles of grazing plains. Two main highways crossed near the water source.

2. **Lystra:** After it became part of the Roman province of Galatia, Romans built a 19-mile road south to connect Iconium. It was the hometown of Lois, Eunice, and Timothy (2 Tim 1:5; 3:15).



3. **Derbe:** 60-miles SE of Iconium; coins inscribed, Claudioderbe, honored the Emperor. Mentioned four times in Acts 14:6, 20, 16:1; and 20:45.

Paul and Barnabas at Iconium

Acts 14:1-7

Acts 14:1 “In Iconium . . . into the synagogue of the Jews . . . a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed” Paul and Barnabas arrived at the beautiful oasis city of Iconium. They continued the practice of beginning their missionary efforts at the local Synagogue. Luke refers to the “God Fearers” or the believers in Moses’ God who attend synagogue worship, as the “Greeks.” The missionaries had great success with a great number of both Jews and Gentiles receiving the fulfillment of the Law through Jesus.

Acts 14:2 “But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds . . .” (BSB) Repeatedly, Luke describes how the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles to anger, or “poisoned their minds.” Faith can be poisoned. As we look at the whole scripture cannon, the worst enemies are the inside rebels (i.e. Judas Iscariot, Absalom, the Zormanites, William Law and the producers of the “God Makers”). Those who should be the most sympathetic become the bitterest enemies.

Acts 14:3 “Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord . . . perform[ing] signs and wonders” (NIV) Luke leaves out the details, but summarizes their work of teaching and healing with gifts of the Spirit. Their miracles confirm that the conversion and faith of the new Christians were sincere enough to enable the Spirit to work among them. The faith of the two missionaries must be joined by their congregation for such “signs and wonders” to occur.

“the message of his grace” or “the word of his grace” Paul and Barnabas specifically focus their preaching on the Lord’s gift of “grace/charisma.” Grace is God’s free gift or an undeserved favor. It is a spiritual endowment of power that cleanses individuals and edifies the church. The Book of Mormon teaches what grace is and how we can receive it:

- 2 Nephi 2:24 “It is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved”
- Moroni 10:32 “Love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God”

Acts 14:4 “the city was divided, and indeed some were with the Jews, but some with the apostles” (BLB) The Jews aroused much of the city against the Paul and Barnabas. This is the first reference where Luke calls these two missionaries “apostles/apostolois.” In Greek, *apostolos* means: “a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with order.” Yet in the New Testament, Christian apostles are those who:

1. Have seen the resurrected Lord,
2. Received His commissioned to testify of that witness, and
3. Received an ordination.

Apostle in Greek: *Apostolos*

“a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with order”

Paul and Barnabas were probably called during their recent trip to Jerusalem (Acts 11:30). At that time, we only know of one vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve from James’ martyrdom. Either another apostle died that we are not told about, (nor does it fit the historical record which tracked and detailed each apostle’s death²²), or Barnabas and Paul were both commissioned as “apostles / one sent,” with potentially neither, or only one, serving as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. (This could explain why Luke changed his order from “Barnabas and Paul,” to consistently listing Paul first.) The New Testament may use apostle for more than just the members of the Twelve. Perhaps some were called apostles and acted as assistants-to-the-Twelve. As both Paul and Barnabas are full-time missionaries, both keep Antioch of Syria as their home base (not Jerusalem), and we never hear that a first presidency is organized. We assume that as the church grew, there were apostles called who were not members of the Twelve. Paul’s and Barnabas’ apostleship is again mentioned in Acts 14:14. Paul also refers to his apostolic authority in nine Epistles.²³ A Christian definition of apostle is: one who has seen the resurrected Lord and who has been commissioned to testify of that witness.

Acts 14:5–6a “an assault made . . . to use *them* despitefully, and to stone them” Paul and Barnabas were there long enough for the citizens to design a plot to mistreat and stone them. They either raised a mob to stone the apostles, or used the “legal” system to threaten stoning. In either case, the rumors were intercepted and the apostles fled the jurisdiction. Luke never goes into detail about their hardships, trauma, discouragement of the missionaries and saints, but just “carries on.” This suggests that Luke wrote after a period of time where he had the perspective to step back and see God’s hand in history.

Acts 14:6b–7 They . . . fled unto Lystra and Derbe. And there they preached the gospel” When the apostles were first called on missions, Jesus warned them that they would face persecution. He even instructed them: “when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another” (Matthew 23:10). Paul and Barnabas did just that as they went forty miles away to the district of **Lystra** (under King Antiochus IV), which was dominated by old pagan religions. Nevertheless, Paul and Barnabas found a community ripe enough to receive the gospel.

Paul and Barnabas in Lystra

Acts 14:8–20

Acts 14:8 “. . . a cripple from his mother’s womb” The story of Paul calling on God’s healing power for the disabled man “who could not use his feet” (RSV) is remarkably similar to the earlier account with Peter. Luke includes parallel stories (and even phrases), to demonstrate that Paul was an apostle like Peter, by words and works. Going one step further, the apostles followed the example of their Master Jesus’ healings.

Healing of a Lame Man

JESUS

John 15:1–18
Matt 9:1–8; Mark 2:1–12;
Luke 15:17–26

PETER

Acts 3:1–8

PAUL

Acts 14:8–12

Parallel Experiences Recorded for Peter and Paul

PETER

Acts 3:1–8
Acts 5:14–15
Acts 8:18–23
Acts 9:36–40
Acts 12:6–7

PAUL

Acts 14:8–12
Acts 19:11–12
Acts 13:6–11
Acts 20:7–12
Acts 16:25–26

Acts 14:9–10 “Paul . . . looked intently at him and having seen that he has faith to be healed . . . Paul called out, ‘Stand up on your feet!’ And the man jumped up” (BSB) Jesus commanded the Twelve and the Seventy on their first missions to heal the sick and cast out devils (Matthew 10:7–8; Luke 10:9). Also, all four Gospels close with the Lord’s charge to preach and heal. Luke includes examples of the apostles fulfilling these two mandates. Additionally, the apostles followed the Lord’s example in many healings, as this man had “faith to be healed.” He joyfully “leaped” or “sprang up,” as did Peter’s enthusiastic restored man (KJV, ESV).

Acts 14:11 “saying in Lycaonian, ‘The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!’” (ESV) The apostles may not have understood the local dialect. Most of their conversations were probably in Greek. But this accounts for why Paul and Barnabas were not initially aware that the crowd tried to worship them as idols (Acts 14:14).

Acts 14:12 “they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius” (most of the English translations use the Greek equivalents: Zeus and Hermes). Barnabas was larger so he was Jupiter / Zeus. From this slender evidence stems the speculation about the appearance of Paul as being short and slight, which was even published in Bible dictionaries in the 19th Century. This may have also been the source of Joseph Smith’s description of Paul, as it is similar: “Paul is about five feet high, [with] very dark hair, dark complexion, dark skin, large Roman nose, sharp face, small black eyes-penetrating as eternity, round shoulders, and a whining voice, except when elevated, and then it almost resembles the roaring of a lion. He was a good orator.”²⁴

Acts 14:13 “the priest . . . being just outside the city . . . brought oxen and wreaths to the gates . . . to sacrifice” (BLB) This pagan priest who had led oxen decorated with garlands to the gate of the city or temple is seen in Roman mosaics and other art work, suggesting it was entrenched in the ritual of Roman sacrifice.

Acts 14:14 “when the apostles . . . heard . . . they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out” It sounds as if the confused apostles did not realize what the crowd was doing, but as soon as they saw, they tried to stop it as idolatry. They had begun to preach to the people before the healing (Acts 14:7), but the locals who called them gods, had not understood the healing. Paul’s gift of a healing miracle—their first introduction—appeared high-jacked.

Acts 14:15–18 “Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you” (NIV) Paul and Barnabas offered a passionate plea to the Lysterians to worship the Creator not fellow humans. The message was enough to restrain them, but they are not converted enough to defend Paul and Barnabas from what happened next.

Acts 14:19a “But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city” (NASB) Jewish opponents of Christianity hounded the proselyting apos-

Paul and Barnabas at Lystra by Pieter Lastman, 1617. Image via Wikimedia Commons.





bles. Paul had enemies persecuting him during much of his ministry (Acts 9:23–25; 13:50; 17:13; 21:27–30). Stoning in the Jewish practice under the Law of Moses had a protocol as discussed in Acts 7:58.²⁵ We are not told what happened to the larger Barnabas. Was he able to defend himself? This stoning may have been mob violence, or a Jewish punishment for blasphemy or being false prophets (Deuteronomy 13:1–10; 17:2–7; 18:20–22). This became one of twelve major forms of persecutions that Paul endured as a missionary.²⁶

Persecution not only followed Paul, but most of the early Christians. Looking back through the

scriptures we find most prophets beginning with Noah in the Bible and Lehi in the Book of Mormon were harassed or hunted for their beliefs. Most early members of the Restoration likewise suffered for their beliefs. It appears that living prophets are attacked more often than dead prophets. Our Savior set the example for suffering as Hebrews 2:10 reads: “to make perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.”

Acts 14:19b–20 “supposing he had been dead . . . the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city” The text does not go into detail, but the “stood round about,” could refer to the disciples forming a prayer circle, or offering Paul a blessing. Whatever happen, the supposedly-dead Paul was healed by the power of God enough to walk back to town, and over the next days he travel nearly sixty miles to Derbe. The fact that Paul returned to the city suggests that the stoning was mob action, not sanctioned by the legal system.

Paul and Barnabas Preach at Derbe

Acts 14:21–22

Acts 14:21a “They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples” (NIV) The missionaries had great success in Derbe, but Luke only summarizes with one sentence about the apostles’ experience there. Nothing is said about further persecution either. Perhaps the angry Jews from the neighboring cities did not know that Paul was alive. Derbe was the most eastern city they visited on that mission to Galatia. If they had continued further, just over 100 miles southeast, they would have come to Paul’s home town of Tarsus. But, we assume the Lord inspired them instead to return to visit and strengthen the new converts from the past year or two.

The Two Apostles Return to Antioch in Syria

Acts 14:22–25

Acts 14:21a–22 “Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples and encouraging them to continue in the faith” (BSB) This was a bold and courageous undertaking by the missionaries—to return to the very places where “certain Jews” were trying to kill them (Acts 14:19). But, the apostles’ return visits were very important. They clarified that conversion alone was not the key to salvation. Paul and Barnabas sacrificed to retrace their steps because it was vital to strengthening their converts (which Paul later wrote about in Ephesians 4:12). Undoubtedly their young flock needed leadership and teaching. It appears that those early saints were also persecuted, because the apostles’ first message was:

“We must endure many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (BSB). The missionaries spoke from first-hand experience about the value of suffering tribulations for the kingdom.²⁷ Their sacrifices for the saints must have been a source of encouragement. Our first parents were told that life would be filled with pain, thistles, and sweat, but the blessing of a Redeemer would make it all worthwhile. That hope of the Redeemer was the missionaries’ message. Enduring and sacrificing for God’s kingdom became the themes that Paul returned to in his Epistles as well (Romans 12:1, 12; 1 Corinthians 4:12; 13:3; etc.). Revisiting the newly baptized members became a crucial pattern that Paul repeated at the close of his other missions. Obviously, he considered growth in the gospel as much a critical part of salvation as conversion.²⁸

Acts 14:23 “they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord” This verse identified the missionary procedure of organizing churches with local priesthood leadership. The missionaries’ first visits to each city included preaching, healing, and baptizing. But, on their return visits, the apostles “*ordained elders*,” or priesthood leaders. We also learn that women served as missionaries, teachers, healers, prophetesses, and ordinance workers in Paul’s Epistles (Philippians 4:3; 1 Corinthians 11:2, 5, 11; 12; Titus 2:3; etc.).²⁹ Even with the apostles’ visit and leadership organization, we learn in Paul’s letter to the Galatians that some converts were led astray by false teachers (Galatians 1:6).

The apostles most likely gathered with the saints in “house churches.”³⁰ Luke had mentioned earlier examples in Acts 1:13–14; 2:46; 12:12; etc., and later Paul expressed thanks in his correspondence for the people who opened their homes for worship and missionary work.³¹

Missionary Return and Report to the Church at Antioch

Acts 14:26–27

Acts 14:24–27 “They gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them, and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles” (BSB) Paul and Barnabas returned to their home base in the large city of Antioch in Syria (350 miles north of Jerusalem). The apostles gave their missionary homecom-

ing address there because that was the church they were called from, or “where they had originally been commended” (NEB). And in vs. 27 the translation for rehearsed is “declared,” (RSV), “reported” (NEB), or “gave an account.” (JB).

Ac14:28 “they abode long time with the disciples” Luke summarizes without a timeframe as he was not present and writes as a second-hand source.

ACTS 15

Approximately AD 49–50

The Dispute over Circumcision

Acts 15:1–4

Acts 15:1 “Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch . . .” (NIV) The Jewish vernacular honored the sacredness of their temple on Mt. Moriah. That is, that everywhere one went in the world from Jerusalem was said to be going down. Even though Antioch was due north, because the phrase referred to leaving the holy city, it was said they were going down. This group from Jerusalem were the Jewish-Christians who felt that Christianity represented only additional teachings or an addition to the Law of Moses, not a fulfillment of the Law. They felt strongly that all Christians should live the Law of Moses as well as Jesus’ teachings of baptism, etc. Paul and Josephus called these people, “Judaizers.”³² They have already been referenced in Acts, and will continue to be a problem for the rest of the Book of Acts and throughout many Epistles.

“Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved” (NIV) When Peter received the revelation to open Jesus’ message to the Gentiles (Acts 11), the gift of the Spirit cleansed the converts through their faith, justifying the Gentile Cornelius’ entrance into the church without circumcision. However, for the Jewish-disciples, this became a different issue as more and more Gentiles became Christians. Initially, the church incorporated a few Gentiles into a largely Jewish-Christian community. But, when Barnabas and Paul (and other apostles we presume) began converting whole congregations (or even stakes) of Gentiles, it became another issue.

As an outgrowth of their first full preaching to the Gentiles, the issue came to the forefront. The Judaizers or “circumcision party” were far more realistic in their fears that Christianity would become separate from Judaism and become a Gentile religion. This actually happened. Within three centuries, Christianity looked quite alien to Judaism. This was especially the case after AD 70 when Titus destroyed the Jerusalem temple and the rabbis relied more heavily on their interpretation of the Law of Moses and their oral laws, than on the redemptive focus of the Temple.³³

Acts 15:2 “Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them” The dispute in Antioch of Syria was not just a local issue—it affected the whole church. An uncomfortable truce was not the solution; rather, the Antioch congregation took the question to the inspired authorities in Jerusalem for an answer. The 350-mile trip to Jerusalem was planned to rectify the problem. Luke recorded that “*others*” joined Paul and Barnabas on this trip to Jerusalem. In Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, he says that he felt inspired to go through revelation (2:2). Furthermore, Galatians 2:3 includes that one of Paul’s traveling companions was the Gentile convert, Titus, who came along as a “test case.” It was shrewd to bring a converted uncircumcised Gentile with him to remind the leaders that this was about individuals, not an arbitrary policy. Likely, some of the Jewish



The ancient city of Jerusalem with Solomon’s Temple, ca. 1871. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Christians in Jerusalem had not met many Gentile converts and could only say, “You are not a Christian because you do not agree with me.” (We face the same problem in our definition of “Christian” and the “Trinitarian Christians” today.) Paul and Barnabas hoped that feelings or reactions could be modified after the Jewish Christians met and heard the testimony of a committed Gentile convert.

Acts 15:3–4 “On their arrival in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and apostles and elders, to whom they reported . . .” The Antioch contingency who traveled with Paul and Barnabas visited and ministered to the saints from “Phenice and Samaria,” as they traveled south. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they first met with the church leaders. According to Galatians 2, this was a private meeting with the Twelve to “Return and Report.” Then, they came to the Jerusalem Conference/Council with all the elders. This is a significant point. Paul and Barnabas chose to privately discuss the issue first with Peter. Otherwise eye-ball to eye-ball public confrontations “usually prove little more than near-sightedness.”³⁴

The Jerusalem Council may have been the most important meeting held since the Lord’s forty-day ministry. They worked out decisions that allowed Christianity to move beyond Judaism and spread “to the ends of the earth” (Mark 13:27). We are fortunate to have two accounts of this meeting. Acts 15 is more simplified and Galatians 2 is Paul’s eyewitness account, albeit a little defensive. Galatians also reports that the Council was fourteen years after Paul’s first visit to Jerusalem. This means the Council was held in AD 49 or 50 (give or take a year).

Jerusalem Conference/Council

Acts 15:5–21

Acts 15:5 “. . . the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them and . . . observe the Law of Moses.’” (NASB) The debate between the two factions sounds heated. Everyone at the conferences was Christian, including those of the “sect of Pharisees.” Unfortunately, we do not hear their arguments, except for the general issue of circumcision and the Law of Moses. Originally, circumcision was the token of the covenant between God and Abraham. Jews at the time of the New Testament saw it as a badge of their faith. They failed to understand that circumcision was only the token, not the covenant. The covenant was still intact. The purpose of the Law was to prepare them for their Messiah. Accepting Him was the goal, not the Law of circumcision.

Acts 15:6 “The apostles and elders met to consider this question” (NIV) Luke’s detailed report opens the council room for readers to see revelation in action. We get a glimpse of how church procedure unfolded.

Acts 15:7–9 “when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said . . .” A lively discussion ensued in which, no doubt, Paul played a verbal part. Then the chief Apostle, Peter, returned to his thrice-repeated vision of the unclean animals, where God taught him “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy” (Acts 10:15; NASB). The Lord’s message was clear.

Acts 15:10–11 “why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” Peter explained that Christ freed mankind from many Mosaic ordinances, which freed Israelites from the heavy, detailed demands of the lower Mosaic Law. This does not mean that Christians

should minimize what disciples should do. The modern Protestant interpretation of this issue may go to another extreme where ordinances and baptism are purely symbolic—only an “outward sign of an inward grace.”³⁵ Looking back at Peter’s message, he stressed God’s approval of Cornelius (and consequently, all Gentile converts), by the Spirit falling upon him.

Acts 15:12 “The multitude kept silence . . . Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought” Once their leader spoke, the discussion ended. Then Barnabas and Paul shared an enrapturing account of miracles from their mission in Galatia. Luke sandwiches the missionary report in between the important discussion by the Jerusalem leaders, Peter and James. While in Galatians 2, we read more about Paul’s ideas, by reading between the lines of both accounts, we get a larger perspective.

James’ Summary

Acts 15:13–21

Acts 15:13 “after . . . James answered, saying, “Men, brothers, hear me . . .” (BLB) This James is the half-brother of Jesus (not James the brother of John the beloved, whose martyrdom is in Acts 12:2–20). This James did not follow Jesus in His mortal ministry (John 7:5) but became a vibrant church leader in Jerusalem after the Lord’s resurrection (Acts 12:17; 21:18; Galatians 1:19; and possibly 1 Corinthians 15:7). The Book of James claims his authorship. Tradition claims that he became the Bishop in Jerusalem. As such, he probably conducted the meeting and voiced, or read, the verdict of the Twelve to the Council.

Acts 15:14–18 “Simeon hath declared . . .” or Simon Peter, the chief Apostle who just spoke. The original is written as a command, as he read an order for future policy. He then quoted an Old Testament prophecy fulfilled in this situation, Amos 9:11–12 (which is also similar to Deuteronomy 28:10; Isaiah 43:7; 45:21; etc.).

Acts 15:19 “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles . . .” (NIV) We do not know if James was still reading what Simeon Peter “declared,” the Council’s verdict, or giving his concluding testimony.³⁶ The sentence stated that Gentiles should obey only the moral laws and keep a non-blood dietary restriction. It only applied to the Gentile converts. No decision was made about Jewish Christians living the Law of Moses (but it will be discussed in Acts 21:20).

Acts 15:20 “write to them to abstain from . . .” (ESV) The challenge of applying this new protocol plagued the church for the rest of the New Testament. The leadership of the Jerusalem Council had made a decision, but it was hard for some Jewish-converts to internalize and accept it. Of all 613 commandments in the Torah and the 10,000 oral laws that the rabbis taught, only four commandments were retained. There were no longer kosher laws, no segregation laws, no micromanagement of the Sabbath, and no circumcision. To join the disciples of Jesus, converts basically just needed to follow what Jesus did and taught, and one other thing.



Left: St James the Brother of the Lord by Tzangarolas Stephanos, 1688. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

“the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood” (ESV) Of the four specific items that were retained from the Law of Moses, two were also taught by Jesus, and one repeated the same principle. The Council included abstaining from:

1. Idolatry
2. Sexual Immorality
3. Eating blood (Leviticus 17:10–16)
4. Eating things strangled (which meant the blood was still in them).

The Judaizers must have felt this as a blow. It required a paradigm shift from their previous philosophy, which some made, but others did not. Those who did not accept the Council’s decision, plagued Paul’s missionary work for the rest of his life. This issue reappears in most of his letters. To study the Epistles, especially Paul’s letters, requires a clear understanding of the Judaizer’s challenge.

As Christianity spread to the Gentiles, the problem was not if their faith in Jesus was sufficient to receive salvation, nor was there an issue with performing sacrificial ordinances. Instead, the problem was a question of whether Gentile converts to Christianity still needed to obey the Law of Circumcision and all its corollary Laws.³⁷

Acts 15:21 “We must remember that the Law of Moses has been preached in city after city for many years”

(CEV) Sections of the Torah or Pentateuch were read every Sabbath in the Synagogue and then discussed. Almost every city in the Roman Empire had at least one Jewish congregation, which met in large homes or a synagogue. They read, debated, and memorized their “Law and the Prophets.” The Old Testament was not canonized yet, so the Jews referred to basic sections of their scriptures. “The Law” was the first five books of Moses, their Torah or Pentateuch; “The Prophets” were writings of prophets from both the northern and southern tribes between the time of Joshua to the present; “The Writings” were their historical records, the Proverbs, and Psalms.

Sending a Documentation from the Jerusalem Council

Acts 15:22–23

Acts 15:22–23 “Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church . . .” The decision appeared to be accepted by everyone. At least Luke’s account sounds as if “the whole church” in Jerusalem, or at least everyone at the Council, was initially in agreement to move forward with the new procedure of not requiring Christians to live the Law of Circumcision. However, it was a complicated and delicate issue that took decades to incorporate.

“They chose Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, two leaders . . . and sent them with this letter” (BSB) The two leaders from Jerusalem (and possibly others) accompanied Paul and Barnabas and their group from Syria, 350 miles back to Antioch to deliver the verdict of the Conference to the saints there. We do not hear more of Judas Barsabbas, but Silas becomes well known as Paul’s next companion.³⁸

Having this emissary from Jerusalem join the Antioch group to deliver the Council’s letter is one of the reasons why we wonder if Paul and Barnabas were another form of “apostle” rather than members of the Twelve. If they were members of the Quorum of the Twelve, why would they need two respectable elders to read the verdict of the Jerusalem Council and back up their story? Only if they were chosen to accompany Paul and Barnabas for protection or to make their journey easier would this make sense. The text sounds as if Judas Barsabbas and Silas were the voices of authority from Jerusalem.

“To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings” (NIV) The letter began with greetings to the local saints in southeastern Asia Minor. In most English translations, this greeting is to the “brethren,” but the New International Version (NIV) consistently follows the Greek more closely when it comes to gender-exclusive language. Usually the NIV translates, “brethren,” as “brothers and sisters,” and here as “believers.” (The NIV saves the word “brethren” for the church leaders.) This inclusion of women in worship was a significant change with Christianity. The example of Jesus and the Apostolic church offered a much larger role for women than the culture of the day. Most religious ritual in the ancient world was restricted to men.³⁹ Yet Jesus and the Apostolic church empowered women’s worship—especially in comparison with ancient practices of that day. It is worth checking with the NIV or a Greek text to see how inclusive early Christianity was to women.

Reading the Letter from the Jerusalem Council to the Gentile-converts

Acts 15:24–29

Acts 15:24 “we have heard, that certain . . . [men] have troubled you . . . saying, Ye must be circumcised” Luke may have had a copy of the circular letter for the churches abroad and quotes it directly here. It brought a message of peace. Historical information suggests that the majority of the members in the Christian churches in Syria and Antioch were probably Jewish-Christians at this stage.⁴⁰ This is why they had problems with the Judaizers who misrepresented Peter and Paul’s message for years.

Acts 15:25–26 “. . . having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul” (NASB) The letter introduced its purpose and the two representatives from Jerusalem, and kindly honored Paul and Barnabas with the adjective, “*beloved*.” It also reaffirmed that at the Council there was unanimity with the decision that would be announced, which was to not require the relics from the Mosaic laws including circumcision.

Acts 15:28 “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us . . .” (ESV) The leaders wanted to make sure everyone knew that their decision included revelation. Both their minds and a spiritual witness to their hearts were in agreement. This ruling had powerful implications for the Twelve. The apostles and other Council members felt inspired to go beyond their scriptures to reverse Moses’ lesser law in favor of Christ’s higher law. In Richard Lloyd Anderson’s words, “not past scripture but new revelation was the foundation of the Church of Christ . . . past scriptures are a guide to truth, but living prophets give new scripture.”⁴¹

Acts 15:29 “That ye abstain from . . . fornication” Luke again repeats, as a second witness, the same four impurities that Christians should continue to avoid (Acts 15:20). The Greek word translated in the KJV as “fornication” is “*pornea*,” the root for pornography. It included all forms of sexual immorality: incest, adultery, harlotry and homosexuality. The letter concludes with the encouraging words: if the saints will keep these four moral and dietary laws, “ye shall do well. Fare ye well.”

The Believers at Antioch Rejoice

Acts 15:30–35

Acts 15:31 “When the people read it, they rejoiced at its encouraging message” (BSB) Luke only includes the positive reception of the news from the church leaders here, but over time, the opposition party is more vocal.

Acts 15:32 “Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers” This is another example of how the word “prophets” is used differently in the New Testament. Here it agrees with John’s definition: “for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10). Across

the Bible we find prophets and prophetesses in a range of people with a range of gifts from: those who testify, predict the future, speak for the Lord, give moral and ethical direction, and lead. Jesus was also seen as a prophet. Prophecy was one of the gifts of the Spirit and became a part of worship.

False prophets also lived at the time (Acts 13:6; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1; Revelation 2:20, etc.). The Prophet Joseph taught that anyone who testifies of Jesus as the Christ has the gift of prophecy.⁴² In the last phrase of this verse, the KJV uses the word “confirmed” while other translators communicate the Greek as “strengthen, reestablish, support further.” This does not appear to mean that the saints received the ordinance of confirmation as used in the restoration.

Acts 15:33–35 “after they had tarried . . . they [left] . . . in peace . . . Notwithstanding . . . Silas . . . Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch” When it was time for the Jerusalem contingency to make their return trip back to Jerusalem, Silas chose to remain in Antioch to build the kingdom of God with Paul. The section on Silas is not found in many Greek texts.

Paul’s Second Mission as an Apostle

Acts 15:36–41

Acts 15:36 “**Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached . . .**” (NIV) This is a chapter break in some Bibles as it begins the planning for Paul’s next missionary expeditions. I presume Paul and Barnabas want to share the news from the Jerusalem Council with their converts and minister to the new branches as they can.

Acts 15:37–38 “Barnabas wanted to take along John Mark” (CSB) Barnabas wanted to bring his relative, John Mark, again with them as a junior companion. But, unfortunately, Paul disagreed strongly. Luke records Paul’s view point, which leaves the readers with only one side of the story. Luke writes the story as a way to show the end result; it helped the work to cover more territory and be the best for missionary work.

Acts 15:39–40 “Their disagreement was so sharp that they parted company. . .” (BSB) The result of the contention was that they divided up. Barnabas and John Mark went to his home-island, Cyprus, to strengthen the church there, while Paul took Silas and went through Syria to Paul’s homeland, Cilicia, to strengthen the new members in Galatia.

Acts 15:41 “He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches” (ESV) This is the beginning of Paul’s next Gentile mission as an Apostle. Some scholars feel that it is an extension of his second mission, and others a third, or even fourth mission. For simplicity sake we will refer to it as the third.

Header Image: Peter's vision of a sheet with animals, from Acts 10; illustration from Henry Davenport Northrop, "Treasures of the Bible," published 1894. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

1. In the Roman army a century (50–100 soldiers) made up 1/60 of a legion. A cohort or regiment was made up of 10 centuries having the potential of 600 soldiers or 1/10 of a legion. A legion was ten cohorts with the potential of 6,000 soldiers.
2. Matthew 8:5, 8, 13; 27:54; Mark 15:39, 44, 45; Luke 7:6; 23:47.
3. Michael P. Speidel, "The Roman Army in Judaea under The Procurators: The Italian and the Augustan Cohort in the Acts of the Apostles," *Ancient Society*, 13/14 (1982): 233–40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44080154> (accessed 6-28-19). "From the reign of Herod the Great to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70 the garrison of Judaea comprised one cavalry regiment of Sebasteni . . . and five cohorts of infantry, among them at least one cohort of Sebasteni. . . It was Roman recruiting practice from the beginning of the empire to enroll local recruits in auxiliary regiments no matter where the unit had been raised originally." The author has evidence for gravestones that the Italian cohort at Caesarea included Roman citizens. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIX, 176. From AD 59 the military was mainly Caesareans and Sebasteni. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, 1.1. After the death of Agrippa I in AD 44, Palestine became annexed to Syria.
4. A. T. Kraabel, "The Disappearance of the 'God-Fearers,'" *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions*, 28, no. 2 (1981): 113–114. doi:10.2307/3270014 (accessed 6-29-19).
5. Heshy Zelcher, *A Guide to the Jerusalem Talmud* (Universal Publishers, 2002), 92. "The middle class citizens often owned eight slaves, the rich from five hundred to a thousand, and an emperor as many as twenty thousand." I choose to use "servant / slave," as they were the same word, and in the Jewish and Roman world, servitude was not for life (Jews released after seven years, and Romans at age 30–35), but was more like a middle age serf.
6. Joseph Smith, Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith. 264; quoting *Times and Seasons* 3.905.
7. Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: Acts of the Apostles* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1998), 461.
8. Darby Bible Translations, Aramaic translation in English, Webster Translation, and Young's Literal Translation.
9. Thayer, New Testament Greek Lexical Dictionary.
10. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, 1.297. "I [Joseph,] received a visit from Elders Joseph Young, Brigham Young, and Heber C. Kimball of Mendon, Monroe County, New York. They spent four or five days at Kirtland, during which we had many interesting moments. At one of our interviews, Brother Brigham Young and John P. Greene spoke in tongues, which was the first time I had heard this gift among the brethren; others also spoke, and I received the gift myself."
11. *Mishnah, Avoth*, 1:1. An example of one of the oral laws to ensure one kept the Sabbath holy: One could spit on a rock, but not on the dirt as that was cultivating. Raymond Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John 1–XII* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 371.
12. Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1971). 118. "In the east even

- today, to invite a man to a meal was an honour. It was an offer of peace, trust, brotherhood and forgiveness.”
13. For example, the prophetess Anna in Luke 2: 36, was from the tribe of Asher, and Saul from Benjamin (Philippians 3:50).
 14. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XX, 1.3–2.5. “. . . Claudius Caesar . . . Around this time lived queen Helena of Adiabene . . . her arrival was of great help to the masses in Jerusalem; for there was a famine in the land, that overtook them, and many people died of starvation.” Evidence of a multiyear famine continues in the same account.
 15. Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem at the time of Jesus*, 121–122.
 16. There were six “Herod’s” who held political authority in Palestine throughout the New Testament writings.
 17. Galatians 1:19; 2:9, 12; Acts 15:13; 21:18. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XX.9.1.200, refers to him as “James, the brother of Jesus, who was call the Christ.”
 18. Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Volume 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), Acts 2:19.
 19. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIX.8.2, 343.
 20. John W. Welch, *Charting the New Testament*,
 21. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 45–46.
 22. Historical accounts record the martyrdom by each of the original ten apostles (Judas Iscariot hung himself, and John the Beloved has not died). Peter: Crucified upside-down in Rome, ca. AD 64; James son of Zebedee: beheaded ca. AD 44; Andrew: crucified; Philip: crucified ca. AD 54; Bartholomew: crucified; Matthew: halberd ca. AD 60; Thomas: spear; James son of Alphaeus: beaten by club, after crucified and stoned; Jude: crucified; Simon the Zealot: crucified.
 23. Paul refers to his apostleship in: Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:1; 9:1–2; 15:7–9; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 2:2; 1 Timothy 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1; Titus 1:1.
 24. Andrew Ehat and Lyndon Cook, ed, *Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991), 59. Spelling updated by Kent Jackson, *Joseph Smith’s Commentary on the Bible*, 149.
 25. The victim was taken outside the city, where the first witness would throw the victim off a cliff or ramp (built about twice a man’s height), so that the victim fell on his or her back. If the victim fell on his or her face, the first witness would have had the responsibility of turning him or her over. If still alive, a second witness would throw a large rock at the victim’s heart. If the blow did not kill the victim, then other men took rocks, removed their outer cloaks to have more freedom to throw their stones, and then aimed them at the victim until death resulted. (For more see Acts 7:59–60.)
 26. 2 Corinthians 11: 23–27 “Five times whipped with 39 lashes, 3 beatings with a rod, often imprisoned, once stoned, 3 shipwrecks, left in the ocean all night and day, plus perils “in journeyings often, [in] perils of waters, [in] perils of robbers, [in] perils by [mine own] countrymen, [in] perils by the heathen, [in] perils in the city, [in] perils in the wilderness, [in] perils in the sea, [in] perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.” But Paul didn’t mention being bitten by a poisonous snake from Acts 28:3–5.
 27. Neal A. Maxwell, *Conference Report*, April 2002.
 28. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 55.
 29. Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ’s Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: GP, 2015), chapters 2–4. In the

KJV it is difficult to see how many times women are encouraged to teach, preach, pray, and serve in the church, because the use of “man” included both genders as human. There are over twenty verses that encourage female service teaching and using the gifts of the Spirit to build the kingdom in the NT.

30. Everett Ferguson, ed. *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd Ed (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2013), 546.
31. 1 Corinthians 16:19; “Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house;” also see more examples of homes used for church service: Acts 16:14, 40; 20:7–12, 20; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 1:11; and Philippians 1:3–7; 4:1. The New Testament speaks of four valiant women who organized and opened their homes for house-churches: Mary of Jerusalem, Chloe, Lydia, and Priscilla.
32. Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, XVIII.2.
33. Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1997), 306–308.
34. *Ibid.*, 307.
35. Robert Millet, *Studies in Scripture* (SLC, UT: Desert Book, 1987), 112.
36. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:146. There are examples in our modern church history when someone other than the person holding the directing power was appointed to act as president and presided over a conference.
37. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 51.
38. Silas is also known as Silvanus in 2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 Peter 5:12. Judas Barsabas may also be related to the person mentioned in Acts 1:23.
39. There were a few exceptions like the six women chosen as Vestal Virgins, and those women needed to act as prostitutes for fertility rituals.
40. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 309.
41. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 53. His quote continues, “What guided the apostles was not the New Testament, for their acts created it. The Bible does not make the true the true church, but the true church made the Bible.”
42. Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:28, 30; 5:232. From January 1, 1843, “If any person should ask me if I were a prophet, I should not deny it, as that would give me the lie; for, according to John, the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy; therefore if I profess to be a witness or teacher, and have not the spirit of prophecy, which is the testimony of Jesus, I must be a false witness; but if I be a true teacher and witness, I must possess the spirit of prophecy, and that constitutes a prophet” (*Ibid.*, 5:215).



ACTS 16–21

PAUL'S 2ND AND 3RD MISSIONS

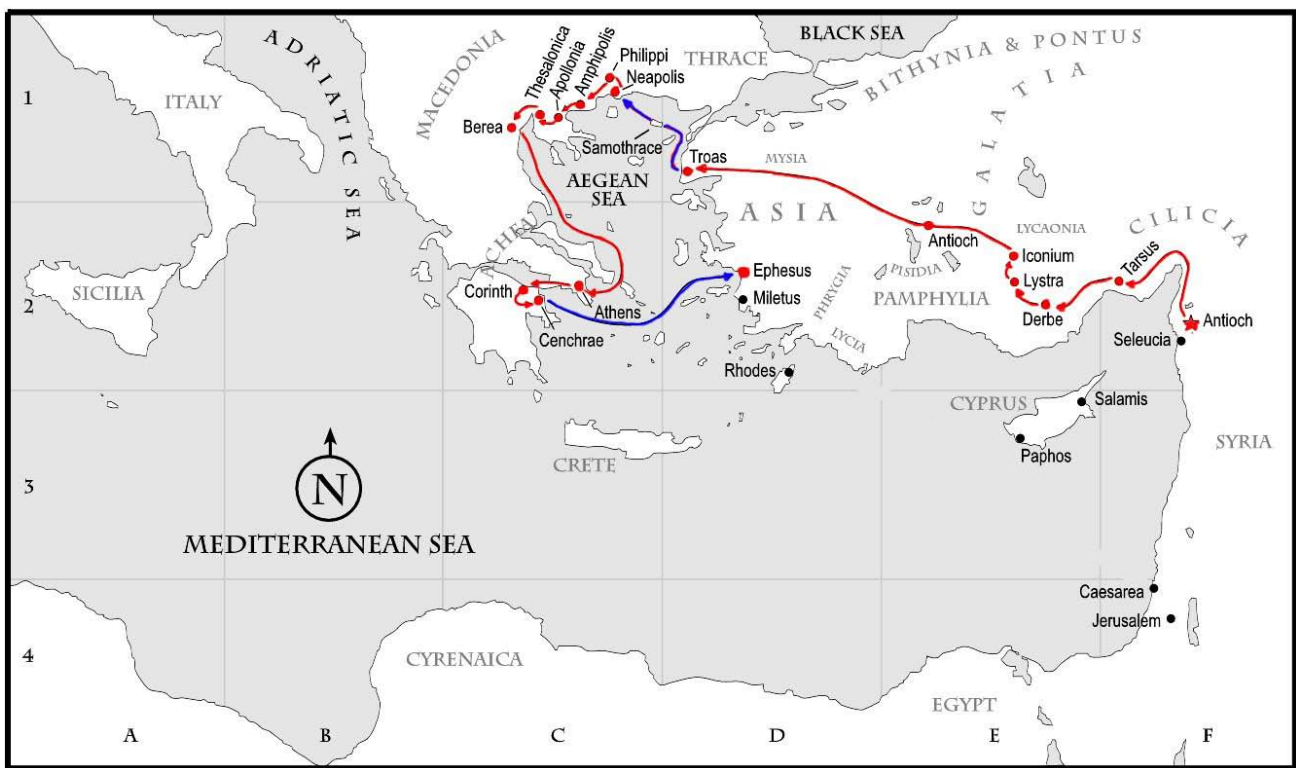
INTRODUCTION

In this section of Acts, we complete Paul's second and third apostolic missions to the Gentiles. (For a timeline of Paul's Life see Acts 21:26). They are filled with his passionate testimony in action. He traveled with three companions in the second mission with Corinth as his home base. But in the third mission, Luke mentions no companion until Paul links up with friends Priscilla and Aquila at the mission home base, Ephesus. Then three years later, on his return trip back to Jerusalem, seven traveling companions join him. In both mission accounts, Luke included: 1) one sermon, 2) several stories when the gifts of the Spirit were poured out on Paul (paralleling his recounting the same for Peter and the Lord), 3) examples of administering the saving ordinances, and 4) a Jerusalem report to the leaders after each mission. To add more perspective to Luke's travel log, follow his text with a map of the Roman Empire. Like the missionary travel logs in the Book of Mormon, Paul, Alma, and the sons of Mosiah are passionate about proclaiming that Jesus is *the* Way, the Promised Messiah, and Son of God.

Paul's Second Gentile Mission

ca. AD 49-52; Acts 15:40-18:21

LOCATION	COMPANIONS	HOW IT BEGAN ¹
Syria	Silas	Paul and Silas set off from Antioch to minister to the young converts.
Cilicia	Luke	They wanted to share the news from the Jerusalem Council on circumcision.
Greece	Timothy	Paul had a vision to “come over into Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9)



This was Paul's largest mission covering the most geographical space, from Jerusalem to Greece (including northern Macedonia and southern Achaia). We still have the correspondence from Paul to three of the five cities he visited that first year. Luke's record includes one sermon for each mission, this one from Athens. Corinth became his headquarters for one and a half years. There Paul wrote his first canonized Epistle to the Thessalonians. Luke's record also gives us two historical events from this mission that are attached to specific dates, Claudius Caesar's edict against the Jews in Rome in AD 49, and Gallio's reign over Achaia in AD 51, which gives historical context to Paul's travels.

ACTS 16

Timothy

Acts 16:1–5

Acts 16:1 “Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra” (BSB) Paul returned to Galatia to visit his new converts (including the healed lame man) and to share the news from the Jerusalem Council. The saints no doubt needed his ministering, but it would have required courage and a witness from the Spirit for him to return to the towns where he had been chased out and stoned a year or two before (Acts 14).

“where he found a disciple named Timothy” (BSB) In Lystra, Paul and Silas meet a dynamic young convert, Timothy. He became one of Paul’s closest companions and an adopted “son in the faith” (1 Timothy 1:2). This verse sounds as though Paul was meeting Timothy for the first time, which suggests that Timothy had joined the fold through the missionary work of the local saints after Paul’s last visit.

“the son of a believing Jewish woman and a Greek father” Timothy’s mom was Eunice, a Jewess with a Greek name (suggesting she had previous Gentile associations) and his dad was a Gentile. Marriages outside of the covenant were illegal in the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 7:3) but were more common in the Diaspora at this time. Paul praised both Timothy’s mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois, as women of faith who knew and taught the scriptures (2 Timothy 1:5, 3:15). They are two of the forty-five named women in the New Testament.

Acts 16:3 “circumcised him because of the Jews” For Paul to bring Timothy along as a junior companion and be more effective in the Jewish synagogues, Paul felt that Timothy should be circumcised. This was ironic as Paul had just fought in the Jerusalem Council for his new Gentile converts to not be bound by the Law of Circumcision (Acts 15:24–29 and Galatians 2:1–3). Paul’s point was still the same—circumcision was not needed for salvation. Yet, circumcision was a big bonus when preaching to the Jews. Later Paul wrote, “to the Jews I became as a Jew . . . that I might gain them (1 Corinthians 9:20).

Acts 16:4 “They delivered . . . the decrees” The leadership of the church in Jerusalem communicated through the missions passing on the ordained information from the Jerusalem Council. These tangible efforts to unify the teachings of the church came through the leaders, but spiritual unity came through the Spirit.

Acts 16:5 “increased in number daily” The spread of the early church was amazingly successful because they were “established in the faith” of Jesus Christ.



Vision at Troas (to go to Macedonia),
Luigi Cochet. Image via Hermit's Door.

Paul's Vision in Troas

Acts 16:6-10

Acts 16:6-8 “forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia” Paul’s group traveled through the provinces in central and northern Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). The three major routes traversed green pine and cedar filled narrow gorges and plains, under limestone cliffs. Paul prayed for guidance and the Spirit inspired him where *not to go*. Interestingly, that is exactly where Paul was inspired to go later (Acts 19:1). Following the Spirit requires flexibility as well as repeatedly asking. The Spirit’s inspiration is often time-sensitive, especially in daily guidance. Personal “revelation often shines a small light in the dark before the whole problem is illuminated.”² Paul trusted the Lord and went to Troas.

Acts 16:9 “[In] a vision . . . there stood a man . . . saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us” Acts records five of Paul’s night visions. This one opened the door for Christianity to enter Europe through northern Greece.

Acts 16:10 “immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia”

Watch Luke’s use of “we” to track when he joins Paul’s travels. This is one of the strong pieces of evidence that the author of Acts was a missionary companion of Paul. “We” began in Troas and continued through Philippi (Acts 16:12, 16–17). Then seven years later, from approximately AD 50–57, when Paul returned to Philippi, the “we” pronoun joined the storyline again (Acts 20:6).³

Mission in Macedonia

Acts 16:11-17:13

Acts 16:11-13 “From Troas we put out to sea and sailed . . . to Philippi . . . On the Sabbath we went . . . to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer” (NIV) The missionaries set sail with a good wind and made their voyage across the Aegean Sea in only two days (while their return trip took five days, Acts 20:6). By the Jewish Sabbath, they were in Philippi, but it appears there were not enough Jews to have a synagogue or house of prayer. Yet Paul knew the habits of the Jews well enough to look by the river bank for an open-air *proseucha* (a circular shaped enclosure, built on a seashore or river, for the frequent Jewish washings which their worship required).⁴ They gathered outside of the city gate to the banks of the river where the battle was fought 94 years before when Augustus conquered Cassius, for Rome. Luke describes only women there (perhaps like Eunice and Lois, they were married to Gentiles or they were widows).

PHILIPPI

Philippi was the capital city of Macedonia, founded by Alexander the Great's father Philip as his frontier fortress. Nearby gold mines helped make him rich. It was a military and agricultural center when it became a Roman colony. At the time of the NT, the city had few to no Jews, but Paul called the strong Christian congregation in Philippi "my joy and crown" (Philippians 4:1-3).

Below: Philippi's forum and basilica B seen from the acropolis. Photography taken on 12/11/2000 by Marsyas. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Lydia

Acts 16:14-15

Acts 16:14 "A certain woman, named Lydia . . . which worshiped God" Luke introduces a great woman who became a leader in the New Testament church. She met with the Jews on their Sabbath, but the phrase, "*worships God*" (similar to a "God-fearer"), designated her as a believer, but not fully converted to Judaism. She was a rich

businesswoman (probably a widow) who sold “purple,” an expensive fabric associated with royal or rich garb. Those living in Syria and Phoenicia had a monopoly on the dye, which was extracted from shellfish that lived along their sea coast.⁵

Acts 16:15 “when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us . . . ‘come and stay at my house” (NIV) Lydia’s heart was opened to the truths spoken by Paul, “and her household” (which referred to her servants/slaves and family). The question arises, did slaves or servants have a personal choice to join their master’s religion? In the case of the first Christians, agency was a foundational doctrine (Matthew 26:39; John 5:30). Jesus never compelled believers to follow Him, but encouraged, “come and see” (John 1:39); we assume that they also had the freedom to choose baptism. Lydia’s generosity prevailed and the four missionaries stayed with her (Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke—or to whomever this “us” referred). Initially, the apostles traveled without purse or scrip, but it is unclear if that was the case on this mission (Matthew 10:10; Luke 9:3; 22:36).

Possessed Damsel

Acts 16:16–19

Acts 16:16 “a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination . . .” The girl was probably a slave girl who had been possessed by a devil or taught to become a soothsayer. Divination is the act of determining the future through cards, horoscopes, charms, Ouija boards, séances, crystal balls, etc. It was forbidden in the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 18:9–14 and Joshua 13:22).

Acts 16:17–19 “followed . . . us . . . saying These men are the servants of the most high God . . . the way of salvation” Evil spirits often testified of Jesus’ divinity in the Gospels as well (Mark 1:34). After many days of this “crying,” it innerved the group so much that Paul cast out the devil. As servants of God, in order to teach the way of salvation, they had to cast out the evil. However, by so doing, the soothsayer’s masters were furious with the loss of their potential money supply through her and devised a legal plan against Paul and Silas.

Paul’s Imprisonment and Miraculous Release

Acts 16:20–40

Acts 16:20–21 “These . . . Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city” Paul and Silas were called Jews, not Romans (nor Christians). The Jewish faith was one of the ten legally protected religions under Roman law, but the prosecutors did not convict Paul and Silas for their worship. It was the teaching of non-Roman customs that convicted them.

Acts 16:22–24 “. . . laid many strips upon them, they cast them into . . . inner prison . . . their feet fast in the stocks” As this was a Roman not a Jewish court, there would have been no limit of 39 lashes for Paul and Silas. Beatings included stripping the victims, tying their hands to a whipping post, and then lashing them with a whip

of leather thongs with pieces of rocks, bones, and shells embedded at the ends to cut and tear open the skin. Paul endured five whippings (2 Corinthians 11:24–25 lists the physical abuses Paul endured). Luke includes the extra security requirements that Paul and Silas were kept in the inner prison for greater protection.

Acts 16:25 “At midnight, Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God . . . and suddenly there was a great earthquake” Singing Psalms probably helped the missionaries endure their pain by bringing the Spirit of the Lord to their cell, or at least it buoyed up their spirits. The fact that the timing of their imprisonment and singing corresponded with an earthquake was nothing short of miraculous. More often than not, the Lord uses natural laws to perform His miracles—but His timing shows His divine work. As the prison foundations shook, the prisoners’ bands were loosed, paralleling the miraculous loosening of Peter’s prison bands in Acts 12:6–7.

Acts 16:27–28 “The keeper of the prison . . . would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had . . . fled” We assume the jailer was about to attempt suicide because if a Roman jailer or soldier did not guard their prisoners, their lives were taken. Also, in Philippi at the time, committing suicide for such a situation was heroic. Paul did not want any harm to come to anyone and assured the jailer that they had not fled.

Acts 16: 29–30 “What must I do to be saved?” We do not know the frame of mind of the trembling jailer’s question—he may have been asking how he could be physically spared from Roman torture or death—or perhaps he had heard Paul’s singing or preaching and wanted to learn more. In either case, his question has a spiritual element to it that each Bible reader can ask God. Regardless of the jailer’s intent, Paul jumped at the chance to use his question as a missionary opportunity.

Acts 16:31–34 “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved . . .” Paul added the teachings of the “word of the Lord” to his discussion, and then offered the ordinance of baptism for the jailer and his multi-generation family and slaves/servants. Belief was “the beginning, not the end of the requirements for salvation.”⁶ The real deliverance-miracle was not the prison doors opening, but the jailer’s family opening their hearts to the message of salvation through Jesus. The jailer washed the missionaries’ wounds and was then washed with the Lord’s first saving ordinance of baptism.

Acts 16:35–39a “When it was day . . . the sergeants [said] Let those men go” Sergeants are police (RSV) or officers (NEB). Luke does not tell why the “magistrates/*praetors*,” released the prisoners in the morning. Perhaps the previously possessed girl’s master was not there. Paul did not accept their release, and demanded a full apology claiming his rights as a Roman citizen. He spoke with great confidence in the protection guaranteed by the Roman law. He was bold that morning, but I wonder why he did not tell his prosecutors that he was a Roman citizen the day before in order to stop his beating? Paul must not have been dressed in the official white wool Roman toga, which identified citizens.⁷ He must have dressed as a Hebrew.

Acts 16:39b–40 “desired them to depart out of the city . . . entered into the house of Lydia . . . seen the brethren . . . and departed” Even though he had been pardoned, Paul respected the magistrate’s request for him to leave. He did not leave the young saints alone though; Luke remained in Philippi to build the kingdom. This became one of the faithful strongholds of Christianity. In his Epistle to them, there is evidence that Paul moved his wife to this branch as well, “my true yokefellow, help those women which labored with me in the gospel” (Philippians 4:3).

ACTS 17

Paul and Silas Visit Thessalonica

Acts 17:1–9

Acts 17:1–3 “. . . they came to Thessalonica . . . synagogue of the Jews . . . reasoned with them out of the scriptures . . . that Christ . . . suffered and risen” Paul’s pattern of preaching at the synagogue emphasized that he focused on the most important message, that Jesus is the Messiah/Christ.⁸ He addressed the Jews’ false expectation that their Messiah would come to conquer and reign. For three Sabbaths, he found Old Testament prophecies that explained that Christ first needed to suffer and then be resurrected. “Explaining and proving” (RSV) that Jesus was their Promised Messiah.

THESSALONICA

Thessalonica was the largest city in northern Greece, a center of wealth and influence. In 315 BC it was named after the half-sister of Alexander the Great. It became a Roman province in 146 BC and was then declared a “Free City” (free from taxation, military occupation, and Roman governance). The major highway across northern Greece, “Via Enghatia” ran through Thessalonica. Paul’s oldest known Epistle was to them written a few months after he left.



Right: The Arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki, Greece. Image by Dimitris Vetsikas via Pixabay.

Acts 17:4 “Some believed . . . devout Greeks a multitude, and of the chief women” Not only was Paul’s practice of synagogue teaching consistent, so were his results. Those that flocked to Christianity were often monotheistic believing gentiles (also called “devout Greeks” or “God fearing”⁹) and many women who had been investigating Judaism. Women flocked to the fold because women were valued in Christianity. The Apostolic Church honored women and encouraged their worship across most of the New Testament (the few statements that discourage it may not belong to the original text¹⁰). This was an abrupt and radical change from the religious practices of the day. The KJV translation, “*consorted*” means, “joined.”

Acts 17:5 “the Jews which believed not, moved with envy” The unbelieving Jews hired a gang to attack the Christian missionaries, which “set all the city on an uproar.” In their search for Paul and his companions, the gang attacked “the house of Jason,” where Paul probably stayed, or where the Christians met for church. Jason must have been a property-owning Christian convert. (Romans 16:21 calls him a companion of Paul.) But, the missionaries were not there and went into hiding.

Acts 17:6–9 “These . . . do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king” The mob charged Jason and his supporters with attacking Caesar, the law, and the peace. The list resembled the charges against Jesus in Luke 23:2. (As this list is only found in Luke, it appears that Luke added it to bolster his theological message—that the Apostolic Church followed Jesus’ example). The rulers required Jason to post some type of bond in order to calm down the mob (for more on this story, see 1 Thessalonians 2).

The political background sheds light on why the Thessalonian Council was keenly worried about the animosity between Jews and Christians. About this same time, in AD 49, Claudius Caesar expelled Jews from Rome due to a conflict with one of their factions, Christianity. These movements were probably linked with the resurgence of Zealots after King Agrippa I’s death in Palestine.

Paul and Silas Visit Berea

Acts 17:10–13

Acts 17:10–12 “. . . sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea” Immediately after this, Paul and Silas escaped under the cover of the dark. They traveled forty miles to another Greek city, Berea.

“they received the word with all readiness . . . and searched the scriptures daily” Perhaps these synagogue members were more receptive because they studied their scriptures together. Rarely did an individual have the means to own their own set of sacred scrolls. Each village or town shared a copy of the Torah, and then if they had the means, the next most commonly owned scroll was Psalms followed by Isaiah.

“many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks” Luke continues to point out the numerous female converts in nearly every town (the eleventh time). I think he does this because it was out of the ordinary or even shocking for their culture. It not only meant that the women were receptive to the truth of the message and of the witness of the Spirit, but also that the new faith had something for women that was lacking in their society.¹¹

Acts 17:13 “Jews of Thessalonica . . . came . . . and stirred up the people” The regular hounding of God’s servants in every town, by a previous town, has been repeated in other dispensations. Satan uses the same attack to try to stop the spreading of God’s kingdom. Ironically, the persecution often unifies those who are attacked, and the attention they raise builds curiosity that often results in more interest and conversion (D&C 99:8; Alma 24:26; etc.).

Paul and Silas Visit Athens

Acts 17:14–21

Acts 17:14–15 “the brethren sent away Paul . . . unto Athens” Paul left Silas in Berea, sent Timothy back to Thessalonica (see 1 Thessalonians 3:1–2), and then sailed 200 miles to Athens. Once there, Paul decided to have them join him as quickly as they could.

ATHENS

Athens was a wonder of the ancient world. It was one of the three largest cities in the Roman Empire. At the time of the New Testament, Rome was the political capital, but Athens was the educational capital. It was the center of culture, philosophy, and art. It had an extensive influence on western culture. A Greek education was fostered by libraries that contained as many as 600,000 books. The most popular Greek subjects were rhetoric and philosophy. Most of the male population of Greece spoke with skill and many were literate. Romans often completed their formal schooling at one of the two universities in Athens. At that time Athens provided the equivalent of postgraduate study.



The Acropolis of Athens viewed from the Hill of the Muses. Photo by Carole Raddato. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 17:16 “Paul[’s] . . . spirit was stirred in him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry” The ancient joke was, “It is easier to find a god in Athens than the person you are looking for.”¹² Hugh Nibley’s broad definition of idolatry fits both the ancient world and our own: “Idols give you what you want. We are an idolatrous people when we want what we want not what God wants.”

Acts 17:17 “Disputed he in the synagogue. . . and in the market daily” In most Greek cities, but especially in Athens, debate, speeches, or forensics occurred regularly in public and private gatherings. Groups gathered in the markets to exchange ideas. The love of speech had become second nature. “They were a nation of talkers. They were almost slaves of cultivated expression.”¹³

Acts 17:18 “Certain philosophers . . . said, ‘what will this babbler say?’” Paul’s audience saw his message of Jesus’ resurrection as a new strange god. They wanted to be convinced through persuasive rhetoric or logic not revelation or feelings. As Paul taught them, he skillfully used some of their Greek beliefs and concepts that would have related to his audience. Luke mentions two different philosophical camps among his audience:

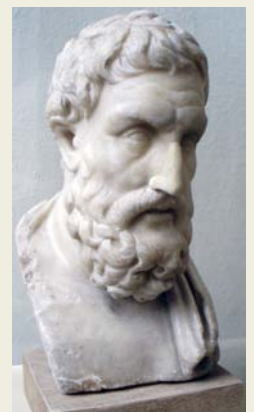
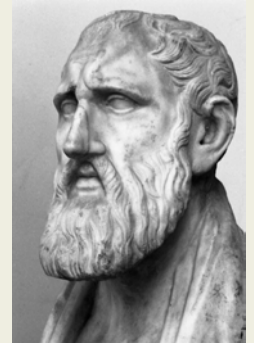
Right top: Zeno of Citium. Photo by Paolo Monti, 1969. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Right bottom: Epicurus. Photo by Keith Schengili-Roberts. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

PHILOSOPHIES

Stoicism was founded by Zeno from Cyprus (334–262 BC). For him the greatest achievement in life was **reason**, and knowledge which arose from it. Stoics believed in a Great Spirit. All matter, including humans, was part of the supreme, and thereby divine. All order and law within the world were the Great Spirit’s mind and will. All was predetermined. If any evil came to a good man, it was only temporary, and in the grand scheme of things it would not be considered evil. They shunned luxury and thought all things done in virtue would bring joy. They found joy in horses, hunting, parties, and falling in love. Death was everyone’s fate, so suicide was fine. After death every spirit became part of the Supreme Being.

Epicureanism was founded by Epicurus of Greece (341–270 BC), who authored over 300 books. He taught that life was about simple pleasures, and its greatest achievement was **wisdom**. Epicureans rejected religion and taught that all reason must be confined to the sensual experience as the final test of truth. Knowledge arose out of the senses. They believed that humanity began spontaneously and that death was the end. Sensual pleasures that freed the body from pain, and the soul from disturbance, were legitimate, and wisdom found room for them.



Acts 17:19–21 “The Athenians . . . spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing” Paul probably spoke to the Athenian governing body, which then met at the Areopagus and Mars Hill (the market place). Paul’s life and early education in Tarsus (where the universities specialized in philosophy and literature) and with Gamaliel in Jerusalem (who was a master of the Law of Moses), prepared him to testify to the educated, sophisticated Athenians who were used to the most intelligent gifted public speakers. Paul also knew that the Lord would magnify, with the power of the Spirit, anything he could offer. A few years later, Paul modestly introduced himself in an Epistle, “I came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom” (1 Corinthians 2:1). Yet this invitation to speak before the civil council on Mars Hill suggests that he must have been a fabulous orator.

Paul knew his audience and so should we. The most important principle to the Greek civilization was the virtue, “wisdom/*sophy*.” It stemmed from developing one’s rational mind not one’s emotions. This led to the glorification of the intellect, through philosophies and religions. For centuries the Greeks strove and failed to find answers. By Paul’s time, there was an atmosphere of doubt. We see this with the increase of different religions with their powerless gods, and the decrease of philosophy.

Paul’s Speech on Mars Hill

Acts 17:22–34

Acts 17: 22 “Paul stood in the midst of Mar’s Hill . . . I perceive that . . . ye are too superstitious” Luke recorded Paul’s sermon in quality Greek with philosophical and poetic quotations that offered a cultured approach to his missionary message. Luke only recorded this sermon from Paul’s second mission. He began by attacking ignorant pagan superstitions—which were also attacked by both the Stoics and Epicureans.¹⁴

Acts 17:23, “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD . . . declare I unto you” Paul’s second sentence is more complementary, as he praised the Greek’s “devotions” or “objects of your worship” (RSV), or “sacred monuments” (JB). Repeatedly, the pagan Greeks had a monument to an “unknown god” to make sure all deities were placated.¹⁵

Acts 17:24–26 “God that made the world . . . of one blood all nations” Paul addressed the beliefs of the Stoics (god is creator) and denounced the Epicureans (god does not exist). He described the plan of salvation including the unity of humanity having the same source, God, and blood from Adam and Eve, through Noah and his wife.

“their appointed times” (NAS) God’s plan of salvation was set from the beginning with times and bounds set for everything. Paul opened the possibility of pre-mortality in this definition of the creation.

Acts 17:27 “if they are willing to find him, for he is not far from every one of us” (JST) Paul reasoned that finding God requires a willing mind, a willing heart, and effort. It also requires the Spirit’s inspiration as a wit-

ness of truth. Paul diagnosed the shortcomings of intellectualism: To learn the things of God, we must learn His language and listen to Him. It requires seeking even though He is not far.

Acts 17:28–29 “In him we live and move and have our being” Paul quoted a Stoic philosopher that was from his own hometown, Tarsus. Assuming the Apostle Paul actually said what Luke wrote, we are left with enormous admiration for his memory, his breadth of knowledge of the Greek poets, and his ability to weave together specific lines from different poets. The first poem is called, “Hymn to Zeus” written by Cleanthus.

“We are the offspring of God” Paul also cited a line from the poet, Aratus a Sicilian’s, “Phaendmena.”¹⁶ Using the poem as a spring board, Paul taught that God was actually our Heavenly Father; we are begotten sons and daughters unto Him. However, many Christian scholars do not interpret this as Paul’s doctrine, but only evidence of a shared interest in their poetry.

Acts 17:30–32 “. . . commandeth all men everywhere to repent” God may have delayed His punishment in mortality for some sins (see the footnote for “God winked” as “overlooked” or “disregard”), but in the future, “He will judge the world in righteousness.” Unlike most Greek religions that did not stress personal accountability, Paul taught that we must ultimately face justice. In conjunction with repentance and the judgement, God promised to raise all in a resurrection. Some Greek philosophers taught that when one dies, they are at last free from the punishment of the physical body. Paul fascinated his audience enough for some to say, “we will hear thee again of this matter.”

Acts 17:33–34 “Paul departed from among them . . . and others” A few women and men believed the message of Christianity (specifically, Dionysius and Damaris) and joined Paul on his next journey to Corinth.

ACTS 18

Paul Completes His 2nd Apostolic Mission to the Gentiles in Corinth

Acts 18:1–22

Acts 18:1 “Paul . . . came to Corinth” It sounds as though Paul does not wait for Silas and Timothy, but left Athens and headed due west 40 miles to Corinth. Paul reviews this visit in 1 Corinthians 2:1–5. He made at least two return visits to Corinth and wrote at least four letters to them (two of which we have). While in Corinth the first time, he wrote his epistle to 1 Thessalonians.

CORINTH

Corinth was a double port city, controlling the isthmus between mainland Greece and the Peloponnesus. This facilitated its commerce and cosmopolitan population. The ancient city was founded by Dorian Greeks in the 10th century BC, at the foot of Acrocorinth, a rocky summit of 1,886 feet. They crowned the top with a temple to Aphrodite. Between 625–585 BC a five-foot-wide canal track was cut through the rock to connect the ports on the Aegean and Adriatic Seas. They wheeled ships across the isthmus rather than sailing around. Corinth was sacked by the Roman in 146 BC. Julius Caesar re-founded the city in 44 BC and populated it with freed Italian men. In 27 BC Corinth was named the capital of the senatorial province of Achaia, seat of the ruling proconsul. Archeologists found a broken lintel with four words engraved in the stone: “Synagogue of the Hebrews.” The city was also well known for its sexual promiscuity. At the time, the nick-name for a prostitute was a “Corinthian girl,” and to practice fornication was “to Corinthianize.” It should not be surprising to find Paul denouncing sexual sins in the new church in 1 Corinthians.

Right: Map of Corinth.

Below: Ancient Corinth. Photo by Chris Oxford.

Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Acts 18:2 “. . . found a certain Jew named Aquila . . . and his wife, Priscilla” Luke introduces us to two future leaders in early Christianity. They were Jewish refugees who had fled Rome. Aquila was from “Pontus” which was a region of Asia Minor east of Galatia, north of Syria, and associated with the Black Sea. Aquila and Priscilla may have already been Christians when they fled Rome as members of a “Jewish splinter group” (Acts 2:10). When Paul arrived in Corinth, they immediately invited him to live with them. They became great missionaries and lifelong friends of Paul. We will read more of them throughout the Epistles (Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Acts 18:18).

“. . . because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome” Claudius Caesar was the fourth Roman Emperor who reigned from AD 41 to 54. He was conciliatory toward the Jews most of the time, but when rioting broke out between the Jews and Christians, he expelled some of them from Rome in AD 49.¹⁷ A short time later, Claudius modified his edict because of the great number of Jews in Rome, to simply prohibit Jews from holding meetings. We have evidence that Christians returned to Rome by ca. AD 57 when Paul writes his epistle to the Romans. Even with Claudius’ attempts to calm down the Jewish / Christian arguments, Christianity still took a firm hold in the Mediterranean world during his reign.¹⁸

Acts 18:3 “he abode with them . . . [as] tentmakers” Luke explains that Paul moved in with Aquilla and Priscilla because both men shared the same profession: tentmaker. (All three became full-time missionaries directly afterward.) Paul had been trained, but since he came from a wealthy family he probably only needed to work occasionally (or possibly more after he became a Christian, depending on how his family accepted his faith).¹⁹

All Jewish boys were encouraged to earn a living. Here’s the *Mishnah’s* guidelines, starting with learning to read and write at age five: “at five to Scripture, ten to Mishnah, thirteen to religious duties, fifteen to Talmud, eighteen to the wedding canopy, at twenty to acquire riches, at thirty strength, at forty prudence, fifty to the council” and so on.²⁰ Later in Paul’s letters he tells us that he supported himself and did not ask the saints for financial aid, which is consistent with this verse (2 Thessalonians 3:8–10; 2 Corinthians 11:9). Paul’s example of working emphasizes that he was on the Lord’s errand of helping people spiritually not profiting from them financially. Paul’s home district of Cilicia exported goat’s hair for making tents. By connecting the information of Paul’s being both Jewish and a free-born Roman citizen (Acts 22:28)—a unique position—one could deduce that his father gained his Roman citizenship and wealth by providing tents for a Roman army.

Acts 18:4–5 “when Silas and Timotheus were come . . . Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ” Paul’s companions finally arrived from Berea and Thessalonica. Having three missionaries to testify in the synagogues added strength to their witness (Ac17:14; 1 Thessalonians 3:1–2). They again focused on the most important message—Jesus fulfilled the law as their promised Messiah.

Acts 18:6 “when they opposed . . . **Your blood be upon your own heads . . . I will go unto the Gentiles**” Paul had tried to teach the restored truth to the Jews at the synagogue in Corinth, but they rejected it. As a sign, he “shook his raiment” against them and felt justified to move on, freed from the responsibility of preaching to the Jews first (Romans 2:9–10). This ordinance was restored in this dispensation, but only to be used when God commands it (D&C 24:15; 60:15).

Acts 18:7 “and entered into a certain man’s house named **Justus**” Justus was a “God fearing gentile” (see Acts 16:14), who Paul probably met in the Jewish synagogue and he appears to have converted to Christianity. Because he lived exactly next door to the synagogue, Paul would have felt safe at that close distance to teach there or possibly move in with Justus for a period. Perhaps the Jews did not violently retaliate against the missionaries because their leader believed their message.

Acts 18:8 “**Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue . . . and many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized**” We learn later that Crispus was one of the few people that Paul personally baptized (1 Corinthians 1:14–16). This verse also reinforces a key Christian doctrine that Jesus taught (John 3:3, 5), which was that baptism is an essential step in the conversion process.

Acts 18:9–11 “**One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid; keep on speaking . . . I am with you and’**” (BSB) This is Paul’s third of seven visions recorded in Acts (Acts 9:3–6; 16:9). In the past, Paul had left each city when Jewish persecution arose, but in Corinth he stayed for eighteen months. The vision gave him the courage to endure and to know that his sacrifices were not in vain. The heavenly message is a great missionary motto. We can see God’s inspiration directing Paul’s work in all seven recorded visions:

PAUL’S VISIONS AS RECORDED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

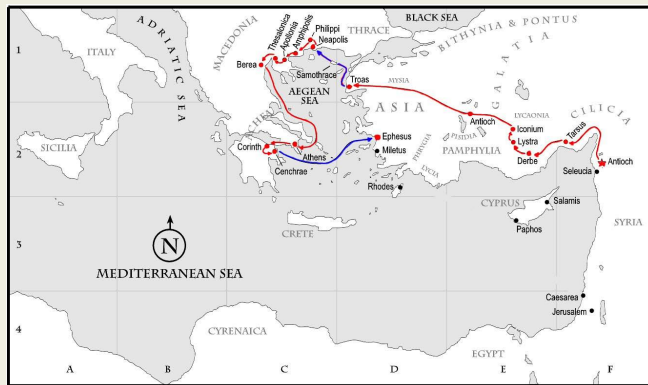
1	Acts 9, 22, 26	Christ near Damascus	Paul’s conversion and direction to visit man in Damascus
2	Acts 16:9–10	Man praying from Macedonian	Direction to preach in northern Greece
3	Acts 18: 9–10	Lord encourages in Corinth	Direction to remain in southern Greece
4	2 Cor 12:1–4	Saw Third Heaven	Comfort in persecutions; inspiration to understand afterlife
5	Acts 22:17–21	Christ in Temple	Direction to leave Jerusalem for Gentile areas
6	Acts 23:11	Christ in Jerusalem fortress	Comfort in imprisonment and direction for Rome
7	Acts 27:23–24	Angel of God	Promises safety in shipwreck and preparation to stand before

Gallio²¹

Acts 18:12–17

Acts 18:12–13 “The Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment” (NIV) The local Jews took Paul before Roman governor/proconsul, “Gallio.”

LUCIUS JUNIUS GALLIO ANNAEUS



Lucius Junius Gallio Annaeus was the son of the Roman rhetorician Seneca, and brother of the philosopher Seneca. His brother recorded of him, “No mortal is so agreeable to any one person as this man is to everybody.” Evidence for Gallio’s judgment seat as proconsul in Achaia was discovered in the old city of Corinth. Also an inscription in Delphi mentioned a Gallio in Claudius’ reign, during the 26th accolade (July 1, 51). This establishes the dating of Paul in Corinth.

He governed the province of southern Greece known as “Achaia.” Paul’s prosecutors would have known that a Roman ruler would not deal with religious issues, so they must have charged Paul with breaking a Roman law (i.e. propagating an illegal religion—implicating that Paul was not teaching Judaism which was protected by Roman law). The place of judgement, or Tribunal, was a six-foot-high platform with a large chair for the governor. Gallio’s jurisdiction in this area dates to AD 51.

Acts 18:14–15 “Gallio told the Jews . . . ‘Since it is a dispute about words and names and your own law, settle it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of such thing’” (BSB) Gallio’s ruling became the authoritative precedent for other magistrates guaranteeing Paul’s freedom to preach for years to come. An adverse verdict could have silenced Paul and other Christian missionaries for years.

Acts 18:17 “the crowd seized Sosthenes the synagogue leader and beat him” (BSB) Is Sosthenes the new ruler of the synagogue after Crispus? Or is it a different synagogue? There is another reference to someone named Sosthenes who is a companion of Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:1. We do not know if it is the same person. Luke includes the story to show how Gallio ignored social needs, “none of this was of any concern to Gallio” (BSB).

Paul's Return Trip from Second Mission

Acts 18:18-22

Acts 18:18 “Paul . . . left the brothers and sisters and sailed . . . his hair cut off at Cenchreae because of a vow . . .” (NIV). The seas were only opened for travel after the winter storms, so Paul waited until the seas were opened to travel in the spring of AD 52. Before embarking at Cenchreae, the eastern seaport of Corinth, he cut his hair, which he had allowed him to grow it long for his vow. This sounds like it was a temporary Nazirite vow as outlined in Numbers 6.²² (Did Paul's vision promising protection and great missionary success induce the vow?) Full discharge of the vow called for a “thank-offering” (sacrifice) in the Temple.

Acts 18:19–21 arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila” (NIV) Paul took Aquila and Priscilla to serve in Ephesus (across the Aegean Sea to the west coast of Turkey) with hopes of returning himself. Even though his stay in Ephesus was short, the synagogue was his starting point for missionary work. Paul continued to honor the Israelites with the “first,” chance to hear the gospel.

“bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem” Passover fell at the beginning of April in AD 52, and navigation did not begin until about March 10, so this could explain Paul's haste.²³ The Greek text used for the KJV, *Textus Receptus*, adds this phrase that Paul hurried home to spend the Passover at the Temple (Numbers 15, 30; Lev22, 27), but it is not found in most other English translations.

Acts 18:22 “he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch” (NIV) Paul's ship sailed from Ephesus to the Palestinian coast. He ended his second mission by giving a mission report to the leaders in Jerusalem, and then he returned to his “home base” of Antioch in Syria. (This was the practice in the latter-days as well. Until the mid-twentieth century, missionaries reported to a General Authority in SLC.) In biblical times, when anyone went to Jerusalem, no matter from which direction or height, one “went up” to the holy city. And when one left the high and holy city, it was always down. The Temple is the most sacred place in the world to a Jew.²⁴

Paul's Third Gentile Mission

ca. AD 53/54–58; Acts 18:23–22:16

LOCATION

Western
Asia minor,
Ephesus

COMPANIONS

Priscilla
Aquila
Gaius
Timothy
Titus

HOW IT BEGAN²⁵

After Paul gave his mission report to the leaders in Jerusalem and Antioch, he accepted the Ephesian Jews' request for Paul to visit.

This was Paul's longest mission—four years. Ephesus became his headquarters for three of those years. In Ephesus he wrote several letters, four to six of which we have canonized as Epistles to the Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, 1 Corinthians, possibly Romans, and 2 Corinthians. Tradition holds that Ephesus was also where John the Beloved settled with Mary, the mother of the Lord. The New Testament suggests that Ephesians as well as the Book of Revelation were written to the Ephesian saints and to six other nearby churches. The New Testament does not say that the two apostles overlapped in Ephesus, but they may have.



Apollos

*Acts 18:23–18:28*²⁶

Acts 18:23 “After Paul had spent some time in Antioch, he traveled . . . strengthening all the disciples” (BSB) Paul began what is traditionally called his “third” mission (but actually would have been his 5th or 6th mission since his conversion). He probably spent a year or two in Antioch, and then returned to visit and strengthen his new converts from his previous missions (probably Lystra, Iconium, Derby, and the other Antioch in Pisidian), before setting out to Ephesus (in what they called Asia, and we call western Turkey).

Acts 18:24 “Apollos born at Alexandria . . . an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures came to Ephesus” Luke introduces the brilliant, well-versed-in-Jewish-scripture, Apollos from Alexandria. In one version of the Greek text, it states that Apollos was taught the Christian message “in his home city” (Western Text). He moved to Ephesus.²⁷

Acts 18:25 “[Apollos] had been instructed in the way of the Lord and was fervent . . . and taught accurately about Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John” (BSB) Apollos knew of Jesus’ teachings and taught them passionately—even though he knew only the baptism of John and nothing about the resurrection or the Gift of the Holy Ghost. This indicates that John the Baptist followers and/or other Jews who learned of Jesus while visiting Jerusalem or Palestine during His ministry, had taken what they learned back to their homes and shared the word, independent of the Twelve or the Apostolic Church.

ALEXANDRIA AND EPHESUS

Alexandria, Egypt on the Nile delta was an Egyptian capital for 300 years before Rome took it over in 48 BC. It became one of the most populated cities in the Roman Empire (with approximately 100,000 people), and had the largest Jewish population outside of Palestine. The Alexandrian Jews were created of the Septuagint. Tradition claimed Mark brought Christianity to them.



Ephesus, Asia was a port city that joined the East and the West since the tenth century BC. It became a center of transportation and commerce. At its height in the first two centuries AD, it was the second largest city in the Roman Empire. Cicero described it: “Asia indeed is as wealthy as it is fertile, so it easily exceeds all lands in the richness of soil, in the variety of products, in the extent of pastures, and in the number of its exports.”



Right top: Roman amphitheater at Alexandria, Egypt. Photo by Daniel Mayer. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Right bottom: Ancient Ephesus Gate of Mazeus and Mithridates. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 18:26 “[Apollus] began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” (ESV) A year or two earlier, at the end of Paul’s second mission, he asked his friends from Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla, to proselyte in Ephesus. These two missionaries attended the same synagogue in Ephesus and heard Apollos’ testimony. Apollos was humble enough, and close enough to the Spirit to know that he could trust the new information taught by Aquila and Priscilla. All this happened before Paul arrived on his third mission.

Acts 18:27 “When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him” (NIV) Apol-

los wanted to preach in southern Greece, specifically in Corinth (Acts 19:1). Aquila and Priscilla were probably involved with those disciples who gave him recommendations to the church in Corinth. He supported the saints there who “believed through grace,” which referred to the grace of Jesus or what Paul preached as “law-free,” meaning free from the confines of the Law of Moses.

Acts 18:27b–28 “When he arrived . . . he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah” (NIV) Apollos “mightily convinced” the Jews in Corinth. His knowledge of the scriptures and his debate skills were a huge asset to his missionary work. We have evidence that Apollos made a strong impact on the Corinthian saints (1 Corinthians 3:4–6, 9, 32; 4:1, 6; 16:12; Titus 3:13). Paul later records that Apollos became his friend and companion, but the Corinthian saints were swept into a splintering effect in their discipleship. Over time some of the Corinthian saints formed factions within the church at Corinth: “One of you says, ‘I follow Paul’; another, ‘I follow **Apollos**,’” which Paul discouraged (1 Corinthians 1:3, NIV).

ACTS 19

Paul Arrives in Ephesus

Acts 19:1–12

Acts 19:1–2 “Paul . . . arrived at Ephesus . . . and asked them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’” The opening scene synthesizes Paul’s missionary message in a nut shell. In the conversation with a group of twelve disciples, meaning believers, Paul introduced Jesus as the Messiah and the name by which His saving ordinances are performed. Luke includes their dialogue to open the door to understanding the importance of the saving ordinances following belief. True to his pattern, Luke also parallels this message with other examples throughout the Book of Acts.

The corollary of Paul’s question is that belief is a prerequisite for receiving the Gift of the Holy Ghost. But, these early disciples had not even heard of it. We are not told where Paul met these twelve disciples of either John the Baptist or Jesus’ mortal ministry (Acts 19:7). Perhaps they met at a synagogue, or possibly they were a remnant of Apollos’ early missionary work (as he did not know about the Gift of the Holy Ghost either). John the Baptist had also addressed the baptism of fire in Matthew 3:38 and Luke 3:16, but it was not given until after the Lord’s resurrection. In such a large city (the population estimate includes a broad range from 33,000 to a quarter million²⁸), there may have been several groups of Jews and disciples who did not know of the others.

Paul’s arrival in Ephesus is an example of the miracle of the Lord’s timing. In Acts 16:6–7, Paul was told not to teach there, but now the timing was right (Acts 18:21). He found people who had been prepared by “John’s

baptism,” who were ready to learn and who received the Gift of the Spirit. Paul’s trust in the Lord’s timing and seeking for more inspiration opened the door to this miracle.

Acts 19:6–7 “when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied” As an apostle, Paul held the priesthood authority to administer the ordinance of confirmation. In the Gospels, the Lord gives this gift of the Holy Ghost to the Apostles (Acts 2); and in the book of Acts there is one example of Peter and one example of Paul giving the same ordinance to believing, baptized saints through the laying on of hands. Luke leaves a clear picture of the first saving ordinances, with at least two witnesses to each example. To appreciate Luke’s witness, it helps to see them together.

Saving Ordinances in Acts

ORDINANCE	WITNESSED BY FIRST APOSTLES	WITNESSED BY PAUL
Baptism	<p>Luke 3:21; John 1:35–42 John the Baptist baptized John-Andrew-Jesus</p> <p>Acts 2:38 Jews at Pentecost</p> <p>Acts 8:12 Samaritans</p> <p>Acts 8:38 Eunuch</p> <p>Acts 10:48 First Gentiles</p>	<p>Acts 9:18 Paul baptized by Ananias</p> <p>Acts 16:15 Lydia and her household</p> <p>Acts 16:33 Jailer and household</p> <p>Acts 18:8 Corinthian disciples</p> <p>Acts 19:5 Twelve disciples</p>
Confirmation “Gift of the Holy Ghost”	Acts 8:17 Samaritans	Acts 19:6 Twelve disciples
Ordination & Setting Apart	Acts 6:1–7 “The Seven”	Acts 13:1–3 Paul and Barnabas
Sacrament	Acts 2:42, 46 Jerusalem Church	Acts 20:7, 11 Churches at Troas

Acts 19:8 “he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months” Three months appears as the longest span that a Jewish community allowed Paul to teach in their synagogue.

Acts 19:9–10 “some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe” (NIV) The RSV begins this verse, “some were stubborn.” Those that believed had already followed the missionaries, but the more hardened Jews only disputed with the missionaries’ reasoning.

“and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them” Not only did they not believe and follow, but the hardened Jews attacked the early church. “The Way” appears to be the first name of the church. So, Paul and the disciples stopped meeting at the synagogue and began worshiping in the school or “lecture hall of Tyrannus” (BSB). This public hall may have been owned by a fellow saint as it became Paul’s daily forum and mission headquarters for two years as the missionaries taught in the outlying communities (possibly even Colossians 100 miles to the east).

Acts 19:11–12 “God gave Paul the power to work great miracles. People even took handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched Paul’s body, and . . . all of the sick people were healed” (CEV) Luke carefully gave God credit for the extraordinary miracles that Paul performed, and choose to include miracles that both Peter and Jesus were connected to as well. He recorded parallel events to show God blessed Peter and Paul with the same powerful witnesses as His Son. By doing this, Luke illustrated how the power of the Spirit unified God’s work from one leader to another. God directed His early church through the Spirit.



The Miracle of Saint Paul by Felice Giani, ca. 1800. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Jesus' Promise of Miracles Fulfilled by Peter and Paul²⁹

JESUS' PROMISES & POWER

Mark 16:17 "in my name shall they cast out devils"

Mark 16:17 "speak with new

Mark 16:18 "take up serpents . . . any deadly thing, it shall not hurt"

Mark 16:18 "They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover"

MIRACLE THROUGH PETER

Acts 5:16 "vexed with unclean spirits and they were healed

Acts 2:11 "speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God"

Acts 3:6 "Peter said . . . rise up and walk" (healed cripple)

Acts 4:30 "By stretching forth thine hand to heal"

Acts 5:15 "people brought the sick into the streets...so that at least Peter's shadow might ..."

MIRACLE THROUGH PAUL

Acts 13:6–11 Blinding Elymas the magician

Acts 16:16–18 Cast out evil spirit from girl

Acts 19:12 Cast out evil spirit in Ephesus

1 Cor 14:18 "I speak with tongues more than ye all"

Acts 28:3–6 "no harm" from viper bite, but "should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly"

Acts 14:8–10 Healing of cripple in Lystra

Acts 19:11–12 Healing diseases in Ephesus

Acts 28:5 Healing of Publius' father when Paul "prayed and laid his hands on him"

Acts 28:9 Healing others "which had diseases in the island"

A similar healing experience with a healing handkerchief happened in Nauvoo when Joseph Smith received the gift of healing, and healed hundreds, if not thousands, in one day July 22, 1839.³⁰

The Sons of Sceva

Acts 19:13–20

Acts 19:13 “some of the itinerant Jews, exorcists, also attempted to invoke the name . . . saying, “I adjure you by Jesus, whom Paul proclaims.” (BLB) A group of strolling (NEB) Jews found out about Paul casting out devils in the name of Jesus and tried to duplicate it to perform exorcisms. Earlier, in Jesus’ ministry, when others used His name to cast out demons, Jesus responded, “he that is not against us is for us” (Luke 9:49–50).

Acts 19:14 “Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest” (BSB) The father and sons’ team was not just made up of run of the mill Jews but claimed to be from a chief priestly family, descendants from Aaron. This brings up the question, what would a chief priest be doing in Ephesus? This claim alone, discredits him. It was known throughout the Near East that the Jew serving as the high priest had access to the name of God and its true pronunciation, as one of his responsibilities was to receive it on the Day of Atonement at the veil (Leviticus 16). A type of folklore spread about this in magical canons, claiming that one who knew this secret could command it with enormous power over the spirit world.³¹

Luke’s inclusion of this story gives a nice flair of local color. These sons of Sceva, learn of Paul’s invocation to heal the sick in the name of Jesus, and want to adopt it into their magical practice. However, when they tried to use it, it backfired.

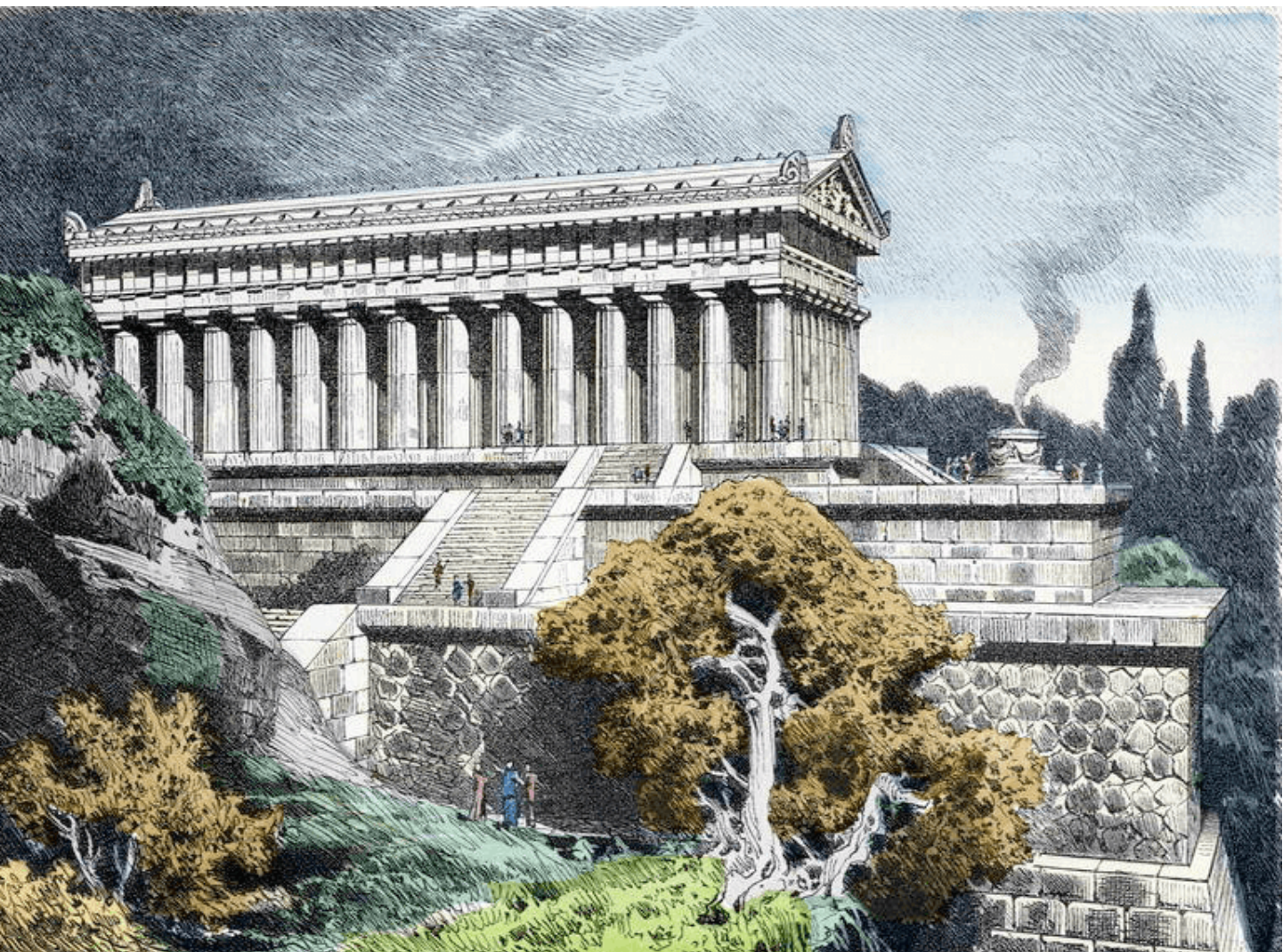
Acts 19:15–16 “Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but you, who are you? . . . the evil spirit jumped on them” (BSB) Luke uses this story as a second witness on the importance of authority (Acts 19: 4–5). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that only through God’s power of the gift of discernment could false or true spirits be discerned.³² Joseph often spoke of priesthood power, using the larger definition of all of God’s power that was available to all believing disciples. Jesus taught the same thing, that all with pure faith in His Name could cast out an evil spirit or perform the gifts of the Spirit, though some “goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21). It is helpful to be on guard, for evil spirits are still functioning and can harm one spiritually and physically.

Acts 19:17–18 “Many that believed came, and confessed , and shewed their deeds” Luke includes a threefold process of repentance—1) Belief in a Savior that motivates one to seek His redemption, 2) Confess one’s sins to God, His representatives, and those offended, 3) Show a changed heart and mind through one’s deeds. This experience illustrates another example of when a trial became a blessing, and even grew the kingdom.

Acts 19:19 “them . . . which used curious arts, brought their books together and burned them” The magicians or sorcerers of Ephesus who believed were even willing to destroy their profession. The cost of the books is included as “50,000 pieces of silver,” which was the equivalent of 50,000 days of labor for a common worker. Using this number to determine the number of converts, it may have represented 5,000 people who converted because of this experience.³³

Acts 19:20 “Mightily grew the word of God and prevailed” Luke uses this same phrase three times—first with the Christian growth in Jerusalem (Acts 6:7), second in Antioch (Acts 12:24), and here—suggesting that Ephesus became one of the major centers of Christianity, along with Jerusalem and Antioch. Tradition states that John the Beloved and Mary, the mother of the Lord, lived there for many years.

The Temple of Artemis (Diana) at Ephesus by Ferdinand Knab., 1886. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Ephesian Worshipers of Diana

Acts 19:21–41

Acts 19:21–22 “Paul purposed in the spirit . . .” Paul felt inspired that his future would include returning to Jerusalem and preaching in Rome. (Luke includes others who confirmed this prophecy.) In the meantime, he sent two missionaries (Timotheus and Erastus) back to minister in Macedonia and Greece again, while he stayed in Ephesus.

Acts 19:23 “there arose no small stir about that Way” The early saints still referred to the church as the “Way” (see comments in Acts 9:2).

Acts 19:24–26 “A silversmith, which made shrines for Diana, brought no small gain” Paul’s experience in Ephesus with the Roman goddess Diana (or the Greek goddess, Artemis) became famous enough to make its way into the book of Acts. Diana was just one of many gods in the state religion, but the only one that made it into the New Testament by name. Diana was the goddess of the moon, animals, forest, hunting, and women in childbirth.

Acts 19:27–34 “our craft is in danger . . . also . . . the Temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised . . . whom all Asia and the world worshipping . . . the whole city was filled with confusion” The growth of Christianity threatened the Roman cult. An Ephesian silversmith egged on irate cult worshipers.

Acts 19:35–41 “. . . Ephesians is a worshiper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?” A town clerk stopped the riot by assuring everyone that Diana still represented the dominate religion. “In some places her worshipers preformed fertility rites as she also represented the mother goddess.

Paul Writes the Corinthian Epistles at this Time

Simultaneous to Paul’s work in Ephesus, it appears that he communicated with the saints from the areas in which he had proselytized and hoped to visit: 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans. He addressed the problem of Judaizers undermining Paul’s authority (Galatian 2:14).³⁴ Corinth especially was bombarded with factionalism. Paul wrote to tell them that he hoped to personally visit and rectify the situation. First, though, he sent a stinging letter to the Corinthian church, like a verbal spanking to the offenders. Titus carried that letter, but we do not have a copy of it, only a mention of it in 2 Corinthians 2:3–4; 3:1.

When Paul left Ephesus, he hoped to do missionary work in route to Troas, but that had to wait until he received news from the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 2:12–13). It appears that when the Aegean Sea closed for sailing during the winter months, Paul realized that Titus was not coming that along the route, so Paul traveled overland to Corinth (2 Corinthians 2:13).

He met Titus in Macedonia with the great news that the Corinthian church had responded well to Paul's letter. Disciplinary action had been taken against the offending party. When Paul heard this happy news, he wrote another letter to the Corinthians from Macedonia promising them that he would come (2 Corinthians 10:11). This letter is full of affection and reconciliation showing Paul's underlying motive in his apostolic ministry (2 Corinthians 2:8–10).³⁵

ACTS 20

AD 57–58

Paul Travels from Ephesus to Macedonia and Greece

Acts 20:1–6

Acts 20:1–2 “After the uproar was ceased, Paul called . . . the disciples, and embraced them, and departed” Luke only records a brief sketch of Paul's return trip—as if he were hurrying to discuss Paul in Jerusalem. It helps to look at a map to follow how he traveled. Luke does not leave many details, but focuses the onward march of Christianity, not the development of church communities.

Acts 20:3–5 “[Paul] stayed three months . . . when the Jews formed a plot against him” (BSB) Paul and his companions wintered in Corinth with plans to return to Jerusalem in the spring. But, a Jewish plot and the Spirit's inspiration changed his plans to “return through Macedonia.”³⁶ This again turned out to be a blessing in disguise as seven fellow disciples joined Paul traveling to Jerusalem.

The seven traveling companions waited for Paul in Troas. They appear to represent certain areas, carrying tithing or charitable donations to church headquarters in Jerusalem (Acts 24:17; Romans 15:25–27). To get to know these great men, here is a list:

1. Sopater from Berea, traveler with Paul, and possibly the fellow worker, Sosipater (Romans 16:21)
2. Gaius from Derbe, worker with Paul in Asia (Acts 19:29), seized at the Diana riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:29)
3. Aristarchus from Thessalonica, seized at the Ephesus riot (Acts 19:29), goes to prison in Rome with
4. Paul (Acts 27:2), and sent greetings with those “of the circumcision” (Colossians 4:10–11; Philemon 1:24)
5. Secundus from Thessalonica, traveler with Paul
6. Timothy, Paul's beloved companion and “son” (Acts 16:1–3; 1 & 2 Tim, 2 Corinthians 11:1; Rom 16:21)
7. Tychicus, a fellow missionary with Paul in Asia (Colossians 4:7; 2 Timothy 4:12)
8. Trophimus, a fellow missionary with Paul in Asia (2 Timothy 4:20)

Acts 20:6 “we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread” The “we” suggests that Luke joined Paul again in Philippi (Acts 16:10, 12, 16–17). Paul and his companions celebrated the Passover and the weeklong Feast of Unleavened Bread, with his beloved saints in Philippi, of whom he wrote, “I love and long for, my joy and crown” (Philippians 4:1, NIV). The group all left Philippi and sailed from Neapolis about 130 miles across the Aegean Sea.

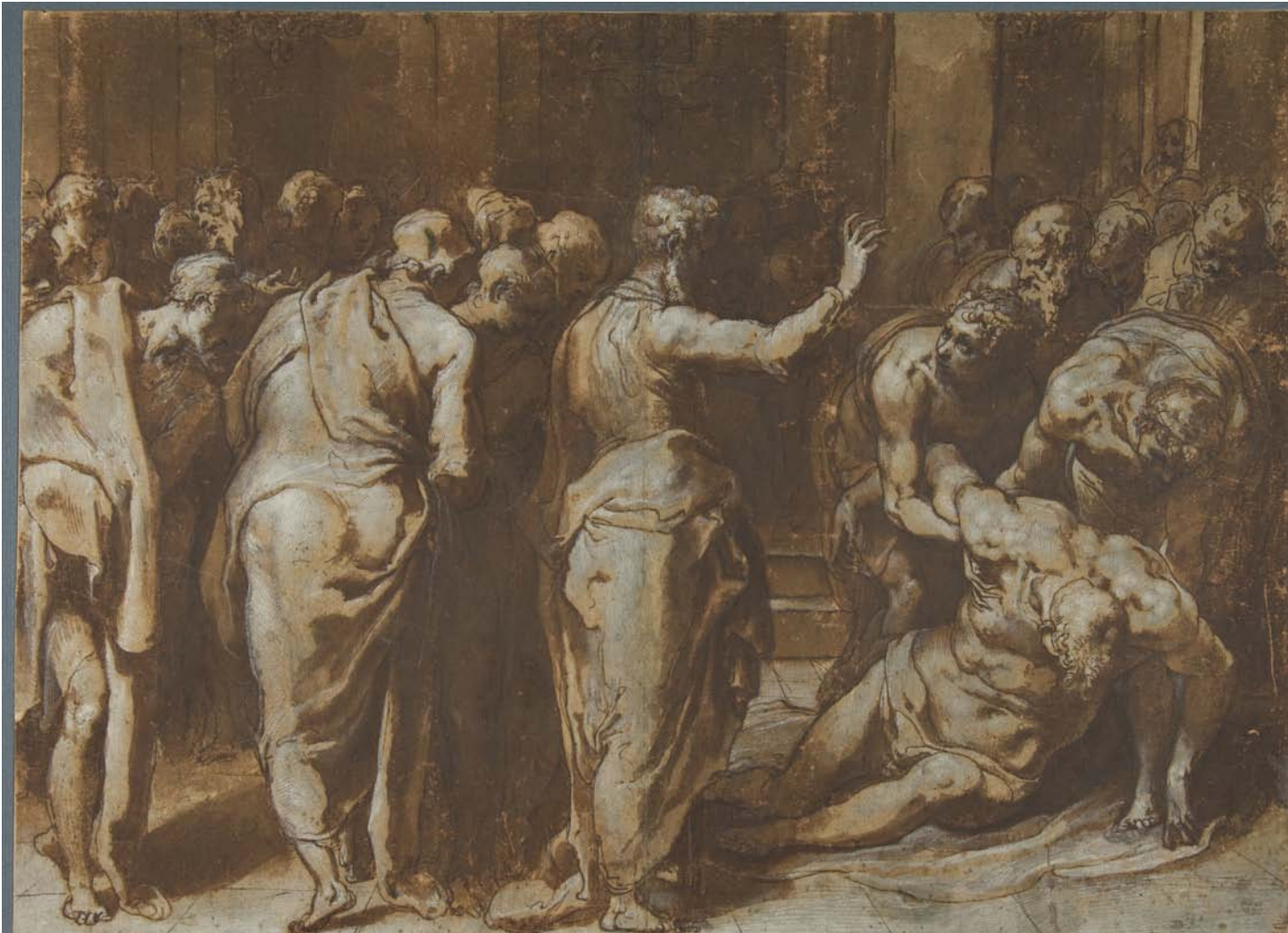
In Troas, Eutychus Raised from the Dead

Acts 20:7–12

Acts 20:7 “upon the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread” During Paul’s week in Troas, he joined the Saints for a Sunday Sacrament service. Note they no longer worshipped on the last day of the week, the Jewish Sabbath, nor do they travel on their Sabbath. This is the only time Luke includes a sacrament of the Lord’s Supper in Paul’s missions (paralleling Acts 2:42, 46).

“Paul preached unto them . . . until midnight” The night before Paul and his companions departed from Troas, he spoke to them for several hours. Sadly, Luke does not include any details about his message.

Saint Paul Restoring Eutychus to Life by Taddeo Zuccaro, ca. 1529. Image via The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Acts 20:8–9 “there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus . . . sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead” The church service was held in a packed room on the third floor. One person was even sitting in a window sill, openings in the stone or brick walls. The saints were so eager to spend more time hearing Paul, that they brought out their oil lamps and he continued until midnight, when an accident occurred.

Sleepy Eutychus fell out the window, three flights down to probably a stone courtyard. When the group reached him, he was dead. Luke includes the story not only to tell the miracle that followed, but also to teach that it was not enough to be in the right place at the right time; we must listen to learn.

Acts 20:10–12 “Paul went down and bent over Eutychus. He took him in his arms and said, ‘Don’t worry! He’s alive!’” (CEV) Paul raised the young man, Eutychus, from the dead. Luke included Jesus, Peter, and Paul each receiving God’s power to raise the dead (Luke 7:22; Acts 9:36–42; also, in John 11:38–44 Jesus raised Lazarus). The gathering returned from this midnight miracle, to upstairs “and had broken the bread and eaten” (NASB), which probably refers to partaking of the sacrament together (compare Acts 2:42). They continued to talk with Paul until sunrise when the travelers left.

Paul Sets Sail with one last stop south of Ephesus

Acts 20:14–17

Acts 20:14–17 “Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time . . . for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost” (NIV) Luke describes how Paul had walked for a distance (Acts 20:13), and then joined him in a ship to travel more quickly in hopes of arriving in Jerusalem before the pilgrimage “Feast of Pentecost” in four or five weeks (Acts 20:16). Luke records several stops, but the most important was almost fifty miles south of Ephesus in Miletus. Paul intentionally passed Ephesus to save time. Also, the cargo ship he was on (Acts 21:3) probably had a set path that Paul could not control. But when the ship stopped, Paul made effective use of his “layover” time. After having ministered in Miletus for over two years, he would have been gone from them about four to six months at this time, and he feared the time and energy it would take to update the saints and then say goodbye again to so many friends. However, a result of stopping in Miletus rather than Ephesus meant “the elders of the church” had to make a nearly one-hundred-mile round trip journey for their leadership conference with Paul.

Paul’s Last Recorded Missionary Sermon

Acts 20:17–38

Acts 20:17–32 “I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus” (NIV) Luke records portions of Paul’s last recorded sermon. He emphasizes four things.

1. **Service:** Paul's example of service should be ours—serve without pay, with humility, sincerity, and work with those you serve (Acts 20:19–20, 31, 33–35).³⁷ Paul used the shepherd and flock imagery as Jesus and Peter did (1 Peter 5:1–4; John 10:11). Paul also quoted Jesus, “it is more blessed to give than to receive,” but we do not have this statement in the Gospels (Acts 20:35). This is evidence that there were earlier collections of Jesus' sayings circulating in the early church that preceded the Gospels.
2. **Repentance and Faith:** Stand clean toward God by repentance and increase our faith (Acts 20:21). Paul exerted his faith to leave his sheep in God's hands (Acts 20:32).
3. **Follow the Spirit:** The Spirit's inspiration pushed Paul to Jerusalem, even though he was warned repeatedly that prison awaited him (Acts 20:23). By following personal revelation, he fulfilled his missionary service to God—not worrying about his own life or martyrdom.
4. **Apostasy:** This warning overshadowed everything Paul said (as he did in his last letter too, 2 Timothy 1:15; 2:18; 3:5; 4:4, etc.). Paul warned that future church leaders would reverse Christ's doctrines (Acts 20:30).³⁸ Knowing of this, Paul wanted to clear himself from the saints' future apostasy, preaching “night and day with tears” (Acts 20:31, also 20:25–26, 28–30). Jesus also warned disciples of false teachers (Matthew 7:15; 24:11). Jesus' church would not disappear, but be captured by the enemy, Satan (Acts 20:30).

Acts 20:36 “When he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them” Paul's example as a leader closing the meetings with prayer and having a prayer before departure on bended knees was also part of the practice and living truths taught in the Restored Church. Luke does not share the words he prayed. I presume it was not filled with small talk nor vain repetitions, but that his words were directed by the Spirit and filled with heart-felt concerns about what mattered most.

Acts 20:37–38 “They all wept openly as they embraced Paul and kissed him” (BSB) It sounds as if Paul were more upset about the saints falling away, while the Ephesian leaders were most upset about not seeing Paul again. Paul loved his converts and God's work more than his life.



ACTS 21

Paul Returns to Jerusalem to Report Third Apostolic Mission

Lesson on Personal Revelation learned in Tyre

Acts 21:1–6

Acts 21:1–3 “we sailed directly to . . . and landed at Tyre, where the ship was to unload its cargo” (BSB). Luke’s presence is seen with four references to “we” in three verses, as well as extra details about their voyage.³⁹ After weeks at sea, the missionaries stayed in Tyre for a week.

Acts 21:4 “We sought out the disciples in Tyre . . . through the Spirit they kept telling Paul not to go up to Jerusalem”⁴⁰ The local disciples interpreted their inspiration about the dangers that lay ahead for Paul, as reason for him to stay away. This brings up an important point. We may correctly receive inspiration, but we can interpret it through our own lens or filters in the wrong way. Rarely does personal revelation come as a clear guidebook, but more often like the angel guiding Nephi through his dream, requires personal discernment. The local saints’ inspiration that danger lay ahead for Paul was correct, but they misunderstood that he was still supposed to go. Fortunately, Paul held firm to his own inspiration back in Ephesus and he continued on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 19:21).

TYRE

Tyre, a small island off the coast of southern Lebanon, has been populated since 3000 BC. In ca. 1000 BC, King Hiram of Tyre supplied David and Solomon with wood, gold, and craftsmen for their temple (2 Samuel 5:11). In 332 BC, Alexander the Great built a cause-way to connect it to the mainland. Jesus also had followers from Tyre (Mark 3:8).

Acts 21:5–6 “They all brought us on our way, with wives and children . . . and we knelt down on the shore, and prayed” We can see the sincerity of the local Tyre saints as after only a week with Paul and his companions, they come out as whole families to see them off with kneeling prayer on the beach.



Acts 21:7–9 “We reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven” (NIV) After another 70 miles at sea, Paul’s company visit’s Philip (Acts 6:1–6). Luke remembers that Philip had four daughters who were virgins and prophetesses. This is another scriptural example of valiant New Testament women who the early church honored (as the Book of Mormon did, see Alma 32:23).

Acts 21:10–12 “a prophet named Agabus . . . took Paul’s belt, bound his own . . . and said, ‘The Holy Spirit says: ‘In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt’” (BSB) As Paul and the companions rest in Caesarea for “many days” an inspired man, Agabus prophesied one last time about Paul’s future imprisonment.⁴¹ Paul by now is well forewarned that trials lay ahead. But he carried on following his earlier promptings from the Spirit (Acts 19:21).

Acts 21:13–14 “Why are you weeping . . . ? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord” (BSB) It was difficult for Paul’s companions to see the wisdom in this, but they said, “the will of the Lord be done” (Acts 21:14), Like Job’s friends, Paul’s comforters also misunderstood the Lord’s plan. Disciples who trust in the Lord can provide help to do hard things.

Paul’s Arrival in Jerusalem

Acts 21:15–26

Acts 21:15–19 “When we arrived in Jerusalem . . . welcomed us joyfully . . . went in . . . to see James, and all the elders” Paul’s companions walked the last 60 miles (KJV “carriage” is actually a verb that meant prepared for the journey or “packed the baggage” INT), and went to report their mission to the “elders” in Jerusalem.⁴² James was acting as the local leader (not the apostle who was killed, Acts 12:2). There may have been a General Leadership meeting in conjunction with Pentecost. (This is the last time the pronoun “us” or “we” is used until Acts 27:1, in Caesarea again.) Paul gave them a “detailed” (NIV) mission report or account of what happened on his mission.

Acts 21:20–21 “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law” (NIV). After praising God for the Gentile missionaries’ success, the Elders apprised them that there had also been thousands of Jewish converts who still loved the Law of Moses. The Jerusalem Council had occurred nearly ten years ago and Paul had been gone for most of those years.⁴³ At that time, Peter and the church leaders had announced that the Gentile-Christians only needed to obey Jesus’ higher law, and four things from the 613 Mosaic Laws (Acts 15:19–20). However, nothing had been determined for the newly converted Jewish-Christians. Many of them were still living the Law of Moses after baptism. Christianity taught that the Law of Moses was fulfilled. This conflict was a battle between culture and doctrine.⁴⁴

Acts 21:22–24 “Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow . . .” The elders suggested a prudent plan for Paul to appease the feelings of the zealous Jewish-Christians. Before going to the temple, as Paul had been doing among the Gentiles, he needed to purify himself with ritual baths. The four Christian converts who had made a short-term a Nazarite vow (Numbers 6:1–13), were cutting their hair (just as Paul had done after his 2nd Gentile mission in Acts 18:18) and needed to make their thanksgiving offering.

As a former Pharisee, Paul knew how important these vows were to the Jews, and accepted James’ advice. If Paul joined them, and “pa[id] their expenses” (RSV, NIV, JB), it would demonstrate his mindfulness of the Law. (Historically at the time, it was regarded as a pious action to pay for the thank-offerings of another.)⁴⁵ This also gave Paul an opportunity to render an account of his stewardship in the Temple. Twenty years before, the Lord had appeared to him in the vision that sent him “far away to the Gentiles” (Acts 22:21).

Acts 21:25 “we have written *and* concluded that they observe no such thing, save only . . .” The group of elders acknowledge the letters announcing Jerusalem that were sent a decade earlier in ca. AD 49 (Acts 15:6).

Acts 21:26 “So the next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he entered the temple” (BSB) The “days of purification” (KJV) usually referred to forty (Leviticus 12:40). But the Nazarite Vow only required a few days of separation from blood and wines, etc. (Numbers 6:6). We do not know the price that Paul paid for the four men’s temple offerings, because the price fluctuated dramatically according to the whim of the chief priest who acted as “Treasurer.”⁴⁶

Paul’s Arrest in Jerusalem

Acts 21:26–40 Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem will be added to next week’s Come Follow Me (Acts 21:26–40) The following timeline covers Paul’s life and ministry.⁴⁷

Header Image: Paul in Athens. Artist unknown. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

1. Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1983), 43. Adapted from a chart.
2. *Ibid.*, 54.
3. The complete “we” passages are: Acts 16:10,12, 17 all between, Troas and Philippi; Acts 20:5–15; 21:1–18 (at the end of the third mission from Philippi to Jerusalem); Acts 27:1–28:16 (when Paul is a prisoner from Caesarea to Rome). Luke also was with Paul during his first (Colossians 4:14; Philippians 24) and second imprisonments (1 Timothy 4:11).
4. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 54.
5. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 359. Lydia is the name of a biblical woman and a place, “a producer of textiles and purple dye” (*ibid.*, 832). Purple was referred to as an expensive commodity in: Exodus 25:4; 2 Chronicles 2:7, 14; 3:14; Proverbs 31:22; Song of Solomon 3:10; Mark 15:17–20; John 19:2–5; Revelation 17:4; 18:12, 16.
6. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 55.
7. Roman citizens only wore their official togas for special public meetings and certain events. The large oval piece of white wool had a colored stipe along the border. It was not only hot, but also heavy, weighing thirty-five pounds.
8. Josephus, *Against Apion*, 14.216; 16.164; Vit. 277ff; 290; 295. Josephus repeatedly mentioned synagogues, but they were not always separate buildings, but rather any place where Jews gathered for religious discussions, education, and social meetings.
9. See previous commentary on Acts 10:2
10. Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ’s Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: GP, 2015), chapters 2–4; Appendix 3 includes all 180 women referenced in the New Testament. Also see earlier commentary on Acts 14:23. Jesus and His Apostles “restored the sacred nature of the family and marriage by re-establishing a noble image of women and children. In order to appreciate the dramatic change that Jesus made to the role of women and their relationships, we need to place His teachings in the context of His day” We can find at least twenty verses that praise women’s ministering in the church.
11. Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament* (NYC, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1998), 25–26. Jewish synagogue worship did not encourage women to attend, but if they did, it was preferred that they were unheard and unseen. They segregated them into one corner. The same was true of their temple worship. Many Roman state religions allowed women to belong and exercise leadership, with or without their spouse’s influence. Religious Cults were formed around social classes, occupations, and even stages of a woman’s life. William Dunstan, *Ancient Rome* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), 37.
12. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 57.
13. Sperry Symposium Staff, *The New Testament and Latter-Day Saints* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 1987), 30. “Speech and reason were the most specifically human of all accomplishments” (*ibid.*, 29, 23).
14. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 58.

15. J. G. Frazer, *Pausanias's Description of Greece* (Macmillan and Co, 1913), 258.
16. Kenneth O. Gangel, Holman, *New Testament Commentary Acts* (Brodman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 290.
17. This decree was quoted from Suetonius in AD 120. Thirty years before, Tiberius Caesar, also expelled Jews from Rome)
18. Frederick F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, 295–304.
19. John W. Welch and John Hall, *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 15.5, Evidence of Paul's wealth is seen in: well educated in both Tarsus and Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin knew and trusted Saul as a young man, he could afford extensive travel, he had books, hired scribes, and many more.
20. *Mishnah, Avoth* 5:21. One translation summarized an ideal male Jewish life:
 - 5 to Scripture,
 - 10 to Mishnah,
 - 13 to fulfilling commandments,
 - 15 to Talmud,
 - 18 to the bride chamber,
 - 20 to pursuing a career,
 - 30 to authority,
 - 40 to discernment,
 - 50 for the counsel,
 - 60 to be an elder,
 - 70 for grey hairs,
 - 80 for special strength,
 - 90 for bowed back,
 - 100 as a corpse.
21. Paul J. Achtemeier, *Harpers Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1996), 361. Roman sources record that Gallio also served in Egypt, returned to Rome to take an official position. When his brother conspired against Nero in the early 60s Gallio fell into disgrace and committed suicide.
22. For other Old Testament vows, see Genesis 28:20; 31:13; Numbers 21:1–3; Judges 11:30; 1 Samuel 1:11; John 1:6.
23. Bruce, *Acts*, 378.
24. *Mishnah, Kelim*, 1:6–9; outlines “ten degrees of holiness.”
 - “The land of Israel is holier than all lands...
 - The cities that are surrounded by a wall are more holy than it...
 - Within the wall [of Jerusalem] is more holy than they...
 - The Temple Mount is holier than it...
 - The rampart is more holy than it...
 - The Court of the Women is more holy than it...
 - The Court of Israel is more holy than it...
 - The Court of the Priests is more holy than it...

[The area] between the porch and the altar is more holy than it...

The sanctuary is more holy than it...

The Holy of Holies is more holy than they.”

25. Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1983), 43. Adapted from a chart.
26. Apollos is also mentioned in D&C 76:99; 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:4–6, 22; 4:6; 16:12; and Titus 3:13.
27. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 63.
28. Alan Bowman, and Andrew Wilson, eds., *Settlement, Urbanization, and Population: Oxford Studies on the Roman Economy* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2011), 252–257.
29. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 56. (Adapted chart)
30. Wilford Woodruff, *Leaves from my Journal*, 78–79. In the summer of 1839, after spending the entire day healing the saints who were sick the malaria camped in tents among the swamps along both sides of the Mississippi, a father came running in from a distant town begging the prophet to come heal his ailing infant twins. Even though Joseph was unable to personally administer to them, he had Wilford Woodruff take his handkerchief to wipe the children’s faces and they were restored to health.
31. Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: Acts of the Apostles* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1997), 647–650.
32. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 213.
33. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 64.
34. For more information on Judaizers see Acts 15:1, 20.
35. Bruce, *New Testament History*, 333–334.
36. The additional information is added by the Western Text.
37. Paul warned of the corrupting influence of money. He advised the elders against the beguiling love of money as they manage the church money (see also 1 Peter 5:2; Time 3:3; Titus 1:7). We find similar warnings in the Book of Mormon against “priestcraft” or preaching for money (Alma 1:12–16).
38. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 65.
39. They travel by boat to Coos, Rhodes, Patara, then changing ships they sailed toward Syria. “After sighting” Cyprus, they continued south of it finally landing in the natural harbor of Tyre.
40. Regarding going “up” to Jerusalem, see Footnote 26, and Acts 18:22.
41. The word “prophet” is used differently in the Old Testament than the New Testament, or restoration. See notes on Acts 11:27.
42. Luke uses “elders” not apostles. In the Mishnah outline of ages, sixty is the age for “elder.” If we look in Luke, he calls the “apostles” the “Twelve,” but separates “elders.” *Mishnah, Avoth* 5:21. Each translation differs slightly. One reads, “twenty for pursuing a vocation, at the age of thirty for entering into one’s full vigor, at the age of forty for understanding, at the age of fifty for counsel, at age sixty, one attains old age.” Philip Blackman, *Mishnayoth*, (New York: The Judaica Press, 1963), 537.
43. For more information on the Jerusalem Council see earlier notes on Acts 15:1–30.
44. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 109.

45. Bruce, *New Testament History*, 355. Supposedly when King Herod Agrippa I did paid for someone else's vow, it counted as "righteousness."
46. Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple and its Ministry and Services as they were at the time of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, reprint, 1987), 196. Each chest or trumpet was carefully marked to identify what it was used for. Nine of the trumpets were for the receipt of what was legally due by worshippers' the other four for strictly voluntary gifts. Jeremias cited the son of Gamaliel I, who passionately fought to bring the price of the temple offering for the poor, a pair of the turtle doves, down and successfully reduced the fee 99% in one day (from two gold dinar to half a silver dinar). Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1969), 33.
47. Welch, Hall, *Charting the New Testament*, 15.2.



ACTS 22–28

THE CLIMAX OF PAUL'S LIFE'S MISSION

INTRODUCTION

Luke filled his record of Paul's last journey with healing, testifying, and missionary experiences. Missionaries have and will share Paul's experiences in every dispensation. We will note parallels of his life with Alma in the Book of Mormon. The Prophet Joseph Smith also quoted the apostle Paul often and found solace in their shared experiences. "Both began their service to the Lord through a life-changing vision. Both were true to the vision they received and acted with unrelenting faith and courage to fulfill their missions, bearing testimony to a skeptical world (see JS—H 1:24–25). And both sealed their testimonies with their blood as witnesses to the gospel they had so fervently preached throughout their lives."¹ We find foundational truths and admirable examples in Luke's retelling of Paul's last journey to Rome. We can learn how to be better missionaries and endure trials by studying Paul's life. Also, understanding Paul's life in the Book of Acts will make his Epistles easier to follow.

Paul's Timetable for Act 22–28

DATE	LOCATION	SCRIPTURE
AD 58 (late spring)	Jerusalem	Acts 21:17; 20:6
AD 58–60	Caesarea	Acts 24:27
AD 60–61 (Oct–winter)	Journey to Rome	Acts 27:9; 28:11
AD 61–63	Roman House Arrest	Acts 28:30

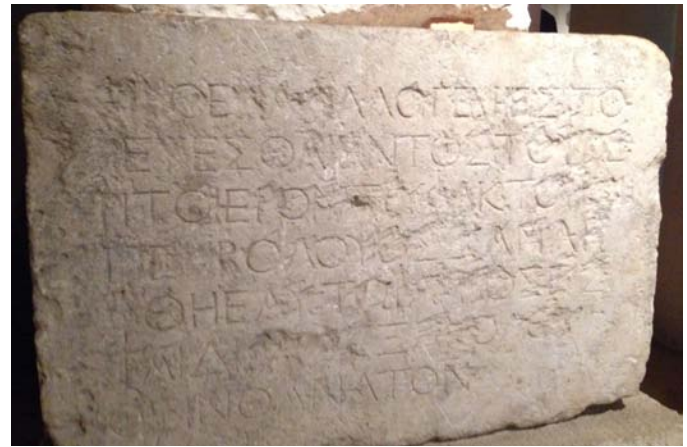
Paul Seized at the Temple

Acts 21:26–40

Acts 21:26 “So the next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them . . . When the seven days were almost over . . .” Paul had cooperated with the local elders to show his allegiance to the Law of Moses by going through his own—and paying for others’—purification rites (Acts 21:23–25). The “seven days” refers to either to the week-long Feast of Pentecost or more likely, the seventh day of the prescribed purification period for his vows.



Model of Herod's Temple in Jerusalem. Image by Juan R. Cuadra via Wikimedia Commons.



Jerusalem Temple Warning. Image by oncenawhile via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 21:27 “Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple . . .” For Paul to enter the temple, he would have had to walk across the Court of the Gentiles and up to a wall that acted as a barrier to separate the sacred space. Near the doorway, Jews had engraved a warning sign, in three languages, forbidding any Gentile or unclean person to enter the holy area—on punishment of immediate death.² Paul would have walked past this sign and into the Court of the Women across to the treasury. Along the perimeter stood thirteen trumpet-shaped chests that would have collected money for different offerings. The treasury was also a gathering place (Jesus taught there, John 8:20).

Acts 21:28 “This is the man who preaches . . . against our people and the Law . . . and has defiled this holy place” (NASB) Some Jews recognized Paul from Asia (who had probably debated against him in Ephesus). They jumped to the conclusion that Paul had brought Trophimus, one of his seven traveling companions and a Greek-Christian-convert, into the temple. The uproar began a riot.

Acts 21:30–32 “They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut” Luke’s retelling of angry Jews attacking Paul comes to a climax in Jerusalem at the temple. He includes the symbolic closing of the temple gates. The mob planned to kill Paul immediately, but the uproar was overheard by the Roman tribunal or “chief captain,” Claudius Lysias (Acts 23:26). He was stationed in the Antonian Fortress on the northwest corner of the Court of the Gentiles.

Acts 21:33–36 “When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. The commander . . . arrested him and ordered him to be bound” (NIV) The captain tried to find out what happened, but could not get the facts straight, so he had the soldiers carry Paul up the stairs into “the castle” (KJV) or fortress with the angry crowd yelling behind. Luke is dramatic here.

ANTONIA FORTRESS

The **Tower of Antonia** was a Roman fortress built on the NW corner of Temple Square to keep the peace. Josephus described it as “a tower with other towers at each of the four corners; three of these turrets were fifty cubits high . . . the [fort] rose to seventy cubits and so commanded a view of the whole area of the temple.”³ In the 1st century, BC Herod the Great rebuilt it luxuriously.



*Right: The Antonia Fortress, near Herod’s Temple.
Photo by Ariely via Wikimedia Commons.*

Acts 21:37–40 “Paul said . . . ‘Am I allowed to say something to you?’ He replied, ‘You know how to speak Greek?’” (CSB) Near the top of the stairs, Paul asked the captain if he could have a word. Claudius Lysias was

shocked by Paul's perfect Greek (having assumed that he was an Egyptian terrorist). Paul identified himself as a citizen from the esteemed city of Tarsus. This was a game-changer. Claudius quieted the crowd and allowed Paul to speak. He spoke to them in their tongue (some translations say "Aramaic" others "Hebrew," the same in Acts 22:2).⁴

ACTS 22

ca. AD 59—Pentecost

Paul Speaks on the Fortress Steps to the crowd around the Temple

Acts 22:1–23

Acts 22:1–2 “Men, brethren, and fathers . . .” Paul began, just as Stephen had, before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:2). Paul was probably in the same location as Stephen's stoning (Acts 7:58). Paul often addressed both men and women as he started sermons, suggesting that any women and children who had been at the temple that day, had not joined the mob in chasing Paul.

Acts 22:3 “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus . . . brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel . . . zealous . . .” This is one of the best biographical sections on Paul's early days. Luke recorded them as a second-hand source, but, as a travel companion with Paul, he was probably there listening.⁵ We also find evidence in Paul's life for these claims.

Paul introduced himself as a former student of the well-known Jerusalem school of Gamaliel, the grandson and protégé of Hillel (the father of Rabbinism).⁶ Both of these great teachers were honored as the highest authority among the Pharisees as strict observers of the Law of Moses and the ten thousand oral laws (Acts 5:34). Paul had the best education a devout, wealthy Pharisee could want. Paul's alliance to this great teacher probably calmed down the Pharisees in the audience (at least for a moment).

Jerusalem panorama from the Mount of Olives. Photo by Beko via Wikimedia Commons.



Luke recorded that Paul was born in Tarsus (which he repeated four times: Acts 22:3; 21:29; 30; 11:25; 9:11). We see evidence for this as Paul was at home in both the Hellenistic Diaspora and Israelite Jerusalem. He was a skilled orator and writer, which fit into the Tarsus educational scene.⁷ He also wrote beautiful Hebraic poetry as the Epistles, Philemon and Galatians, were each entirely written in a perfect chiasmus. This evidence confirms Luke's second-hand biographical witnesses here.

TARSUS

Tarsus, the largest city in the Cilician province, became a Roman province and the residence of the Roman proconsul in 66 BC. Tarsus was a city of world commerce. The Cydnus River and harbor provided Tarsus' sea trade. Land trade grew with Roman highways that ran both east-west and north-south through Tarsus.

It also boasted of the best schools of rhetoric in the Roman world. Paul's sermons and letters demonstrate that he was a mighty orator and writer, so we assume he studied (or possibly, just learned from listening) there.

Luke recorded that Paul was a tent maker or leather worker (Acts 18:3). Tarsus was also known for the production of goat hair and the processing of goat hair tents.



Map of the Mediterranean highlighting the location of Tarsus.



Acts 22:4–10 “I persecuted this Way . . .” (BSB) Again we see the early Christian church referred to as the “Way,” meaning that Jesus is The Way back to the presence of God.⁸ As Paul retold his conversion experience and first vision from two decades earlier, we find slight variations from the other two accounts recorded in Acts (compare on the road to Damascus in Acts 9:1–2; here on the steps of the Antonian Fortress, Acts 22:3–10; and before Felix in Acts 26:9–16). Minor changes speak to greater historicity than word-for-word duplication. For example, this retelling is now in first-person. Also, Acts 9:7 states the companions “saw no man,” and Acts 22:9 adds that they were conscious of the light, but disagree as to what they heard. Yet, all agree in the great reality of the place, meaning, and time of the visions. (We see similar differences in Joseph Smith’s four accounts of his first vision.)

ACTS 22:9

And they that were with me saw indeed the light and were afraid; they heard not the voice of him that spake to me

ACTS 26:13

...a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking...

ACTS 9:7

And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man;

ACTS 22:10

What shall I do Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.

ACTS 26:16–18

But rise and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou has seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light

ACTS 9:6

[Paul] trembling and astonished said, Lord what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

Acts 22:10–13 “I could not see for the glory of that light . . . one Ananias . . . Brother Saul, receive thy sight”
In this retelling, we hear little of Ananias’ experience where he learned to not tell the Lord what to do, but to receive instruction from Him.

Acts 22:14–16 “. . . arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” Paul’s message is Christ-centered. He uses meaningful titles that open our appreciation and understanding of the God we worship: Jesus of Nazareth, Just One, the Lord, and The God of our fathers (Luke also recorded that Stephen used, “Just One,” and Peter, the other three names). Also, Paul taught the need for Jesus’ cleansing and repentance. He shows how with greater knowledge comes the responsibility of greater witnessing.

Acts 22:17–18 “When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I . . . saw the Lord” (NIV) Paul wanted to share the message of his next vision and left out the space of three years between the visions (According to Acts 11:30 and Galatians 1:18, Paul did not go to Jerusalem for three years after his conversion). This is the only record in Acts of Paul’s second vision when he saw the Lord in the temple and received more instruction. This may have been the time when he was ordained an apostle (although we do not know if he were a member of the Quorum of the Twelve).

Acts 22:19–21 “the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles’” (NIV) This is the first time this is mentioned in Acts. The timing perfectly precedes Paul’s first mission to the Gentiles as an apostle (compare Acts 13:2). Paul’s life uniquely prepared him for his mission. I presume the same can be said for all of us. It is also worth noting that Paul continues to regret his part in persecuting the earlier saints, especially watching the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58).

Acts 22:22–23 “Now they were listening to him until this word . . . ‘he is not fit to live!’” (BLB) The offensive word was “Gentiles.” The very thought that God would send a Jew to the unclean was blasphemy in their minds. That triggered a ballistic reaction, and the crowd went wild again. In their rage, they flung off their cloaks, tossed handfuls of dirt into the air, and returned to their mob mentality eager to kill Paul.

Paul and the Roman Tribune

Acts 22:24–30

Acts 22:24 “the commander ordered . . . that Paul be flogged and interrogated” (BSB) The tribune, Claudius Lysias, actions seem inconsistent. He protected Paul from the riot and brought him into the Antonia Fortress, and yet, he then ordered him scourged. Roman whippings could be deadly, even though they had become a Roman sport (We saw Pilate do the same thing after he voiced that Jesus was innocent).⁹ It is also unclear if Paul’s claim to be a citizen in Acts 21:39 was understood by his guards to mean that he was only a citizen of Tarsus (not Rome), or that they had just forgotten his claim. Some details are obviously missing.

Acts 22:25 “But as they stretched him out to strap him down, Paul said . . . ‘Is it lawful for you to flog a Roman citizen without a trial?’” (BSB) The soldiers had used leather to tie Paul’s hands together and prepared to strip his back bare for the torture. Shortly before this episode, Paul claimed that five times he had undergone “thirty-nine lashes” from Jewish thongs (2 Corinthians 11:24, NASB). But Paul could interrupt the Roman torture because of his protection as a citizen.

Acts 22:26–28 “Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea” The centurion told the tribune (chief captain), who then asked Paul how he received his Roman citizenship. There were several ways one could receive citizenship, including:

1. By being born in Rome, or by being born of citizen parents
2. As a gift received from Caesar
3. By purchasing it at a remarkably high cost

Claudius Lysias had spent a lot of money to purchase his citizenship and assumed Paul was not wealthy enough. Paul was not dressed in the “citizen’s toga,” and there were very few Roman citizens in Jerusalem. However, Paul represented the rare one percent of citizens in the Diaspora who were “free-born.” This meant that Paul inherited his citizenship from his father or an earlier ancestor.¹⁰

Acts 22:29–30 “The chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him” Claudius Lysias was rightly worried since he had misused his power. Paul’s Roman citizenship granted him rights that stretched from his social and financial life to political and legal protection.¹¹

Acts 22:30 “wanting to learn the real reason Paul was accused by the Jews, released him and ordered . . . the whole Sanhedrin to assemble” (BSB) The next day Claudius Lysias released Paul from the Roman jurisdiction and took him to the Jewish governing body, the “council” or Sanhedrin.

Paul before the Sanhedrin

Acts 23:1–11

Acts 23:1–2 “My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day” (NIV) Paul was not new to this setting and did not appear shy or anxious about this trial. He had apprenticed with the Sanhedrin at the time of the stoning of Stephen and had interacted with them for a few years afterward (Acts 8:1–9:1). His experiences from his earlier life had prepared him (D&C 122:7).

“At this the high priest Ananias ordered . . . to strike him on the mouth” Paul was too bold for one in his audience, though. Ananias had Paul slapped for bragging. Under King Herod and Roman rule, the office of the one

Paul's Rights as a Roman Citizen

SOCIAL

- Right to use triple Roman name
- Right to wear the toga
- Right to marry a Roman citizen
- Right to pass citizenship to children

FINANCIAL

- Exemption from *tributum* (taxes to Rome)

POLITICAL

- Right to vote if in Rome
- Right to audience before Roman governors and officials in the provinces
- Right to be appointed to government office
- Right to stand for election to town council (*decuria*) of towns in Italy and the provinces

LEGAL

- Right to make contracts under Roman law, guaranteeing standing within Roman legal system
- Exemption from death or punishment without due process of trial and appeal process
- Right to trial before Roman magistrate
- Right of appeal for judgment to the emperor (*appellatio ad Caesarem*)
- Exemption from physical abuse in interrogation
- Exemption from authority of non-Roman local officials
- Protection from accusation by noncitizens
- Deaths of Roman citizens investigated by government

reigning high priest was changed from a lifelong appointment along bloodlines, to frequent appointments for political expediency.¹² We can see evidence of this in the record kept of the reigning high priest for centuries.¹³ This is a different “Ananias” than previously mentioned.

SANHEDRIN

The Sanhedrin, at the time of the New Testament, was the ruling body or Supreme Court of Jews. At its height, it included seventy-one chief priests, scribes, elders, and political aristocrats, who were knowledgeable of the law, plus the high priest. They decide important issues, including maintaining peace with Rome. It also represented both Sadducees and Pharisees. They met in Jerusalem in the chamber of hewn stone next to the temple sanctuary. Mosaic writings also refer to a body of 70 ruling elders working beside Moses and Aaron the high priest (Numbers 11:16–17; 24–25; Exodus 18:21–22). Over the centuries, under different rulers, their numbers, responsibilities, and powers changed.

Below: Saint Stephen tried before the Sanhedrin by Josef Arnold der Altere. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Opposite: Jesus Teaches Daily in the Temple by William Hole.



Acts 23:3 “God shall smite thee, thou . . . commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?” Paul cited a Jewish curse from Deuteronomy 28:22, “The LORD shall smite thee . . .” and from Leviticus 19:15, “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment.” Luke included this conversation, in part, to show that Paul knew the Law very well, and honored it.

Acts 23:5 “Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: ‘Do not speak evil about the ruler . . .’” (NIV) Paul did not recognize the high priest, possibly because he had changed since Paul had affiliated with the high priest and Sanhedrin members over twenty years earlier (Acts 9:1). I admire Paul’s immediate humility as soon as he realized he was wrong, that he did not become defensive. He even quoted a scripture that condemned his fault (Exodus 22:28), “Thou shalt not . . . curse the ruler of thy people).

Acts 23:6–8 “Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and others Pharisees, called out . . . ‘I am a Pharisee . . . because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial’” (BSB) Paul seized the opportunity to turn the situation into a missionary discussion. These two major groups within Jewish leadership date to the second century BC and animosity between them lasted until the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 when the Sadducee party ended. In Luke’s parallel fashion, he included a similar scene in his Gospel when Jesus addressed the same problem of the resurrection (Luke 20:27).

Sadducees (“Righteous Ones”) formed a tight circle of members consisting of the lay nobility, chief priests, priests, and aristocratic men who saw themselves as the guardians of the tradition and supporters of the temple and high priest. They held to the literal interpretation of the Torah and had their penal code, scribes, and dietary laws. They held the leadership positions at the time, even though they were not in the majority. As Luke recorded, they also did not believe in the afterlife or angels.



Pharisees (“Separate Ones”) accepted both the written and oral law—attributing both to Moses.

They interpreted the law differently than the Sadducees and had their traditions for food, Sabbath observance, ritual purity, tithes, anti-Hellenization, and views of free will and fate (Providence). Josephus mentioned there were 6,000 Pharisees. And as Luke records here, they believed in the resurrection and angels.

Acts 23:9 “If . . . an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God” The Pharisees’ conclusion sounds similar to what their leader Gamaliel had expressed earlier in Acts 5:34.

Acts 23:10 “When the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to . . . bring him into the barracks” (ESV) The Roman chief captain (or tribune) Claudius Lysias, carefully protected Paul, especially now knowing that he was a citizen—at the risk of his own head. The soldiers returned Paul to the Antonia fortress or “castle” (KJV).

Acts 23:11 “The night following the Lord stood by [Paul], and said, Be of good cheer,” the NIV uses “good courage” and the CEV, “Don’t worry!” That night Paul had his sixth recorded vision (see Acts 18:9 for list). This vision comforted Paul, as well as motivated and directed him to the right path for the next few months. It demonstrates how God protects his covenant people; how He opens doorways when it appears impossible. The Lord will fight his servants’ battles until their missions are complete.

The Plot to Kill Paul

Acts 23:12–22

Acts 23:12–13 “some Jews formed a conspiracy . . . with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul” (NIV) The conspiracy who “laid themselves under anathema (curse),” meaning they called for heaven’s punishment if they did not fulfil their oath.¹⁴ Luke includes that it was a group made up of “more than forty men.” Forty was used as both a number, as the concept of many, or to represent a purification period (Leviticus 12:3–4). These forty may not all be members of the Sanhedrin, but it sounds as though they heard Paul’s hearing.

Acts 23:14–15 “. . . you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of . . .” The band of murderers came to the chief priests (who were usually Sadducees) with their plan. (The Pharisees were probably not involved because they had just supported Paul in the Sanhedrin council.) They worked out a plan to kill Paul the next day.

Acts 23:16–21 “when the son of Paul’s sister heard about the ambush, he went into the barracks and told Paul” (BSB) Paul had an influential relative in Jerusalem, which was another miracle of God putting people in the right place at the right time. Paul’s nephew had some way of overhearing the conversation between the Jewish leaders. I think it is significant that he wanted to protect his uncle. Does this mean Paul’s extended family became Christian believers too, or that Paul’s conversion had not antagonized his family? In either case, the nephew was allowed to tell Paul, and Paul “summoned one of the centurions” (BLB) to allow his nephew to report his gossip to Claudius Lysias. We get a feel of the privileges of a Roman Citizen—or perhaps of Paul’s personality—that allowed a prisoner to give orders to a centurion.

Acts 23:22 “the commander dismissed the young man and instructed him, ‘Do not tell . . .’” (BSB) We learn that Paul’s nephew was a “young man,” which meant a different age bracket than modern usage. At the time of the New Testament, a “young man” could be used for one under thirty, or it could extend to forty years for one in the military. Some biblical scholars argue that in the Old Testament, it meant under sixty.¹⁵ Priests had to be thirty to serve in the temple, and the same age received “mature status” in the Dead Sea community. The Mishnah claimed thirty was the age of authority.¹⁶

PAUL SENT TO FELIX AT CAESAREA

Acts 23–26

Acts 23:23–24 “he called two of his centurions and ordered them, ‘Get ready a detachment . . .’” (NIV) Claudius Lysias called out an enormous group of guards! Paul received protection to travel approximately seventy miles from Jerusalem to Caesarea:¹⁷

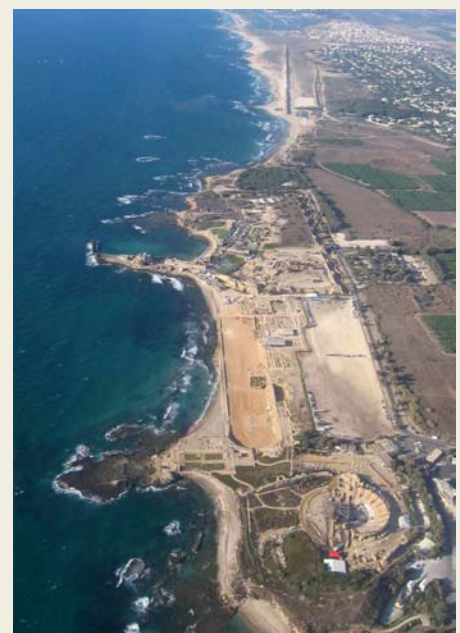
- 400 foot-soldiers (200 of whom were armed with spears)
- 70 horsemen

They were scheduled to leave under the cover of darkness, at nine at night, to aid their protective assignment. Horses were used almost exclusively for military purposes. Paul himself was allowed to ride horseback as the soldiers traveled from Jerusalem to Caesarea where the Roman governor Felix lived (This was the same position that Pilate and Festus had held¹⁸).

CAESAREA

Caesarea was initially known as Stratton’s Tower when the Romans conquered it in 63 BC. King Herod renamed it Caesarea Maritima. In 22 BC, he began building a deep-sea harbor. It was the largest artificial harbor in the world at that time (100,000 sq. meters). He also built storerooms, markets, baths, an aqueduct, and an elaborate palace jutting out into the sea. It became the capital of the Roman government in Palestine for over 600 years. The great Jewish war against Rome began there in 66 AD.

Right: Aerial photo of Caesarea Maritima via Wikimedia Commons.



Claudius Lysias' Letter to Felix

Acts 23:26–30

Acts 23:25–31 “Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix” The title, “excellent” is used for several Roman officials, including the benefactor of Luke and Acts, Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). Legal propriety of the time required Roman officials to send a letter of explanation accompanying their appeal. The message has five parts:¹⁹

1. Formal Opening (Acts 23:26)
2. Paul's arrest (Acts 23:27)
3. Summary of the earlier investigation (Acts 23:28)
4. Claudius Lysias' opinion on the case (Acts 23:29)
5. Rationale for the appeal to Governor Felix (Acts 23:30)

MARCUS ANTONIUS FELIX

Marcus Antonius Felix (also known as Claudius Felix), served as the Roman procurator of Judea between ca. AD 52–59. Historians Tacitus and Josephus described his brutal rule. He owed his position to his influential brother Paullus but lost it due to his incompetence and immorality (Joshua Yoder, *Representatives of Roman Rule: Roman Provincial Governors in Luke–Acts* (Boston, MA: Walter DeGruyter, 2014).



Right: Coin of Marcus Antonius Felix via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 23:32 “the soldiers followed their orders and brought Paul by night to Antipatris” (BSB) Half way between Jerusalem and Caesarea, the detachment stopped for the night. Antipatris was rebuilt in 9 BC, by King Herod and renamed after his father (in the Old Testament it was named Aphek²⁰). It was on the main international highway, the Via Maris, and strategically guarded the mountain pass to the east and a river to the west.

Acts 23:33 “The next day [the soldiers] returned to the barracks and let the horsemen go on with him” (BSB) Now that the worst danger of the trip was passed, the four-hundred-foot soldiers returned to Jerusalem, and the seventy horsemen continued onto Caesarea.

Acts 23:34–35 “The governor read the letter . . . he said, ‘I will hear your case when your accusers arrive.’ He then ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's Praetorium. Felix was curious to learn that Paul's home town was Tarsus of Cilicia, and waited for the prosecutors. Paul's wait in the Praetorium turned out to be a long time. King Herod created a spectacular and utilitarian port in Caesarea.

ACTS 24

Paul Before Governor Felix
ca. AD 58–60

Tertullus Prosecutes Paul

Acts 24:1–9

Acts 24:1 “After five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus” (BSB) The high priest, Ananias, hired a lawyer or rhetorical professional to argue against Paul for a fee (like our modern attorneys). The name Tertullus is Latin and suggests that he was possibly a Roman citizen too. The speech followed Roman legal conventions, so we assume that he studied in Roman rhetoric (or Paul wrote it out in that fashion).²¹

Roman Judicial Speeches included three parts:

1. *Proem* or *exordium* grabbed the audience’s attention and offered goodwill to the listeners
2. *Refutation* gave proof and a proposition
3. *Epilogue* summarized with a climax to arouse the audience’s emotions to make a judgment.

PROEM OR EXORDIUM

Acts 24:2–4 “We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you . . . most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude” (NIV) Tertullus flattered Felix crediting him with Palestine’s peace and prosperity, and then apologized for this inconvenience of a minor “tedious” case. The KJV “clemency,” is also translated, “be kind enough to hear us briefly” (NIV), or “indulge us” (NEB).

REFUTATION

Acts 24:5–6 “We have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” Tertullus’ (false) facts portrayed Paul as a rabble-rouser from the “sect of the Nazarenes.” This was a title for Christians used by Jews and the Romans may have taken it from Pilate’s inscription on Jesus’ cross. Even though the witnesses agreed, Paul refuted them in his defense.

EPILOGUE

Acts 24:7–9 “By examining him yourself, you will be able to learn the truth” (BSB) The climax of Tertullus’ prosecution implied that Lysias had acted unwisely and wasted Felix’s time, but that Felix would soon ascertain Paul’s faults.

Paul's Defense and Testimony

Acts 24:10–21

Acts 24:10–13 “Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense” (NASB) Paul’s rebuttal refuted Tertullus’ attacks and he devoted his time to the proof of his mission. His other sermons and epistles demonstrate that he also knew the rhetorical style, but did so without the flattery and flourishes that Tertullus had. Paul’s opening “*proem*” (or preamble) is simple and respectful: “twelve days ago, I went up to Jerusalem to worship. Yet my accusers did not find me debating . . .”

Shortly before this experience, Paul wrote the Corinthians expressing how he despised the type of rhetoric as Tertullus used—full of deceit, stylistic excess, manipulation, and elaborate performance (1 Corinthians 2:4; also, Colossians 2:3–4). In contrast the Restoration revealed that power and influence should be accompanied “only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile” (D&C 121:41–42; also see Alma 31:5; Moses 6:31–32, 7:13).

Acts 24:14–16 “I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way . . .” (NIV) After he denied the charges against him, Paul testified that he believed in “The Way” (by which he meant Christianity, see Acts 9:2). Judaism was one of the ten legal foreign or imported religions in the Empire. Paul claimed to “serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets.” Judaism was known and legal, so by claiming he held to these beliefs, he could expect to be protected. He described his pure motives: “I exercise myself,” or “I do my best” (JB, NAS) and “take pains” (RSV) and “strive always” (NIV). The difference was, he saw the fulfillment of the Law in Jesus, and most Jews did not.

Acts 24:17 “Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation” In Paul’s Epistles he referenced his gathering of offerings for the poor in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1; 2 Corinthians 8:4–6; 9:2; Galatians 2:10). Luke also documents it repeatedly in Acts, as he also accounts for the years of Paul’s traveling away from Jerusalem (Acts 11:29; etc.).

Acts 24:18–21 “I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this . . . no crowd . . . nor . . . disturbance . . . I stood before the Sanhedrin . . . ‘It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.’” (NIV) All of these facts that Paul points to could be confirmed by Lysias or other eyewitnesses. Paul included—by using Tertullus’ argument against him—the Jews trivialized and wasted Felix’s time.

Felix Holds Paul in Custody

Acts 24:22-27

Acts 24:22 “Felix, who was well informed about the Way, adjourned . . .” (BSB) Felix was already well informed about “The Way,” or Christianity. I presume Jesus’ crucifixion and the spread of missionary work had made a strong impression in the Roman overlords in Palestine. As a governor he would have had access to the “Roman intelligence” that was always out gathering information. He may have had spies in Jesus’ crowds who reported to the Roman officials. These spies had reported that the disciples were not troublemakers, so the Romans let them alone. Whatever Felix knew, he was no longer worried and agreed to postpone until Lysias arrived.

Acts 24:23 “. . . allow him some freedom and permit his friends to minister to his needs” (BSB) Paul remained in Herod’s palace under a loose guard. Felix permitted him to receive family and friends, as well as food, drink, and clothing. Luke does not mention missionary work occurring at this time, but focuses his story line on moving Paul toward testifying before Caesar.

Acts 24:24 “A few days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess” (AB) Paul’s second opportunity to testify of Jesus as the promised Messiah to the Roman procurator came because Felix’s beautiful wife wanted to hear more. Her Jewish lineage may have piqued her curiosity in Christianity. She was probably the source of Felix having “a perfect knowledge” about “The Way” (Acts 24:22). This time Paul did not defend his case but chose to teach “faith in Christ/the Messiah.”

Drusilla was a younger daughter of Herod Agrippa I. Her beauty and familial political ties secured her marriage to King Azizus of Emesa in Syria. However, Felix fell in love with her and through considerable courting, won her away. She was the first of Felix’s three wives. She was Jewish by birth, but her actions demonstrated that her beliefs and practices did not follow the Mosaic Law.

Right: Drusilla by John William Godward. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Acts 24:25 “He talked on about uprightness, self-control, and the coming judgment” (AB) Probably due to the more private audience, Paul moved from faith to morals. In light of the couple’s previously adulterous relationship, Paul’s discussion on the need for righteousness, temperance, and God’s coming judgment sounds like a call for repentance. Paul must have spoken with the Spirit’s penetration because “Felix trembled.” Just as John the Baptist had scared Herod Antipas when he had called him to repentance, and Jesus had upset the procurator Pilate, Paul also startled Felix enough for him to stop the discussion, “Go away for now.”²²

Acts 24:26 “. . . hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul” Here we see the heart of Felix. As Luke recorded, he was willing to break Roman law and seek a bribe. This detail also sheds light on Paul’s wealthy background—that a monetary sum might even have been feasible. We are left to wonder if Felix heard Paul speak again, or if he were too afraid of the powerful Jews to release Paul. We do know that no action was taken against Paul and the case proved to be a stalemate in for Felix.

Acts 24:27 “After two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus” (AB) This can be interpreted as the maximum detention for a citizen to be imprisoned before his mandatory release. But, like his predecessor Pilate, Felix wanted to show the Jews a favor. There must have been other issues in Felix’s governance that raised the conscious of Rome to his poor leadership. Nero had Felix removed about AD 59 or 60. This episode provides another historical date that we can attach to Paul’s life and New Testament history.²³

PORCIUS FESTUS

Porcius Festus took over the procurator or governor’s office in ~AD 60 and served until his death two years later. He came from a family of senators in Rome. He received his appointment by Nero Caesar. History remembers Festus as serving conscientiously, and the Book of Acts confirms that.

Right: Porcius Festus. Image via the Internet Archive.



ACTS 25

Paul before Festus and King Agrippa II
ca. AD 60

Paul Before Festus

Acts 25:1–12

Acts 25:1–3 “Three days after he arrived in the province . . .” (AB) Once in office, Porcius Festus wasted no time and acted quickly to tour his Judean jurisdiction. Luke records that he went “up” to Jerusalem.²⁴ While there, Paul’s accusers brought their charges against him. In this formal setting, during the first month of this new Roman leader in office, and his first week or ten days in Jerusalem, only the most pressing issues would have been addressed. For the case of Paul to be on this list, we see it either as a priority to the Sanhedrin, or else how strongly the chief priests wanted to kill Paul. Luke includes their plot to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, “laying wait in the way to kill him” (Acts 25:3).

Acts 25:4–6 “Paul should be kept at Caesarea . . . go down with me, and accuse this man . . .” Even though Festus was new in his office, he did not capitulate to the Jewish wishes and kept Paul protected in Caesarea. Festus stayed in Jerusalem for no more than ten days and then encouraged the Jewish leaders to come to a trial in Caesarea against Paul if they wished.

“the next day sitting on the judgment seat [Festus] commanded Paul to be brought” The day after Festus returned to his new home in Caesarea, he brought Paul out for a pre-trial. This also speaks to the social significance of this case. Christianity was a big threat to the Jews at this time. By attacking Paul, who spread it around the Empire, they hoped to have a better chance of stopping it entirely.

Acts 25:7–8 “Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any . . .” Luke summarizes the broken record of false accusations and skips to Paul’s defense to the governor. By testifying from his mouth, Paul’s testimony could transfer extra meaning through the Spirit. Instead of being a court hearing, Paul used this opportunity as a missionary moment. Paul’s defense was to witnesses of his faith in the Lord’s blessing to fulfill his mission call to Rome. Festus, as a new ruler and wanting to befriend the Jews, suggested that Paul go to Jerusalem for a Sanhedrin hearing.

Acts 25:10–11 “Then Paul said, ‘I stand at Caesar’s judgement seat’” Paul’s request for an appeal to Caesar’s tribunal may sound like it was an easy way for Paul to save his life, but the Caesar at the time was one of the cruelest ever to reign. Paul would have known that he had banned Jews from Rome and hated Christians.

NERO

Nero reigned over the Roman Empire from AD 54–68. His reputation included public brutality and sexual licentious. He killed his mother and his wife to marry another beauty (whom he later murdered). He started a fire in Rome to build a larger palace, “the gold house” (AD 64). As a scapegoat for the fire, he ordered the brutal execution of Christians. He was passionate about chariot races and used the wealth of the empire to buy popularity. When Britain, Spain, and Gaul, revolted against him, Nero committed suicide. The early Christian fathers interpreted the “666” from the beast in Revelation as an acronym for Nero’s name.

Right: The French Actor Talma as Nero by Eugène Delacroix. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



When a Roman citizen appealed to Caesar, he received a Roman guard to transport him. His housing, travel, and needs until the trial would all have been paid for by Rome. All this was within Paul's citizenship rights.

Acts 25:12, “Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered ‘. . . unto Caesar shalt thou go” The appeal may have been an embarrassment to Festus. One of his first cases, if not his first case as the tribunal, was appealed. But after confirming with his Roman “council,” “a board of assessors” to ensure the proceedings were legal, Festus accepted Paul's request. Paul's appeal ensured that he could remain in Roman custody, away from Jewish hands. More importantly, the Lord had also forewarned Paul that he would testify in Rome. His appeal to Rome fit into the inspiration from God to fulfill that assignment. Luke highlights the drama of the scene with the parallel structure of Festus' response.

Paul's Defense Before Festus, Bernice, and King Agrippa II

Acts 25:13-27

Acts 25:13 “A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and paid a courtesy call on Festus” (AB) Still within the first month of Festus' arrival to Judea as the new Roman governor, political decorum dictated a welcome from the Jewish royalty, King Agrippa II and his sister, Bernice. This visit overlapped with the preparations for Paul to leave for Rome. Before he could set sail, the governor had to write up an account of his case, secure a ship, supplies, and other travelers. The timing of Agrippa II and Bernice's visit became providential as a stalwart missionary opportunity unfolded in Caesarea.

HEROD AGRIPPA II

Herod Agrippa II (AD 18-92) was raised in Judea and educated in Rome. He was seventeen when his father died (Agrippa I). In AD 50, at age 31, he received his uncle Herod II of Chalcis' territory and jurisdiction over the Jerusalem temple (and later received portions of Galilee, Perea, and Lebanon). He re-paved the streets of Jerusalem in white marble and renamed the capital, Caesarea Philippi, Neronia. He sided with Rome during the Jewish revolt in AD 66 and assisted Titus' conquer of Jerusalem. He moved to Rome and lived there until his death in AD 92.



Coin of Herod Agrippa II via Wikimedia Commons

BERNICE

Bernice, the sister to King Agrippa II was twice a widow. She first married her uncle Herod Chalcis, followed by a wealthy merchant. With plenty of wealth, she chose to live with her brother. History rumors that they had an incestuous relationship. She also had an affair with Titus Flavius Vespasianus when he came to Palestine, and even followed him to Rome as his mistress, but returned to live with her brother before he became Caesar.

Acts 25:14–18 “Festus declared Paul’s cause unto the king” During Bernice and Agrippa II’s visit, Festus brought up Paul’s imprisonment, as it appears to have been a hot topic of that period. Agrippa II’s father had tried to stop Christianity, too, when he had had James killed (the son of Zebedee and brother of John the Beloved). His uncle, Herod Antipas had beheaded John the Baptist, and his grandfather, King Herod, had killed the innocents in Bethlehem.

Acts 25:19–22 “I would like to hear this man myself” After Festus explained his predicament—that the Jews’ “superstitions” or “peculiar religion” (NEB) had led to debates over whether Jesus were alive or dead—Festus “was at a loss on how to investigate such matters” (NIV). Having a Jewish opinion on the matter may have helped him know what to write to Caesar about the case. The KJV recorded “Augustus” for the word Emperor, but Augustus had died in AD 14 and Nero reigned at this time. It was tricky because every new Emperor took on Caesar Augustus’ name in addition to their own. Other English translations change Augustus to “Emperor.”²⁵

In the Roman world all future kings were to take upon them Augustus’ name. This became another point where Augustus and Jesus were in juxtaposition. But, in the case of the Lord, all who take on Jesus’ name become Kings and Queens. Luke also uses this scene to illustrate another parallel between Jesus’ trial and Paul’s trial, as both were taken from the Roman authority (Pilate and Festus) to the Jewish authority (Herod Antipas and Agrippa II).

DATE	NAME	SCRIPTURE
27 BC–AD 14	Augustus	Luke 2:1
AD 14–37	Tiberius	Luke 3:1
AD 37–41	Caligula	
AD 41–54	Claudius I	Acts 11:28; 11:2
AD 54–68	Nero	Philippians 4:2
AD 68–69	3 short terms	1 Peter 5:13
AD 69–79	Vespasian	Revelation 1:9?
AD 79–81	Titus	Ephesians 6:20?
AD 81–96	Domitian	2 Timothy 4:16? Revelation 1:9?

Acts 25:23 “Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high-ranking military officers and the prominent men of the city” (NIV) Luke described some of the elaborate display of pomp as the king entered the judgement hall. Fredric Farrar added even more background to the colors

and atmosphere that would have accompanied the occasion: Agrippa II “would doubtless appear in his scarlet paludament with his full attendance of lictors and bodyguard, who would stand at arms behind the gilded chairs which were placed for himself and his distinguished visitors. Bernice [would be] blazing with all her jewels, and he in his purple robes, and both with the golden circlets of royalty around their foreheads, and attended by a suite of followers in the most gorgeous appeal of Eastern pomp. It was a compliment to the new governor to visit him with as much splendor as possible.”²⁶ Three of those in attendance would have been the military leaders of the five groups of 1,000 soldiers stationed in Caesarea.²⁷

Acts 25:24–27 “I found [Paul] had done nothing deserving of death . . . I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him” (NIV) Both political leaders were deferential and act with much flattery to keep the peace. Festus, the new Roman governor, tried to ingratiate himself to Agrippa II, because history had revealed how the “Herods” had acted as Roman spies. Festus carefully laid out the situation because he was embarrassed about sending Paul to Nero without having committed any real crime.

As Christians, we see this gathering also as an opportunity for Paul to testify to King Agrippa II of Jesus as the Messiah, thereby fulfilling the prophecy spoken by Ananias, approximately twenty-five years earlier; “bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings” (Acts 9:15). Paul’s arrest opened remarkable positive opportunities, just as many challenges in our own lives do.

ACTS 26

Paul’s Defense

Acts 26:1–8

Acts 26:1–3 ““King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today to defend myself” (BSB) This is the fourth and last of Paul’s speeches recorded in Acts, and the third of his defenses (as the Roman law allowed citizens to defend themselves). The first was in Jerusalem, the second before the Roman procurator Felix, and this third defense was before Felix’s successor Festus, King Agrippa II, and Bernice. The latter two knew of, and gave verbal allegiance and support to, Judaism.

Paul was “happy” (KJV) because he was more interested in testifying than in proving his innocence. More than defending his own case, Paul felt fortunate to defend Christianity. (Compare Acts 24:5–6.) Even though he stood before them in chains or some type of bonds, he had the freedom of movement to “stretch out his hand” in the manner of a classical Greek orator.²⁸

Acts 26:4 “I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem . . . as a Pharisee” (NIV) The KJV requires careful reading to not confuse Paul’s home of Tarsus with his place of education in Jerusalem. The Pharisees’ fundamental tradition was to “be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the Law.”²⁹ They referred to building a “fence,” which became the 10,000 “oral laws.” Josephus added, “The Pharisees passed on to the people certain regulations handed down by former generations and not recorded into the Law of Moses.”³⁰ Paul claimed the Pharisees were the “strictest sect.” That is true if we compare them only to the Zealots and Sadducees, but the small groups of Essenes at the time lived an even more extreme version of the Mosaic Law.

Acts 26:6–8 “I stand and am judged for the . . . *promise* [of] our twelve tribes . . . that God should raise the dead?” Paul purported that his case was theological, not political. He cut through all the false charges of the Jews and expressed the real issue, which was the resurrection of Jesus—which then would lead to accepting Jesus as the Son of God and their promised Messiah. As Agrippa II and Bernice were raised with Jewish teachings, they should have known the stories of Elijah and Elisha raising the dead. The biblical background would have made the case of God raising Jesus more understandable. This was the promise that their ancestors had sought “earnestly” (RSV, NIV, NAV) or “with intense devotion” (JB). Paul referred to the “twelve tribes,” as he was from Benjamin.

Paul’s Conversion—3rd Account

Acts 26:9–23

Acts 26:9–11 “I too was convinced that I ought to do all I could to oppose the name of Jesus” (BSB) Thus begins the Book of Acts’ third account of Paul/Saul’s persecuting Christians (see parallels in Acts 22:4–5; 8:1–3; 9:1). Paul also referred to this in his Epistles. In Galatians 1:13, he explained that felt it was his duty to persecute the Christians with “zeal” (Also see Philippians 3:6; 1 Timothy 1:13). His investigation, interrogation, and sentencing of Christians fulfilled Jesus’ prophecy in John 16:1–2, “These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service” (also see Matthew 23:34).

“**compelling them to blaspheme**” the KJV wording may mean that Paul made the Christians renounce their faith to save their lives. “Strange” meant “foreign,” which is in all other English modern translations.

Acts 26:12 “I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests” This verse is probably more correct in identifying Saul’s authority and directions as having initiated with the “chief priests,” not the one reigning high priest as Acts 9:1–2 claims. The three parallel accounts of Paul’s first vision are listed above in **Acts 22:4–10**. (I will only point out the differences below.)



Paul Before Felix by William Hogarth, ca. 1800. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Dent Saulp

Acts 26:14 “I heard a voice speaking . . . Saul, Saul . . . *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*” This is the first account that mentions a prick or goad (NEB). It was used to control large animals (i.e. oxen). It was a sharp jab on a pointed stick that the animal pushed against. In this context, it suggests that Paul resisted previous spiritual promptings. Acts 26:15 Significantly, Paul saw the Lord in all three accounts.

Acts 26:16–17 “I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see” In this setting, Paul included more about his commission to preach. His difficult missionary charge included the Lord’s promise of future personal trials. Also, the promise of divine protection from “Gentiles” (also meaning, “nations”), and the call to preach to them. Either he understood that call differently because the thought of associating with Gentiles was repulsive, or Paul combined multiple visions in this retelling. Peter had not yet received the vision to take the Gospel to the Gentiles by the time of Saul/Paul’s first vision (Acts 10:15). The Lord placed the timing of Paul’s commission to the Gentiles, and Peter’s vision to open missionary work to them in perfect proximity.

Acts 26:18 “To open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those sanctified by faith in Me” (BSB) Jesus’ message was the hope of forgiveness for Paul as much as for his converts. The Lord’s message promised sight, light, forgiveness, and inheritance. Take a minute and think about those spectacular gifts. The inheritance comes through sanctification, or the process of purification. Repentance and forgiveness prepare one for sanctification, which leads to more faith. It creates a beautiful circle.

Acts 26:19–20 “I was not disobedience unto the heavenly vision” Paul later wrote of repentance as the way to salvation (2 Corinthians 7:9–10). He described it as not only a change of behavior, but repentance brought a confession of and dependence on Christ as our Redeemer, which then opened the way to become a servant of God. Different translations confirm that repentance requires turning to God and then to good works.

- “Prove their repentance by their deeds” (NIV)
- “Proving their change of heart by their deeds” (JB)
- “Perform deeds worthy of their repentance” (RSV)

Acts 26:22 “I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen” (NIV). Paul referred to the titles of two of the three portions of Jewish scripture: The Law, Prophets, and Writings. What he referred to as Moses or the Law, included the Old Testament’s first five books, or the Pentateuch. The Writings included Psalms, histories, and the like. As the most accessible Prophet at the time, it is not surprising that Paul quoted from Isaiah (42:6; 49:6). Christians read the Old Testament for types and shadows of the promised Messiah, and the Book of Mormon is also replete with this outlook.

Festus’ and Agrippa II’s Perspective

Acts 26:24–32

Acts 26:24–26 “Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. ‘You are out of your mind, Paul!’ he shouted” (NIV) Festus’ remark about Paul having gone mad, implies that Paul was passionate or emotionally moved as he recounted his testimony. Festus was probably looking for data points. Roman administrators looked for legal issues of fact and were notoriously practical. Paul’s heartfelt approach would have been bizarre to Festus, but not necessarily to King Agrippa II and Bernice.

Joseph Smith spoke about Festus (and others) assuming Paul was insane after hearing his testimony:

“[Paul] made his defense before King Agrippa, and related the account of the vision he had when he saw a light, and heard a voice; but still there were but few who believed him; some said he was dishonest, others said he was mad; and he was ridiculed and reviled. But all this did not destroy the reality of his

vision. He had seen a vision, he knew he had, and all the persecution under heaven could not make it otherwise; and though they should persecute him unto death, yet he knew, and would know to his latest breath, that he had both seen a light and heard a voice speaking unto him, and all the world could not make him think or believe otherwise.”³¹



Trial of the Apostle Paul by Nikolai Bodarevsky, 1875. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 26:27–28 “King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? . . . “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”

King Agrippa may have known and even believed the prophets (but his beliefs did not always dictate his actions, sadly). But Luke only recorded his confession that he was “almost” converted. The word, “almost/*oligos*,” in KJV, actually meant: few, little, small, as in a segment of time (as the next verse first phrase confirms, “Short time or long,” NIV), instead of the more modern meaning of “nearly”. It is clearer in other translations:

- “In a short time, you think to make me a Christian!” (RSV)
- “A little more, and you are sure to make me a Christian.” (AB)
- “In a little thou dost persuade me to become a Christian!” (YLT)
- “Can you persuade me in such a short time to become a Christian?” (BSB)

Elder Neal A. Maxwell does not think Agrippa’s remark was flippant; “he was seriously touched” (There is no historical evidence that Agrippa ever converted to Christianity, at least in mortality)³²

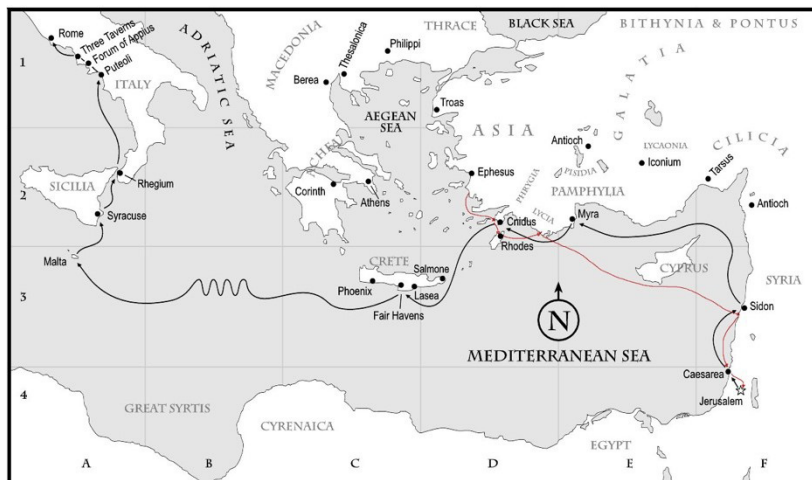
Acts 26:29 “I wish to God that not only you but all who hear me this day may become what I am, except for these chains” (BSB) Paul’s wish is the climatic ending of his testimony. He ended his witness, which moved a mountain. In God’s eyes, Paul was not on trial—his judges were (and we, the readers, are too).

Acts 26:30–32 “When . . . the king rose up . . . they talked . . . “This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed”” The trial ended when the King stood. After the hearing, the two leaders talked in the “hallways” and agreed that Paul had done nothing wrong. The verdict was “not guilty.” This scene added two more declarations of Paul’s innocence. Yet, the Lord wanted Paul to testify in Rome, so we look forward to hearing him witness before Caesar, but the book of Acts ends first.

ACTS 27

Paul's Voyage to Rome ca. AD 61

Acts 27:1–3 “Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. We boarded a ship” (NIV) Herod had built a massive artificial harbor off their sandy coast of Caesarea. We are told that two of Paul’s Christian companions joined the 2,000-mile voyage. Luke (“we”), the doctor and scribe, as well as Aristarchus (Acts 19:29; Colossians 4:10).



Paul’s new Roman guard Julius, one of the Emperor’s special centurions, proved himself an honorable man and trusted Paul enough to let him visit friends (probably Christians) at their first stop in Sidon (100 miles north of Caesarea).

Acts 27:6–8 “the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy. . . we had sailed slowly many days . . .” In those days, ships preferred to sail near the coast lines in case of a storm if trouble arose. Only rarely did sailors intentionally sail into the deep sea. On the island of Crete, Paul’s group changed ships and joined a large grain ship from Alexandria, enroute to Italy with supplies for Roman bread.³³ They inched along the island of Crete, but are then were blown out to sea.

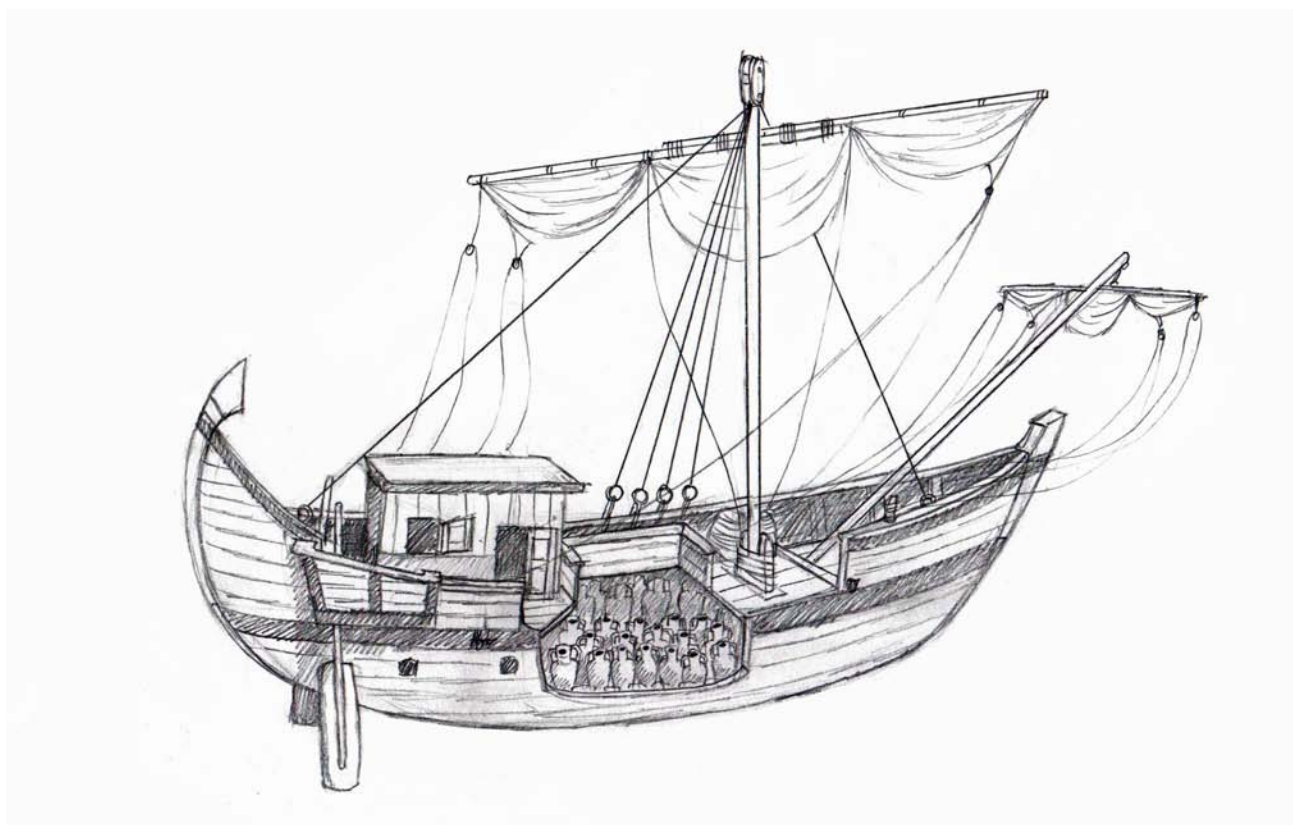
Acts 27:8–9 “Sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them . . .” Mediterranean Sea travel was avoided in the winter in the ancient world, because of dangerous storms. The fast referred to the Day of Atonement. That is the only Jewish celebration where everyone fasts. It falls in the autumn, often in conjunction with the Feast of the Tabernacles. Unfortunately, Paul’s warning to the captain went unheeded.

The Storm

Acts 27:13–21

Acts 27:13–14 “there arose against it a tempestuous wind . . . neither sun nor stars in many days appeared”
The ship crashed into an island “Clauda” and needed repairs, but because of the quicksand, the captain sailed

away. After three more days of fierce storms without the ability to navigate by the stars or sun, the crew lightened the boat and threw cargo and tackle overboard. The storm continued for many more days before the ship crashed.



An approximate diagram of a Roman trade ship carrying transport amphorae. Image by Matthew Jose Fisher via Wikimedia Commons.

Paul's Seventh Vision as Recorded in Acts

Acts 27:22–26

Acts 27:22–23 “Paul . . . said, **Sirs . . . I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship . . .**” Paul attempted to help the crew’s morale, as everyone was so physically and emotionally exhausted that they had lost hope. After enduring days of the storm and fasting from food, Paul had a vision and shared it with them to restore their hope. He began by providing evidence of his trustworthiness—he had given good advice to not sail so late in the season. Then, he shared what the angel of the Lord had told him. This probably saved Paul and several other’s lives, because all the prisoners were going to be killed (Acts 27:42). I am interested in what Paul meant by, “the angel of God, whose I am and whom I serve.” Was the angel the Savior? The angel also reaffirmed, and Luke recorded, that Paul announced to everyone, that he would testify before Caesar.

Acts 27:25 “be of good cheer: for I believe God . . .” No matter that the boat would crash “upon a certain island,” and that they would have to stay there all winter; regardless of the fact that they were all seasick, dehydrated, hungry, in pain, hopeless, and would remain out at sea fasting for days; even in spite of losing their investment of hundreds if not thousands of pounds of grain, their supplies, equipment, and also the ship, the Lord’s message was “be of good cheer.” It is more than a message. It is a commandment, just as much as if it had a “Thou shalt” in front of it. Thirteen times in the scriptures, the Lord commands: “Be of good cheer.” Surprisingly, most of them are given during absolutely devastatingly difficult times.³⁴ Why then? Why not just sit beside the sorrowing sufferer and show empathy? I think because God taught Paul, and the readers of Acts, how to develop the tool of joy to help them endure.

Because Paul believed God, he could always find cheer in an eternal perspective. We, too, can trust His promises. We can trust that He loves us. We can believe that He will provide for us eternally. If we can learn to see trials as God sees them, we can adopt an attitude of cheer or to “take courage” (ISV, CSB, BSB). The way we can change our discouragement, fear, or helplessness into cheer is through focusing on our belief in God. This foresight becomes a tool for mental, emotional, and spiritual empowerment to act. This can become a skillset to develop courage, perspective, and hope to overcome fear, trepidation, and anxiety. Having hope provides the courage to act. God gave Paul (and us) a life-changing tool—to believe and trust God—and to see life from an eternal perspective so that we can be of good cheer.

Fourteen Day Storm

Acts 27:26–37

Acts 27:26–28 “On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea . . . the sailors sensed they were approaching land [and] they took soundings” (NIV) Luke’s detailed record unfolds God’s miraculous rescue. The sailors found they were in 120 feet-deep water, then 90 feet, and sunk anchors hoping to avoid the rocks before morning. The angel’s prophecy was about to be fulfilled.

Acts 27:29–30 “Pretending to lower anchors from the bow, [the sailors] let the lifeboat down into the sea” (BSB). Paul saw the exhausted sailors heading out to land and warned the centurion, “Unless these men remain with the ship, you cannot be saved.” Paul has gained Julius’ trust it seems, and his soldiers stop the plot by cutting the ropes. Paul uttered another prophecy that will soon be fulfilled.

Acts 27:33–37 “This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing” Paul continually urged his fellow travelers to eat with him, and at day break they did. (The word for the KJV “meat” means food or nourishment.) All 276 passengers were safe. Paul turned this into an opportunity to praise the Lord and prayed in “thanks.” Luke added, “Then were they all of good cheer.” To make sure they wouldn’t go aground, the sailors lightened the ship by throwing out their wheat (ack!).

Acts 27:38 “they discovered a certain creek with a shore . . .” Next, they raised the sail and moved toward an unknown sandy beach. But the ship got stuck in a sandbar, and the waves crashed into the back end of the boat. As everyone abandoned the ship, Julius intervened to stop the soldiers from killing the prisoners (which was the protocol for fear they would escape at such a moment). Everyone swam or floated on broken boards to shore.

ACTS 28

Shipwrecked in Malta—Paul Winters there

Acts 28:1–10

Acts 28:1–2 “Once safely on shore . . . the islanders showed us unusual kindness . . . [and] kindled a fire . . . because of the present rain, and . . . cold” (NIV) The “sizable” island on which Paul and the 275 landed was named Melita (Latin for Malta).³⁵

MALTA

Malta, an island south of Italy and Sicily was colonized by Phoenicians in ~1000 BC, fell to Carthage control in 500BC, and then was conquered by Rome in 218 BC. It became an important stop on the Mediterranean shipping trade routes. The local pagans spoke Punic, not Greek.



Acts 28:3–6 “a viper . . . fastened on [Paul’s] hand . . . he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm”

The poisonous snake came out of the sticks that Paul gathered to help with the fire. This scene fulfilled Jesus’ prophecy “They shall take up serpents . . . and they shall recover” (Mark 16:18). Yet, no one there knew that. The superstitious locals first saw it as a sign of Paul’s wickedness, and then when the bite had no ill effects, they saw it as a sign that Paul was a god.

Acts 28:7–8, “Publius, the chief official . . . welcomed us to his home . . . for three days. His father was sick . . . Paul . . . prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him” The “chief man” Publius, was a Roman ruler, not a native. This may have been why of all the 276 shipwrecked people, Paul had the honor of staying in his estate until other housing could be prepared. Julius, the Roman official charge of Paul, was probably entertained at

Publius' home, too. One act of kindness was answered by another as Paul healed his host's father from dysentery through God's Priesthood power.

Acts 28:9–10 “Others also . . . were healed” The Lord again blessed Paul with the gift of healing to help several islanders (and hopefully fellow boat passengers).³⁶ Luke describes how Paul won the love of several islanders, but he does not mention that he preached the Gospel to them. I assume he did (possibly through an interpreter?). It sounds as though they had a grand going away party, complete with food and supplies for the voyage.

Paul's Arrival at Rome

Acts 28:11–16

Acts 28:11 “After three months we departed in a ship . . . we fetched a compass, and came to . . . Puteoli” Luke includes all the stops as they joined another Alexandrian grain ship and sailed north 60 miles to the island of Sicily, and then hopped up the Italian west coast to Puteoli, due west of Naples. It was a significant port where grain ships unloaded their cargo for Rome. Paul visited with a Christian family there for a week (Castor and Pollux were zodiacs signs of the patron god for sailors. The two names/signs were twin brothers).

Acts 28:15 “When the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us . . . Paul . . . thanked God, and took courage” News of Paul's arrival reached Rome before he did, and a group of saints traveled forty miles south of Rome, along the “Appian Way” to “Appii” where they gathered at a Forum. Their lodgings must have been remarkable enough for Luke to record its name: “The Three Taverns.” Luke did not record their conversations, but I imagine the local Christians probably undated the apostle on the latest Roman-Jewish-Christian relations.

Acts 28:16 “when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier” (ESV) Once in Rome, Julius the centurion from Caesarea, turned the prisoner, Paul, over to the captain of the guard (or “Empirical guard”) who kept Caesar's personal garrison. Paul was not kept in the usual prison but was allowed to live in private quarters with only one soldier as his guard (possibly connected with a “chain,” not knowing if verse 20 may be literal or figurative). “House arrest” allowed Paul to have visitors and to come and go to some degree. He may have been in the military barracks (“Praetorium”) of those imperial guards stationed in Rome to guard the Emperor.³⁷

When adding up all of Luke's “we” passages, it appears that he shared about a dozen years of missionary service with Paul (Acts 16:10–28:15). Other New Testament references also show Luke as Paul's companion (Colossians 4:11; Philemon 1:24; 2 Timothy 4:14). Luke may have stayed with him during those two years in Rome and written his Gospel or the Book of Acts of the Apostles, or he may have been too busy as a missionary (Acts 28:30).

Spring of AD 61–63: Paul Preached Under Roman Guard

Acts 28:17–31

Acts 28:17–20 “Paul called the chief of the Jews together . . . there was no cause of death in me . . . I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar” True to Paul’s fashion, after only three short days in Rome, he invited the local rabbis and synagogue leaders to get to know him. Paul wanted to make sure they understood his side of the story. Wisely, he emphasized the indisputable common ground they shared without touching on any of the controversial points. He also used this opportunity to fulfill his call to testify in Rome. He again started his preaching first to the Jews before he taught the Gentiles.

Acts 28:21–22 “we desire to hear of thee . . . as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against” Somewhere the Jewish communication link failed to pass on Paul’s eminent arrival in Rome. The Jews’ “golden question” opened a wide door for Paul to share his beliefs.

Acts 28:23–24 “. . . he expounded and testified the kingdom of God . . . from morning till evening” What an opportunity—a full house wanting to know more about the “sect” of Christianity! Paul’s first Jewish audience must not have been offended, because more came. This scene speaks of Paul’s knowledge of the Messianic scriptures, as no scrolls would have survived the shipwreck, nor were they provided with his “house arrest” (remember, they were as expensive as a second home; usually each community shared only a few scrolls). His masterful oration and debate skills kept his audiences rapt all day long. Combined with the Spirit of the Lord, many were converted.

Acts 28:25–29 “The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah . . . the heart of this people has become dull . . . salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen” (NASB) Paul sounded discouraged when more of the Jews did not believe. He recited Isaiah 6:9–10, as a warning to them. He publicly announced to the Jews that they had had their chance and he would now go preach to the Gentiles.

Acts 28:30–31 “He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!” (NIV) Similar to Caesarea, Paul had a two-year “captivity” in Rome, with “complete freedom” to preach (JB). Philippians 4:2 hints of Paul’s missionary work among the guards while on house arrest: “All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household” (NASB). Paul’s guard(s) would have heard him preach and also carried the Christian message through the ranks of Caesar’s staff and household.

By studying the texts of his Epistles, it sounds as if Paul wrote Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians in Rome during these two years. However, Luke’s abrupt end to Acts does not suggest that we have the finished work.³⁸ Paul had not testified to Caesar, nor were Peter and Paul dead. Yet, in light of Luke’s style of highlighting the Lord and apostles in the most positive light possible, perhaps this is where he chose to end the text. Paul had

followed the Lord's direction from the time of his first vision and the book ends with some successful missionary experiences.

If biblical scholars, archeologists, or Vatican librarians never find a second ending for Acts, we can still appreciate Luke's choice to end at this climatic answer to the Lord's command in Luke's prelude, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Luke's thesis fits nicely within this opening and closing.

Header Image: Paul and King Agrippaa by Vasily Surikov. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Below: Ancient Rome; Agrippina Landing with the Ashes of Germanicus by J. M. W. Turner, 1839. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



ENDNOTES

1. David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely, “Paul: Untiring Witness of Christ” *Ensign*, August 1999.
2. The sign was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin and read: “No foreigner is to enter the barriers surrounding the sanctuary. He who is caught will have himself to blame for his death which will follow.”
3. Josephus, *Jewish War*, v, 238.
4. The NIV, BSB, and CSB say “Aramaic” while the KJV, NASB, and BLB read, “Hebrew.” The vernacular of Palestine was Aramaic (the language the Jews brought back from their Babylonian captivity, 600–538 BC). Most people no longer understood or read Hebrew, this is why the Jews had their scriptures translated into Greek, known as the Septuagint (LXX). Even when the New Testament cites an ancient prophet or psalm it usually uses the LXX. Paul was taught under Rabbi Gamaliel, so we assume that he read Hebrew.
5. Jurgen Becker, *Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 34. Paul’s personal writings do not include that he was tutored under Gamaliel, nor that he was born in Tarsus. However we do have other second hand sources who claim the same thing. The early Church Father, Jerome suggested that Paul’s parentage “emigrated from Galilean Gishala.”
6. Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1983), 21–22. Piecing the patchwork of Paul’s biography together leaves one to question how he could have been taught in Jerusalem without knowing more about Jesus’ ministry. However, if his education from Gamaliel was about AD 20, that was well before Jesus became popular in Jerusalem. This timing fits into the Mishnah outlined of a young man’s path in life mentioned above that advanced rabbinical interpretation began in a young man’s teens: “...thirteen to religious duties, fifteen to Talmud.” Furthermore, Paul’s Epistles are filled with arguments that reflect rabbinical biblical interpretation.
7. The ancient historian Strabo recorded, that Tarsus excelled in rhetoric: “that facility prevalent among the Tarsians whereby [one] could instantly speak offhand and unceasingly on any given subject.” Cited from Strabo, 14.5.15- *Perseus Under Philologic*, available at: <http://perseus.uchicago.edu/perseus/cgi/citequery3.pl?dbname=GreekFeb2011&query=Str.%2014.5.15&getid=2> (accessed 7-13-19)
8. See earlier commentary in Acts 9:2, for how “the Way,” points to temple texts.
9. See earlier commentary on scourging in John 19:1.
10. Christopher R. Little, *Mission in the Way of Paul* (NYC, Washington DC: Peter Lang, 2005), 7–8. Two theories are often purported. The most esteemed was that “... According to traditions preserved in Jerome and Photius, Paul’s parents were carried off as prisoners of war from the Judean town of Gischala to Tarsus . . . What would have happened to Paul’s family” was possibly working as slaves, going through manumission, and over time, Saul’s ancestors were given citizenship before they moved to Tarsus. The second theory purports that Paul’s father may have been one of those from Tarsus who helped Octavia and Anthony during the civil war. As a thank you after Octavia won, he probably awarded those key men with citizenship. We do not know for sure, as no record remains of who was rewarded citizenship.
11. John W. Welch and John Hall, *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 15-4.

12. As a review, the organization of the Mosaic priesthood in the New Testament was divided into the following offices:
 - A. The one reigning high priest
 - B. Chief Priests: The captains of the temple
 1. Cultus: the leaders of the 24 weekly sections or “courses” or “companies” and of their daily course
 2. Custody of the Temple: Temple overseers
 3. Temple finances: Three treasurers
 - C. The Priests: 24 weekly courses, ~7,200 priests who served at the altar, to light the incense, etc.
 - D. The Levites: 24 weekly courses, ~9,600 who served as musicians, guards, custodians, butchers, etc.
13. Frederick F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 3. From the time of King David, the high priest, descended from the Aaronic family of Zadock (960 BC until 171 BC). In 171 BC, a priest named Menelaus, who did not belong to the Zadokite line, bribed the king who made him high priest. From then on, the high ranking, chief priests, vied from the position of high priest, which changed on the ruler’s whim. The list of reigning high priests varies slightly with different sources, but approximate dates for the New Testament are: 3 BC Joshua son of Sie; AD 6 Joazar son of Boethus; AD 6–15 Ananus son of Seth (who participated in Jesus’ trials, also spelled Annas); AD 15–16 Ishmael Fabus/Phiabi; AD 16–17 Eleazar; AD 18–37 Joseph Caiaphas (son in law to Annas, participated in Jesus’ trials); AD 37 Jonathan son of Annas; AD 37–41 Theophilus son of Annas; AD 41–43 Simon Kantheras; AD 43 Matthias son of Annas; AD 44 Elionaisus, son of Kantheras; AD. 44–46 Josephus son of Camydus; AD 46–58 Ananias son of Nedebeus; Jonathan AD 58; etc.
14. Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: Acts of the Apostles* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1997), 722.
15. Cornelia B. Horn, John W. Martens, *Let the Little Children Come to Me: Childhood and Children in Early Christianity* (Washington DC, Catholic University, 2009), 100–101. F. E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 11: Ephesians through Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1981), 374.
16. *Mishnah, Avoth* 5:21; for the full list of age denominations see commentary footnote on Acts 18:3.
17. For more on Caesarea see Acts 10:1.
18. In Caesarea, engraved in a corner stone of an old Roman building, was found the name Pontious Pilate.
19. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 726.
20. Joshua 12:18; 1 Samuel 4:1; 29:1.
21. Sperry Symposium, *The Apostle Paul—His life and Testimony* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1994), 69–72.
22. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 740.
23. Ibid. “The time of the beginning and end of his administration cannot be accurately established” and some historians use AD 59 as his start date. After his death, Luceius Albinus, was the procurator from AD 62–64.
24. For more on why one always ascends to Jerusalem see Luke 2:4; Acts 18:22.
25. As discussed in Luke 2:11, Caesar Augustus used the title “son of god” for himself on ancient coins, he claimed to be the prince of peace and he used his birthday for the starting of the calendar).
26. Frederic Farrer, *Life of Christ* (NYC, NY: Dutton Co., 1887), 699.
27. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 752.

1. What are two major themes that Luke carries throughout the book of Acts?
 2. Where did Paul spend the bulk of his time during each of his 3 missions to the gentiles? (name cities please)
 3. What were the four items decided at the Jerusalem Council that gentile converts needed to live from the Law?
 4. Name three other men called “apostles” in Acts not of the original twelve? Which one replaced Judas Iscariot?
 5. What authority did the Romans give the Jewish Leaders—who held it? (More details and genealogy the better)
 6. What are the dates of Herod’s Temple? Why is that significant?
 7. What evidence do we have for the authorship of Acts? Where can you find it?
 8. Identify five doctrines or practices found in the early church that Joseph Smith restored (preferably from Acts)
 9. Name four divisions within Judaism and explain what each stood for.
 10. Identify five or more things about the Roman Empire that fostered the growth of Christianity
28. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 755.
 29. *Mishnah, Avoth*, 1:1 The Jews fenced in the Law of Moses with ten thousand commandments that became known as the “oral laws” or the Oral Torah. They systematized these laws as a “buffer zone” to protect their Torah.
 30. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 13.297.
 31. Andrew Ehat and Lindon Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith : The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990), 14.
 32. Neal A. Maxwell, “Taking up the Cross,” *BYU Speeches: Devotional* (Jan 4, 1976), 255; also Adam Clarke, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia, PA: Thomas, Cowperthwaite, 1838), 440; “Every circumstance in the case proves them to have been the genuine effusion of a heart persuaded of the truth; and only prevented from fully acknowledging it by secular considerations” (Acts 26:28).
 33. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 234. Caesar had promised “bread and circuses” for all Romans. The food stuffs came from their colonies.
 34. Matthew 9:2, 14:27; Mark 6:50; John 16:33; Acts 23:11; 27:22, 25; Alma 17:31; 3 Nephi 1:13; D&C 61:36; 68:6; 78:18; 112:4. Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Learning the Language of the Lord: A Guidebook to Personal Revelation* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2018), 184, 186.
 35. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 782.
 36. Just as he did in Acts 14:8-10; 19:12.
 37. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 788.
 38. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 211–316. In 1 Timothy and Titus we read of another Pauline visit to Asia Minor, Greece, Crete, and possibly Spain (1 Timothy 1:20). In AD 96 Clement of Rome recorded that Paul reached the “boundaries” or “limits of the west;” suggesting Spain more than Rome. The Muratorian Fragment also says Paul visited Spain. The 4th century historian Eusebius recorded of this time in Paul’s life, “Having, therefore, made his defense at the time, it is recorded that the apostle again journeyed on the ministry of preaching, and, having set foot for a second time in the same city was perfected in his martyrdom.” George Ogg, *The Chronology of the Life of Paul* (Eugene, OR: Methodist Publishing, 1968, reprint, 2016), 186. I agree with many scholars who propose that Paul was set free after his two years, and then preached the gospel for a few more years before a second Roman imprisonment. Paul’s second Roman impris-

onment sounded different that this first as we read of the dark terms in 2 Timothy. This fits in with the timing of more serious Christians persecutions too (after Rome's great fire in July AD 64, which Tacitus claimed, Nero blamed on the Christians). Tacitus, Annals, 15.4, <https://www.livius.org/sources/content/tacitus/tacitus-on-the-christians/>



ROMANS 1–6

REDEMPTION THROUGH JESUS THE CHRIST,
NOT THE LAW OF MOSES

INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLES

What are Epistles? The answer is simple. Epistles are letters written to answer questions, address challenges, or regulate church issues. They include some of the sacred writings of the Apostolic Church from two members of the twelve, other apostles, and other early Christian leaders collected together as additional scripture. They were written to people on the path of discipleship. The authors often used scribes who wrote with a quill on parchment, papyrus, or vellum. Those copies were rewritten over and over (and in some places, edited) and finally translated. There are hundreds of Greek copies of each letter, but none are exactly the same, nor are the translations perfect, but I prefer NIV and BSB.

It is equally important to know what the Epistles are not. They are not an introduction to the gospel, nor a systematized exhaustive list of teachings, doctrines, theology, or procedures of the early church. By nature of being correspondence, we only have one half of the conversation—we often miss the question or issue that initiated the correspondence. They are not chronological, comprehensive, nor in their original form.

When did the Epistles become Scripture? In the New Testament, the word “scripture” always referred to the Old Testament, except for 2 Peter 3:15–16, where something Paul wrote was included with the scriptures (which probably referred to his Epistles, but that comment may have been added later).¹ Peter’s reference is the first hint of the creation of a new prophetic witness or new Testament, collected as a body of Christian writings. Early Christians gathered their sacred writings and shared them with other Christians, just as the ancient Israelites had. (In fact, the Old Testament canon was not closed until after the New Testament canon.) Church leaders filtered the growing body of false writings that were purported to have apostolic origins. The canon was not agreed upon and closed until AD 382.²

How were the Epistles organized? The compilers of the New Testament arranged the Epistles by size, not chronology. Paul wrote the most canonized Epistles, so his letters are first. His longest letter is first, and the shortest is last

(Hebrews was placed at the end because the authorship was debated).

In addition to its length, when Constantine oversaw the compilation of the Epistles, he wanted Romans first because it communicated what he wanted to be said. It speaks of “the gospel” as the “. . . power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16), of Christ’s work of atonement, resurrection, judgment, and Christians’ responsibilities to develop and maintain faith, practice repentance, and submit to ordinances including baptism, and the receiving the Holy Ghost.³

What were the Bias of the Translators? Anyone who has tried to communicate a new subject with someone from a different background can imagine part of the difficulties of translating biblical texts. Especially in the epistles, we see a clear bias by the translators—whether they are Eastern Orthodox or Catholic (JB) or Protestant (KJV). This is why the JST is so valuable. Also, the BYU Commentary Series provides new translations from the perspective of the restoration. As a word of caution, the KJV often includes bias and vocabulary from the five principal Calvinistic doctrines (all of which were denounced by the Prophet Joseph Smith).⁴



Saint Paul Writing by Pier Francesco Sacchi, 1520s via Wikimedia Commons.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE ROMANS

- **AUTHOR:** Paul (Romans 1:1), and scribe, Tertius (Romans 16:22).
- **AUDIENCE:** Believing saints (Romans 1:7), whom Paul had not yet visited (Romans 1:10), living in Rome. Paul wrote this “general epistle,” in excellent Greek and with extensive vocabulary (over 1,000 complicated words), suggesting his audience was well educated.⁵
- **LOCATION WRITTEN:** Probably, from Corinth or at the end of Paul’s 3rd Mission (Romans 1:11–13; 15:19–27; Acts 20:2–3).
- **DATES:** Winter of AD 57/58 (give or take a year or two).
- **THEMES in ROMANS:** The Plan of Salvation; Redemption through Christ, not the Law of Moses; Justification by Faith; Prepare for Judgment; Believers can become joint-heirs with our Savior; Duties to attain holiness. Ten of the sixteen chapters in Romans address the relationship between the Mosaic Law and the Christian Gospel. Most of these themes are used as an exploration of how Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses with His redeeming and universal sacrifice.

Understanding Romans: Romans needs to be read in the JST: There are more JST changes in this Epistle than any other. Joseph changed 119 verses or 27% of the text. Most of the changes are in the footnotes, and five excerpts in the Bible appendix, many are in our footnotes, but I’d suggest looking at the Hite, or other JST versions of Romans to read Joseph’s interpretation.

KEYS TO UNDERSTAND ROMANS

1. Romans is set up systematically to prove a theory. Paul writes as if he were arguing with an imaginary opponent in a *diatribe*. He develops his answers like a defense attorney. Often diatribes become monotonous. Yet, the reader must take in the whole case, not just its parts, in order to fully understand his thesis.
2. Resurrection or immortality is a gift from our Redeemer, but Eternal Life or exaltation requires repentance and the sacrifice of our all. It works only in conjunction with the forgiveness of our Mediator.
3. If something doesn’t make sense doctrinally, read a different translation or the Greek definition of trou-

bling words (i.e. Romans 3:24). Also look for similar doctrines in the Book of Mormon, D&C, and Conference Reports. Paul was not infallible, but he probably taught truths in keeping with the restoration.

Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire, grew from its humble beginnings of a drained swamp in 650 BC to boast the largest population of the empire, nearly one million people. By the time of Augustus Caesar's reign (27 BC-AD 14), they had paved roads, parks, libraries, gymnasiums, temples, forums, aqueducts to deliver running water to the city's fountains and 170 baths with hot, cold, and warm water. Augustus boasted he found the city in brick and left it in marble. One-half of the city were slaves-servants. Many foreigners lived in Rome, including Jews making up 10% of the population). Jews were mentioned as early as Julius Caesar's funeral in 44BC. In a Roman satire from the time, Jews were depicted as an unwelcome reality.



Image of the Colluseum by Free-Photos via Pixabay.

I: FOLLY OF TRUSTING IN CIRCUMCISION, LINEAGE, OR MOSAIC LAW FOR REDEMPTION

In chapters 1–4, Paul opens his first diatribe denouncing any source of redemption other than faith in Christ.

Greetings to the Saints in Rome

Romans 1:1–6

Romans 1:1 “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus” (NIV) *Paulos* is actually his Greek name (meaning “small or little”) but is translated as Paul. The “*os/us*” is a Latin ending which speaks to Paul’s Roman citizenship, but he does not introduce himself with his full three-names that were a sign of Roman of citizenship.⁶ Instead, he introduces himself as a servant (or also translated from the Greek, “*doulos*,” a born bondman or slave) of the “Messiah/Christ” (Hebrew and Greek for the “Anointed One”). Rome had “three slaves to one free citizen.”⁷ Paul uses the word to describe his total submission to the Lord.

“called to be an apostle” The word “*apostolos*” means, “one sent, messenger or delegate,” which reinforces Paul’s use of “born bondman.” Paul was called by the resurrected Christ to witness and serve Him (Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14). To some degree, so are each one of us. “Many are called” (Matthew 22:14; D&C 121:40).

“and set apart for the gospel of God” (NIV) The word, “set apart/“*aphorizó*”/separated” meant, “to mark off by boundaries from, set apart.” I appreciate the fuller meaning of “setting apart” in the context of this verse: a servant of God, sent on an assignment or mission, with a special commission and blessing. The boundaries are God’s directions contained in the gospel. The word “gospel” or “good tidings” is literally, “Good News from God” (KJV, DBT, WEB).⁸ The gospel is the Lord’s plan of salvation. We believe God presented it during premortal councils and it pivots on the appointment of a redeemer to atone for the sins of the world. All doctrines and everything else taught in “the scriptures” (Old Testament writings and more), are tangential to this good news.

Romans 1:2 “promised afore by his prophets” Paul confirms the fulfillment of prophecies, types and shadows of the Messiah.⁹ It was very important to the Jews, that Jesus fulfilled the Messianic hopes and promises of David’s lineage given from many prophets (i.e. Psalm 89:4; Isaiah 7:11; 9:7; 11:1; etc.).

Romans 1:3–4 “who was a descendant of David according to the flesh, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God” (BSB) Paul declares Jesus’ human and divine existence. He does not speak pejoratively by emphasizing the “flesh” and “*sperma/seed*.” His dual nature is “declared,” meaning “appointed or set forth” or “established.” It does not mean something spoken, nor “predestined” (as the Latin Vulgate text and the reformer Calvin misinterpreted). This is the only time in scripture that we find “Spirit of holiness.” Romans 1:4 is a verse that has different meanings with different translations:

BLB

“Having been declared the Son of God in power according to *the* Spirit of holiness, by resurrection from *the* dead: Jesus Christ our Lord”

NIV

“And who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord”

KJV

“And declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead”

This verse does not mean that the resurrection “made” Jesus into the “Son of God,” as many Christians understand. Rather, Paul teaches here that before the resurrection, Jesus was also the Son of God.¹⁰ This confirms Luke’s record that Jesus was conceived when “the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee” (Luke 1:35). The resurrection of the dead provides evidence of His Sonship and also declares that appointment.

Romans 1:5 “Through Him and on behalf of His name, we received grace and apostleship to call all those among the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith” (BSB) The Savior was the source of Paul receiving forgiveness and his apostolic calling. “Grace” is often translated as “favor” in KJV (i.e. Luke 1:30; 2:52; Acts 2:47; etc.).

Grace/charis: “a gift or blessing brought to man by Jesus Christ, (b) favor, (c) gratitude, thanks, (d) a favor, kindness.”

Faith/pistas: “belief, trust, confidence; fidelity, faithfulness.” The root word “persuade,” gives the core-meaning, “divine persuasion.”

Paul’s combination of words provides an interesting understanding of the “obedience of faith,” (NASB), or “so that people of all nations would obey and have faith” (CEV). We assume Paul really liked it as he opens and closes his letter with this theme (Romans 16:26). We too must demonstrate our faith-filled obedience on His Name to all the nations. Note the **JST** changes that clarify our understanding of redemption.

KJV ROMANS 1:5-6

By whom we have received grace and apostleship,
for obedience to the faith
among all nations, for his name:
Among whom *are* ye also *the* called of Jesus
Christ:

JST ROMANS 1:5-6

By whom we have received grace and apostleship,
through obedience, ***and*** faith ***in his name,***
to preach the gospel among all nations;
Among whom ye also are called of Jesus Christ

Paul’s Desire to Visit Rome

Romans 1:7 “To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people” (NIV) Paul writes to converted, holy people, or “saints” (KJV) about important matters of Jesus’ higher law. “Saints” is not a light title to carry.

Saints/hagios, an adjective: “set apart by (or for) God, holy, sacred.”

Romans 1:8 “your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world”
Knowing that the Roman saints were known for their faith begs the ques-

tion, “What are we known for?” In Greek, faith has a component of action that follows with obedience. In Latin, “*fedas*” is loyal, and shared roots with “fidelity”.

Romans 1:9–10 “at last by God’s will I may succeed in coming to you” (BSB) Paul gives us an example of praying, but be careful for what you pray for, as the answer may not be what you expect. I doubt Paul expected to come to Rome in bonds as a prisoner. The JST adds a beautiful example of how Paul’s prayers prioritized the most important things, how he could serve God better, and sought for blessings on others.

KJV ROMANS 1:9–10

For God is my witness, whom I serve *with my spirit* in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, *if by any means now* at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.

JST ROMANS 1:9–10

For God is my witness, whom I serve, ___ that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, ***that you may be kept through the Spirit, in the gospel of his Son, Making request of you, to remember me in your prayers, I now write unto you, that you will ask him in faith, that if by any means,*** at length, I may serve you with my labors, and may have a prosperous journey by the will of God, to come unto you.

Romans 1:11–15 “I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift” (NIV) Paul had wanted to go to Rome in the past, but he was detoured for the Lord’s purposes. His desire stemmed from more than wanting to see the beautiful capital city; his heart “longed/desired, to pursue with love” to see the saints in order to bless them. He wanted to give a spiritual gift “to make you strong” (NIV). He hoped it would help the saints become “established/*sterichthenai*/fix firmly, direct myself towards, (b) support; strengthen.” If these saints had the gift of the Holy Ghost, was he referring to the initiatory blessings of washings and anointings or perhaps the temple endowment? The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that: “The apostles after their endowment, were qualified to ordain others after the holy order of God to teach repentance and remission of sins also or, in other words, to teach all those things that Christ had commanded them to teach.”¹¹

Romans 1:16 “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” The gospel—or Christ’s plan and example—is the way God empowers all who believe in order for each person to receive salvation. Everyone will receive immortality; at some point, “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess to God” (Romans 14:11). Salvation must come individually through a one-on-one relationship with our Creator. The hope of Salvation allows mortals to believe and grow from one level of faith to another.

“first to the Jew, then to the Gentile” (NIV) The Jews were “first” because their ancestors made covenants that lead them to become a chosen people. God’s blessing to them allowed their posterity to have the opportunity to serve God and learn of Him. God is no respecter of persons though. Jesus taught, “the first shall be last, and the last shall be first” (Matthew 19:30). All will have a fair chance to hear and serve God if they wish.

Romans 1:17 “through faith on his name; as it is written, the just shall live by faith” (JST) The JST added the importance of placing our faith on the Savior. Paul cites part of Habakkuk 2:4, but there it is even clearer that “live” required action, “the righteous person will live by his faithfulness” (NIV). The key to understanding God is to develop our faith so that He can reveal His Spirit and truths to us. As disciples progress in their obedience, they may receive God’s *full* justification and receive all He has for them.

This was significant insight to the Reformer, Martin Luther. He recorded his struggle with this concept: “Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that the ‘just shall live by faith.’ Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy, God justifies us through faith.”¹² Verses such as this one developed the Protestant reformation slogan, “sola scriptura, sola fides, sola gratia”/“scripture alone, faith alone, grace alone.” Such thoughts were a reaction to incorrect religious practices, but do not contain the whole truth. Yet, in the process of seeking a greater understanding of faith, Martin Luther realized, “Faith leads you in and opens up God’s heart and will, that you should see pure grace and overflowing love. This it is to behold God in faith that you should look upon his fatherly, friendly heart, in which there is no anger nor ungraciousness.”¹³

God’s Wrath Against Sin

Romans 1:18–32

Paul’s audience included saints who knew the Old Testament and pagan ideology, so he addressed both camps. First, he mentions the wrath of God against the wicked. Then denounced pagan philosophies for eight verses.

Romans 1:18–20 “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness . . . who love not the truth but remain in unrighteousness” (JST) Paul emphasizes that God will punish those who do not repent, and that humans suppress the truth through their sins. Not only is revelation of more truth stunted by sin, but wickedness also leads one to disregard and even deny truth. Since the creation, God has revealed His “divine nature.” Every time the scriptures repeat this phrase, it always refers to our perfect God. Jesus is the only Divine Nature. In church vernacular we use the phrase “divine nature,” as a shared gift or inheritance with humanity. This is a unique interpretation as part of the Restoration. Yet, by remembering that He alone has the Divine Nature fosters humility and adoration.

Romans 1:21–23 “their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened . . . and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images” (NIV) Humility and obedience are required to worship God, otherwise, pride makes us fools. Paul taught that it was not enough to know God, we must also honor and glorify Him. We have an example in the Lord’s Prayer, where one third of Jesus’ prayer was worship.

Romans 1:24–25 “worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator” God has revealed truth to humanity since the creation, but many have rebelled and not worshipped Him. It is the fault of humans that God’s divine message and image became obscured to the world. Paul enumerates his generation’s sins that show their apostasy and their custom of no longer worshipping God. All of them are close to our generation’s problems.

Romans 1:26–27 “Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones . . . Men committed indecent acts with other men” (BSB) At the top of the list of sins, Paul starts with sexual lusts. Unlike the Greco-Roman culture of the time—that valued women’s chastity before marriage, but winked at men’s promiscuity—in the early church Paul taught that both sexes will be judged by the same rule. Any breaking of the law of chastity is a sin and unacceptable to God.¹⁴ He denounces homosexuality as reversing God’s creation. The difficulty of this high standard of morality for Christians, is teaching and striving to live the law of chastity, while having room in our hearts to love all. All those who follow our Redeemer, are “all one in Christ Jesus” (NIV): straight and gay, “Jew nor Gentile . . . slave nor free . . . male and female” (Galatians 3:28). Paul condemns issues of immortality in nearly every letter as it was a major problem in the Roman world (i.e. 1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10; etc.).

Romans 1:28–32 “since they did not see fit to acknowledge God . . . They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity” (BSB) When humans do not *choose* to obey God, then His Spirit cannot bless them in the same way, and they fall to temptations. Paul listed 21 sins. They reflect his Jewish standards and values, especially his closing death sentence: “those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.” In the restored church, we do not hold the same strict punishment, but encourage repentance, and “retain[ing] the knowledge of God.”

ROMANS 2

Beware of Hypocrisy

Romans 2:1

Romans 2:1 “In judging another, you condemn yourself” (AB¹⁵) Paul writes in a diatribe like the Stoic philosophers, as if he were arguing with an imagined critic. He argues that we humans judge others in the same areas where we ourselves fall short. Sociologists have also observed that if something bothers you about some-

Christ the judge and praying angels by Giovanni da Milano, 1365 via Wikimedia Commons.



one else, it is probably because you have a problem with it. Yet hypocrisy can be hard to see in oneself. This is why President Benson’s talk on pride was so helpful in reminding us that we all have a problem with pride, so we should keep looking deeper.¹⁶ Repeatedly the Bible councils us not to judge others. Yet one of the things we were sent to earth to do is learn how to judge right from wrong. Life is full of choices, which requires judgement. The key to this paradox is found in the Book of Mormon, “judge righteous judgement.” Moroni 7:16–19, explains how to do that. At birth God gives every person the “light of Christ,” which can prompt righteous judgement. The influence of the Spirit will also testify of truth to help the seeker “know good from evil.”

Universality and Goodness of The Judgment

Romans 2:2 “God’s judgment . . . is based on truth” (NIV)

God knows all sides of every story; no one can escape God’s judgment . . . so we can leave the judging to God. Paul’s reference to God’s judgment is Christ’s as our glorified judge. Paul later cites “the judgment-seat of Christ” in Romans 14:10 and repeats it in 2 Corinthians 5:10. The same phrase is found eight other times in the Book of Mormon.

Romans 2:4 “Do you not realize that what is good about

God is meant to lead you to repentance?” (AB) Paul knew first-hand the blessings of repentance. Only the stubborn and prideful do not seek repentance. For Christians, the hope of the Lord’s forgiveness gives them courage to change. “Repentance is not feeling bad about ourselves, in fact, it’s quite the opposite.” It is a form of self-appreciation, because it leads us to recognize our weaknesses, which then allows us to see ourselves more honestly and accept our flaws. Next, as we pray for forgiveness, God empowers and cleanses us “to learn little by little and grow into a better person.”¹⁷

Romans 2:6 “He will repay everyone according to his deeds” (AB) This Epistle is filled with Old Testament scripture; here Paul cites Proverbs 24:12. It is the law of the harvest again. In God’s kingdom, how we sow determines what we reap. God will “give back or restore,” what is just at the judgment (Mormon 3:15). There, He will examine the sincerity of our deeds as well as our thoughts. In a sense, the judgment will become a restoration of truth, too. That delayed gratification requires faith to follow Him. Elder Neal A. Maxwell spoke on the challenge of a delayed judgment:

Seeing the unrighteous prosper and pleasure-seekers go unpunished can take its toll too, unless we are meek. So can the accumulation of afflictions and our awareness thereof. Such harrowing can create the fertile soil of self-pity with its “I deserve . . .” It is a surprisingly small step from weariness in well-doing to self-pity. The imagery of being grounded and rooted, of not being “moved away,” warns us of that one small step that, when taken, nearly ensures a second.

Often, we do not receive an immediate or full repayment for our service to God, yet we are blessed in other ways as King Benjamin taught. “In the first place, he hath created you, and granted unto you your lives, for which ye are indebted unto him. And secondly . . . [if you] do as he hath commanded you . . . he doth immediately bless you (Mosiah 2:22, 24; also see 41)

Judgment of the Righteous and Wicked

Romans 2:7–10 “those who by perseverance in doing good seek for . . . immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey . . . wrath and indignation” (NASB) God rewards all mortals with immortality or the gift of resurrection. Additionally, those who valiantly serve him will receive an additional reward of enjoying God’s presence in Eternal Life as the gift of exaltation. The restoration provided this separate and unique definition of Eternal Life (D&C 20:14; 76:78–79; 88:4–5; 132:24; Moses 1:39; etc.).

Paul refers to the results of God’s punishment as the sinner feeling “wrath and indignation,” or “anger and fury” (ABPE). We learn from modern revelation that “Eternal punishment” is another word for “God’s punishment,” which will be just (D&C 19:10–11).

Romans 2:11 “God does not show favoritism” (BSB) God’s impartiality will be especially evident in His judgment. God’s judgment will be based on what one has become—this is a result of one’s desires, knowledge and actions. A higher social status in life will not help one at the judgment bar (and it may require more accountability). This leveling of the social strata was unheard of in the Roman Empire or in any other empire for over a thousand years. God opens the door for all those who seek to become His people. God’s rewards do not require money or station, but come with obedience and service.

Accountability to the Law

Romans 2:12 “as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law” The New Testament reference to “the law,” most often refers to the Law of Moses, recorded in the first five books of the Old Testament (also known as the Torah or Pentateuch). Those who are blessed to know God’s laws in this life are judged with the responsibility and accountability of having them. Similarly, Jesus taught this in Galilee, and later to the Kirtland Saints, “where much is given, much is required” (Luke 12:48; D&C 82:3).

Romans 2:13 “it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but it is the doers of the law” (BSB) Paul hits the nail on the head one more time: only those who live God’s law will be justified. If they have God’s laws or revelation and disregard them, they will be held accountable. Jesus taught the same thing in one of his two most important discourses, the Sermon on the Mount and the Last Supper: “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven,” and “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (Matthew 7:21, 24; John 13:17 ESV; also see James 1:22, 25; D&C 89:18).

Romans 2:15 “the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and *their thoughts*” When disciples internalize God’s laws, the laws become a guide to their thoughts. The Book of Mormon teaches that people are born with a conscience, or the “Light of Christ,” to help distinguish “good from evil” (Moroni 7:18–19).

Romans 2:16 “God judges people’s secrets” (NIV) Even the most secret thoughts and desires are known to God, and Jesus will include them in His judgment.

Moral Duties of Jew and Gentile—Member and Nonmember

Romans 2:17–24

Romans 2:17 “If you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God” (NIV) Paul’s diatribe now turns to the Jews in his audience. He taunts the proud claims of superior spirituality because of an Israelite birth-right. He warns the Jews that if their Law of Moses puffs them up with more knowledge, they need to beware of pride and of looking down on others for their ignorance. Instead, Paul asks them to look within their own souls and change themselves as needed.

Romans 2:19–20 “An instructor of . . .” Paul uses the very word that Jews often called their law, the Instructor. Israelites had the responsibility to teach God’s law, and share the light He gave them from scripture and the prophets, with the rest of the world.

Romans 2:21–23 “**You, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself?**” (NIV) As part of Paul’s imaginary conversation, he denounces hypocrisy. Those who do not apply the law in their hearts have squandered their inheritance. Paul gives five moral challenges and a question about the Torah (backed with a quote from the Psalm 50:16–20; 3:10–18).

1. Will you teach yourself?
2. Do you steal?
3. Do you commit adultery?
4. Do you dishonor the Temple?
5. Do you dishonor God?

Paul scrupulously followed the admonition to be an example of the believers (1 Timothy 4:12). Here he stresses the importance of teachers adhering to their own counsel. When God calls disciples and they become baptized members of his church, they must recognize the importance of being doers of the word as their example preaches to others.

Romans 2:24 “**As it is written: ‘God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.’**” Paul recites Isaiah 52:5 (possibly from memory, as it differs somewhat). Paul observes that Israel was to be a light to the world, but instead their behavior has brought dishonor to God and His covenant people. Paul purports that the Jews did not fulfill their vocation as God’s chosen people.

Circumcision of the Heart

Romans 2:25–29

Romans 2:25–27 “**Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not**” (NIV) Paul uses the Abrahamic definition of circumcision—as a sign of the covenant (Genesis 17:11). Because of this sign, the word circumcision is often used in place of “covenant” throughout the Bible. Paul reminded them that the sign of the covenant was only beneficial if they lived and internalized God’s laws. Like a meaningless talisman, the sign was devoid without obedience.

God does not care if Christians were circumcised or not, He wanted (and still wants) covenant people to live their covenants. By looking at Romans 2:26 in light of Romans 2:14, it appears that God accepted the Gentiles because they kept His commandments. Their “righteousness” was “counted for circumcision.” Even attempts to live the “letter” of the Law without the Spirit of the law are not following God’s commandments (Romans 2:27).

Romans 2:28–29a “**a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit**” (NIV) From the beginning of this Epistle, Paul builds his argument up to this point. The climax of

Paul's Epistle is that God wants His servants to have soft hearts or "circumcision of the heart." This is not new, as we find the Lord teaching it at least six times in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; etc.). Disciples align their desires, thoughts, and actions to follow their Savior—including His example, words, and inspiration from the Spirit. When this happens, the Spirit "adopts" Gentiles so that they, too, can inherit Israel's role as God's servants.

Paul differentiates between two types of covenant people: 1) those by name or outward expression, and 2) those by action or inward expression. In Paul's mind, those of the first camp are "uncircumcised of heart" (2 Nephi 9:33; Ezekiel 44:7,9; etc.). Richard Anderson summarized:

Paul seems to contrast inner attitude and outer conformity, but he really means ritual righteousness as against moral righteousness, for Paul has described the moral Gentile as one obedient 'inwardly' (Rom. 2:29). Paul is clearly stating the Old Testament principle as still true: 'To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams' (1 Samuel 15:22).¹⁸

Paul develops this theme through chapter 8.

Romans 2:29b "whose praise is not of men, but of God" Paul makes a pun that we miss in English. The word, "praise," means "Judah." In other words, when Gentiles obey God, He will give praise to them and give them a new name as he adopts them into Judah/Israel.

ROMANS 3

Paul continues contending that unfaithful Jews had no advantage over the Gentiles in the Kingdom of God. Despite their holy prophets, scriptures, and "sign of the covenant," God's wrath will come upon those who do not keep their covenants. Yet, Paul never gave up the promised people—He knew God would always honor *faithful* Israel.

Advantage to Being a Jew

Romans 3:1-7

Romans 3:1-2 "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew?" (NIV) Paul's imaginary conversation now turns to a debate with a Jewish rabbi. He basically asks, "Is there any advantage in living the old law?" Have you asked the same question about your covenants? Paul answers, "YES!" The advantage is having the "oracles of God" or living and recorded prophets. Israelites were "entrusted with the very words of God" (NIV). The JST footnote adds the important need for Israelites to have their hearts in tune with God.

Romans 3:3–4 “Will their unfaithfulness nullify God’s faithfulness?” This question leads to Paul’s next discussion. He asks his audience to suppose if some Jews were *unfaithful*, “would their infidelity nullify God’s fidelity?”¹⁹ Paul answers, “Of course not!” and paraphrases Psalms 51:4. Obviously, God’s promises will be fulfilled, regardless of whom he uses to do his work. God’s judgment, will not change and is completely upright. However, the amount of truth that God can restore is affected by humanity’s faithfulness.

Romans 3:5–6 “Is God unrighteous to inflict wrath? Absolutely not!” (CSB) God’s punishment is actually helpful. In the restoration we do not see God inflicting wrath, but actually correcting us out of love. When we understand that His work brings “to pass the immortality and Eternal Life of man” we understand God’s encouragement to repent and to stop sinning in a different light.²⁰ The **JST** changes are noted below with Romans 3:8.



Joshua passing the River Jordan with the Ark of the Covenant by Benjamin West via Wikimedia Commons.

Romans 3:7 “if my falsehood accentuates God’s truthfulness, to the increase of His glory, why am I still condemned” (BSB) Paul’s diatribe includes the false argument: “if we sin more, then God’s forgiveness and glory can be greater.” The same argument is used by people who knowingly sin, rationalizing that they can repent when

they take the sacrament, before they go on a mission, or before they die. This mentality desecrates the Lord's atonement, and all will be held accountable for such a flagrant abuse of forgiveness. It prostitutes Jesus' sufferings and sacrifices. Compare different translations to help to understand Romans 3:5–8. I especially appreciate the JST of these verses.

JST/KJV

5 But if we remain in our unrighteousness and commend the righteousness of God, how dare we say, God is unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man who fears God,) 6 God forbid; for then how shall God judge the world? 7 For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie, (as it is called of the Jews,) unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? and not received? Because we **are** slanderously reported; 8 And some affirm that we say (**whose damnation is just,**) Let us do evil that good may come. **But this is false.**

CSB

5 But if our unrighteousness highlights God's righteousness, what are we to say? I am using a human argument: Is God unrighteous to inflict wrath? 6 Absolutely not! Otherwise, how will God judge the world? 7 But if by my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? 8 And why not say, just as some people slanderously claim we say, "Let us do what is evil so that good may come"? Their condemnation is deserved!

NIV

5 But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) 6 Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? 7 Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" 8 Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is just!

All are Guilty Before God

Romans 3:9–20

Romans 3:9–18 "Then are we better than they? No, in no wise; for we have proved before, that Jews and Gentiles are all under sin" (JST) King Benjamin taught a similar message of humanity's nothingness and God's greatness, in his last tower discourse (Mosiah 2–4). Paul then quotes six to nine Old Testament scriptures as

evidence that that all humans are sinners. His list fits our day too—everything from violence and deceit to lying and profanity.²¹

Romans 3:10	Psalms 14:3; 53:4
Romans 3:11–12	Psalms 14:2–3; Ecclesiastes 7:20
Romans 3:13	Psalms 5:10; 140:4
Romans 3:14	Psalms 10:7
Romans 3:15–17	Isaiah 59:7–8 or Proverbs 1:16
Romans 3:18	Psalms 36:2b

Romans 3:19 “The whole world may become subject to God’s judgment” (CSB) Paul persists that the Jews will not be exempt from the God’s punishment by trusting in their law (which here may include references to the oral laws or “traditions of the elders” Mark 7:3).²² There may have been a problem in the church in Rome with the Jewish converts arguing with the Gentile converts on this issue. Paul ends his argument with a double parallelism.

every mouth
may be silenced
and the whole world
held accountable to God (NIV).

Romans 3:20 “No one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin” (NIV) Paul sums up this portion of his argument by correcting a popular notion—that one is saved by one’s obedience to the Law of Moses. Christianity taught that the Law was only for leading a fallen people to recognize the source of their salvation. It was not “the promise,” but only a guide to their Promised Messiah. The Law was only a lower law given to a population of slaves who did not know how to take full responsibility for themselves (i.e. “Moses you go for us”). Humanity cannot vindicate itself; we all need a Redeemer.

All Share Without Distinction Through Christ’s Redemption

Romans 3:21 “the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify” (NIV) Paul had been a lifelong student of the scriptures—both the “law and prophets.” He interprets them as a witness of the coming of “The Righteous of God,” Jesus (Romans 3:26). Throughout his Epistles Paul refers to the Old Testament scriptures that prefigured the promised Messiah as the means of justification and redemption (Romans 13:8; Galatians 3:25; etc. see also 2 Nephi 11:4; 25:24–27).

Romans 3:22–23 “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” This is at the heart of the Plan of Salvation. Grasping the realization that we need the Redeemer is what life is all about—we cannot do it alone. We are in desperate need of a Savior. These verses sound like Lehi’s message: “no flesh can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8). Christ is the only way we can be redeemed. When we internalize this doctrine, it has the power to enlighten all aspects of our lives—our interactions with others, ourselves, and with God—for we “all . . . come short of the glory of God.”



Recreation of the High Priest offering sacrifice at the Israelite tabernacle. Photo by Daniel Smith.

Romans 3:24 “Being justified freely [only] by his grace through the redemption” The word “freely” is changed in the JST to “only.” Jesus’ atoning sacrifice is the only way we are saved from death and the effects of the Fall. It is a gift from God that builds a reciprocal relationship, which requires give and take.

Romans 3:25 “God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith on his blood” Paul uses “propitiation” which is a form of the word meaning “priestly sacrifice.” It is not the blood of animals, though, but our Savior’s redeeming blood. Paul pictures Jesus as the High Priest making “propitiation for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17, NKJB). Paul attests to the Atonement and never moves far from this subject.

Romans 3:26 “to demonstrate His righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and to justify the one who has faith in Jesus” Paul has Jesus as the subject of righteousness again. Because He is just, we can be justified through His atonement. But it takes faith in Christ to receive justification. This is repeated in the Book of Mormon, “And thus he shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name; this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance” (Alma 34:15).

Romans 3:27 “Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded . . . Is He not the God of Gentiles too? Yes” (BSB) Paul’s argument includes the “law of faith,” within the realm of believers and “doers” (Romans 2:13). Salvation is the complete gift of immortality, and sanctification is the process.

Romans 3:28 “man is justified by faith alone” (JST) Critics have seen fault in the restored church for putting too much emphasis on human effort, and yet that is not what our scriptures and doctrine state. For the third time in this chapter, the JST added the word, “alone,” to the Bible to further emphasize that only in Christ can we be saved.

Romans 3:30 “God . . . will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith” (BSB). For the tenth time in this chapter, Paul returns to the problem of the Mosaic traditions overshadowing Christ’s teachings. I assume local Judaizes (those Jewish converts who wanted Gentile converts to live the Law of Moses), were a local challenge (see Acts 15:6–21).³⁰

Romans 3:31 “Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law” (NASB). It is important to differentiate between the Law of Moses and God’s law. Jesus fulfilled the latter, with its animal sacrifices, extra washings, and 613 written laws. However, God’s higher laws were still intact. Jesus repeatedly taught the need to follow His teachings, “If you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them” (John 13:17; also, Matthew 7:21, 24; James 1:22, 25, 27; etc.). He also repeated the Ten Commandments as still applicable within His higher laws. Similarly, the Book of Mormon teaches that we are justified “by grace that we are saved after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23). No man can “earn” salvation on his own. We establish the law through faith, and faith has power. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught; “Where faith is, there will be some of the fruits: all gifts and power which were sent from heaven, were poured out on the heads of those who had faith.”²⁴

ROMANS 4

Abraham Justified by Faith

Romans 4:1-6

The entire chapter answers Paul's preceding question on establishing the law through faith by illustrating "the law of faith" (Romans 3:27), with the examples of Abraham and of a psalm. Paul cites "the law and the prophets" in Romans 3:21, and in Romans 4, reaches back to the first Book of the Law to show God blessing his prophet Abraham for his works and faith (Genesis 12-24). The apocryphal accounts that were written between the Old and New Testaments, always spoke highly of Abraham.²⁵ Baruch taught that God implanted "the unwritten law" in Abraham's heart.²⁶ This carried over to the late Second Temple period when Jews saw Abraham as their most important forefather (For more, see earlier commentary on Matthew 3:9²⁷). Similarly, Jesus honored him as a ruler in heaven (as well as opening a potential heavenly door for Gentiles' adoption into Abraham's seed): "Many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11). Abraham was the model example that his audience of Jews and Christians knew and trusted.

Romans 4:1-3 "Abraham believed God" Before Moses received the Law, Abraham believed and obeyed God. It was his faith that motivated him to follow God in righteousness. For Paul the order was important. Abraham first believed the Lord, then God taught him precepts, Abraham lived them, God tested him, found him loyal, and blessed him.

Romans 4:4-5 "But to him that . . . believeth on [H]im who justifieth . . . his faith is counted for righteousness" (JST) These two verses are difficult to understand in any translation. The JST helps to realize that Paul thought that the problem with relying on our efforts or works, was that laborers felt they deserved compensation. But that is not the case with God; He does not owe us anything. We are always in God's debt. When we approach and obey God with a heart and mind filled with belief and faith, then God counts our service for righteousness and rewards accordingly.

DAVID CELEBRATING THE SAME FAITH

Romans 4:6-8 "Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven; whose sins are covered" (NIV). Paul gives a second example from another beloved ancestor, the Psalmist David, "the man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). Paul quotes (or paraphrases) Psalms 32:1-2, on the blessed state of forgiveness. The psalm does not attach forgiveness to actions but to God's graciousness in covering them. This stems from the Old Testament roots for "atone" and "to clothe," which we will discuss in Romans 5:22.



“the Lord will never count [the sin] against him” (NIV) as long as repentance occurs, God grants forgiveness, and the sin is not repeated.

ABRAHAM WAS JUSTIFIED BEFORE CIRCUMCISION

Romans 4:9 “Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness . . . before . . . he received circumcision as a sign” (NIV) Genesis 17 describes the promises to Abraham’s prosperity, with circumcision as the “sign of the covenant.” But, Paul makes the point that God justified Abraham’s righteous before the sign of circumcision (Genesis 15:6).

Romans 4:11–12 “the father . . . not of circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of their faith” Paul claims that all who walk in faith will be included in the family of Abraham. But, this was a dramatic departure from Pharisaic the teachings of his day. Then, circumcision had become an important part of eternal salvation. Years later, the Talmud recorded:

Abraham will sit at the entrance of Gehenna [hell] and will not permit any circumcised Israelite to descend into it. . . . And what does he do with those who have sinned immoderately in their lives? He removes the foreskins from children who have died before circumcision and puts them on the hardened sinners so that they can descend into *Gehenna*.²⁸

In contrast to this mentality, Paul taught that if God’s promised blessings come from faith, then the faith-filled gentile who repents will receive the same blessings as the Israelites.

As with Abraham, God’s Promises Come to People of Faith

Romans 4:13–17

Romans 4:13 “The promise to Abraham . . . that he would inherit the world . . . through the righteousness that comes by faith” (CSB) It was not through the Law of Moses or the Aaronic order that God gave Abraham and Sarah His assurance of posterity.²⁹ In restored modern scripture, we learn that God covenanted with Abraham through the higher priesthood, which priesthood Abraham received from Melchizedek (D&C 124:58; 132:32; Abraham 2:9–11).³⁰

Romans 4:14 “If those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing” (NIV) Paul explains that if salvation came only from the Mosaic Law, then faith would not be needed—which then made God’s promises to Abraham void. The “heirs” appears to refer to the “heirs of salvation,” or those whom God will give exaltation (Hebrews 1:14). The prophet Joseph explained: “the heirs of salvation may confess the Lord and bow the knee; the rewards for faithfulness, and the punishments for sins, are so much beyond the narrow-mindedness of men, that every man is constrained to exclaim: ‘It came from God.’”³¹

Romans 4:15 “where there is no law there is no transgression” (NIV) With a slight change in meaning, we read in the Book of Mormon, “Where there is no law given there is no punishment” (2 Nephi 9:25). The one-word difference is significant. Jacob’s claim protects the ignorant sinner. But Paul’s word sounds as if the nature of sin or “transgression” itself changes without a law. As there are many ways to interpret the Pauline text, it is immensely helpful to have the Book of Mormon as a second witness.

Romans 4:16 “Ye are justified of faith and works, through grace” (JST) Even though the word “grace” can mean gift (Romans 1:5), God’s “grace,” is more as there is a relationship of loving kindness. The JST clarifies the doctrine that it is through God’s grace that we can be justified if we combine good works and faith. In two more chapters, Paul will discuss how it is not a matter of either works or faith, but both are like two sides of the same coin (Romans 6:1).

Romans 4:17 “I have made thee a father of many nations” This refers to *Abraham’s* name change (from *Abram*, “the father [is] exalted” to “father of great multitudes.” His new name symbolized his new role as a co-creator.

Romans 4:18–19 “He believed, hoping against hope” Abraham trusted God’s promise for posterity even though the hope seemed in vain. Even at ages one-hundred and ninety, he and Sarah had enough faith to receive their promised son. Their faith became the power to conceive (After Sarah’s death, Abraham married Keturah and had six other children, Genesis 25:1–2).

Romans 4:20 “He did not waver in unbelief at God’s promise but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory” Abraham did not doubt God’s promises. As the father of all believers, Abraham’s faith is a “type” of Christian faith that holds to God’s promises. Paul loved this theme and expands on it again in Hebrews 11:11. Faith has power to strengthen disciples to accomplish God’s plans. Trusting in our Creator’s power more than our own makes us fully convinced that God is capable.

Romans 4:22–24 “it was credited to him as righteousness” This is the third time Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 (Romans 4: 3, 9). Faith has the power to develop ‘status of rectitude before God’ for all believers.” Abraham’s pattern of faith should be ours. I think he used the “dead” womb earlier to correspond with the death and resurrection of Jesus as the source of our faith.³²

Romans 4:25 “who was given for our transgressions and raised for our justification” Paul concludes his example of Abraham with this thesis: Paul included the story of Sarah and Abraham’s righteousness for believers “that the Lord will deliver us from our sins and was raised for our justification.”³³

II: RECONCILIATION AND FORGIVENESS THROUGH THE AT-ONE-MENT OF CHRIST

Romans 5

In chapters 5–8, Paul turns to his second doctrinal issue. After proving the folly of trusting in circumcision, Abraham and Sarah’s lineage, or the Mosaic Law for redemption, Paul elaborates on the saving nature of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice. Only through Him can humanity be reconciled to God. In chapter 5, Paul shares God’s divine answer to the human predicament—Jesus, as our Redeemer. In chapter 6, Paul returns to the need to follow Him with good works.

Once Justified Through Christ There Are Many

Romans 5:1–2 “ . . . being justified by faith . . . we have access by faith into this grace . . . and rejoice in hope”

Once we have shown our fidelity to God, we are justified through Jesus’ atoning sacrifice. Then we may receive God’s gifts of peace, grace, hope, and even patience through tribulation. (For the Greek definitions of faith and grace, see Romans 1:5.)

Romans 5:3–5 “we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope . . .” (BSB) Paul taught that our times of suffering can help us progress in the areas that matter the most. These verses contain one of the most comforting sources of peace during our trials. Whether they are general tribulations of mortality or tailor-made trails, our Master teacher gives us these lessons to help us become as He is. Learning through our experiences is one purpose of our second estate. By taking Paul’s words one step further, if we react impatiently to our problems or become angry at our trials, we communicate that we know more than God does. The same idea that tribulation can lead to perfection has been repeated in modern revelation too.³⁴

“the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost” The Spirit becomes God’s vehicle to cleanse and fill repentant humanity with His love. For those who have sincerely sought forgiveness with a broken heart and contrite spirit have often been filled with God’s love as a sign of His forgiveness.

Jesus' Suffering and Death Accomplished Justification, Salvation, and Reconciliation

Romans 5:6–8 “while we were still powerless Christ died for the ungodly . . . [and] still sinners, Christ died for us” (BSB). After Paul used Abraham as an example of faith, he then compared Christ’s accomplishment. These verses are some of the great New Testament explanations of what is involved in divine love. As mortals we had/have no means to save ourselves.³⁵ But Jesus’ willingness to die for all sinners—who do not deserve such graciousness—contrasts sharply to ordinary powerless humans who at times may offer their lives for another. He offered His life and grace to overcome sin and death.

Romans 5:9 “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath” After four thousand years of practicing animal sacrifices, the final or real performance happened when the Son of God took upon Himself the sins of the world to redeem the world through His blood (Moses 5:5–7).

Romans 5:11 “. . . Joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement” This is the only use of the word “*at-one-ment*” in the KJV translation of the New Testament. However, there are three more uses of the same Greek word, *katallagé*, that are translated “reconciliation.” The word, “at-one-ment” was first used in 1526 in William Tyndale’s English Bible. He created the word to describe the process of becoming at one with God. The word for atone in Hebrew, stems from the Semitic root “*kaphar*: to cover, arch over, forgive, expiate,” and in the Arabic “*kafat*: a close embrace.” Hugh Nibley explained its origins:

It was the custom for one fleeing for his life in the desert to seek protection in the tent of a great sheik, crying out, . . . whereupon the Lord . . . puts the hem of his robe protectively over the kneeling man’s shoulder (*katafa*). This puts him under the Lord’s protection from all enemies. They embrace in a close hug [standing at the doorway to the tent] . . . the Lord makes a place for him and invites him to sit down beside him—they are at-one.³⁶

In the Book of Mormon, Nephi speaks of this in his psalm: “O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness! O Lord, wilt thou make a way for mine escape before mine enemies!” (2 Nephi 4:33; also see 2 Nephi 1:15).

In the KJV Old Testament we find 81 uses (all but four occur in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers—including the original temple rites of the Day of Atonement). The D&C uses it three times, the Pearl of Great Price twice, and the Book of Mormon forty-two times. (As the Book of Mormon is one third the length of the Old Testament, this places it in the milieu of the old Hebrew temple rites, with a similar word ratio as seen below).

WORD RATIO OF SCRIPTURAL USAGE OF ATONEMENT

TEXT:	ATONEMENT + ATONE (WITH SUFFEXES)	RECONCILIATION	TOTAL	WORD RATIO / 1000 WORDS
Old Testament 610,303 words	81 <i>kaphar</i>	5 <i>kaphar</i>	86	0.141
New Testament 180,565 words	1 <i>katallagé</i>	3 <i>katallagé</i>	4	0.022
Book of Mormon 266,944 words	29 + 13	0	42	0.157
D&C 1–138 111,117 words	3 + 2	1	6	0.054
Pearl of Great Price 30,362 words	1 + 1	0	2	0.066

Death Through Adam—Life Through Christ

Romans 5:12 “just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, so also death was passed on to all men, because all sinned” (BSB) Because of the Fall of Adam and Eve, humanity is born into a fallen, sinful world. In the fourth century, St. Augustine used this verse as his basis for “original sin” (that humans are born with sinful natures). But that is not what it says—nor what Paul meant. Death passed onto all men, but not Adam and Eve’s original transgression (Article of Faith 2). The word “sin/*hamartia*” means: “missed the mark.”

Romans 5:13 “For before the law sin was in the world: Few matters are more well established in the yet sin is not imputed to those who have no law” (JST) In Paul’s Epistles, most often, the word “law” refers to the Law of Moses, so he is saying that before Moses, there was still sin. Paul knew that God taught earlier prophets the laws of the Gospel, as eternal principles of happiness. The word “imputed” meant “to reckon, or lay to one’s charge.” It is also translated “taken into account” (BSB). It describes our responsibility to follow, knowing God’s laws (as discussed above in Romans 2:12).

Romans 5:14–19 “Adam . . . is a pattern of the One to come” (BSB) In a sense, Adam prefigured Jesus. He was a type of Christ as the only other man created by God. Both are called “son of God” (Luke 3:38). Also, as Adam is the father of our species, Christ is the father of our immortality. Later, Paul refers to Jesus as the second Adam (1 Corinthians 15:22, 45). Paul lists several examples of their parallels (“Adam” can be translated “man”). Eve was equally involved, but Paul does not include her to keep his parallels.

“By one man’s offence death reigned,” Adam’s fall brought death, while Christ’s Atonement bought immortality and the opportunity of Eternal Life. Jesus conquered death for Himself and all earthly life.

“by the offense of one judgment came,” Adam’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so too the obedient act of Jesus’ righteousness led to justification for all who repent (D&C 19:18).

“by one man’s disobedience . . . ” Adam brought condemnation and Christ brought justification. Jesus’ obedience opened the way for purification of righteousness. Through Jesus, the eternal consequence of Adam’s action became null and void.

Adam and Eve Expelled from Paradise by Anton Robert Leinweber, 1910.



Romans 5:20a “The law entered . . .” In Greek the word used for, “entered” means “to come in by the side of.” In classical Greek plays, it was used for supporting actors who would enter the stage briefly and leave again.³⁷ This is how Paul saw the Law of Moses—it was just a supporting actor who briefly played its role, and then left the stage for the main actor to perform.

Romans 5:20b–21 “Sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life” (BSB) Since the beginning of the world, sin has multiplied, but Christ’s gift has infinitely greater ramifications than Adam’s transgression. This truth was also understood in the Book of Mormon which clearly established the fact that the Law of Moses was given to direct humanity’s hopes and faith toward Jesus, the Promised Messiah (see 2 Nephi 11:4; Jacob 4:5; Jarom 1:11; Mosiah 13:30; Alma 25:16–17; 34:14).

Paul personifies “sin” (Satan) with the understanding that Jesus is doing battle with the forces of sin and defeats sin/Satan.

ROMANS 6—BAPTISM

After Paul’s treatment on Christ’s grace in chapter five, he next logically turns to the need for good works. He teaches faith’s relationship to works, and then his climax in chapter 8 teaches of Exaltation. Here in Chapter 6, Paul deals with baptism more thoroughly than in any other Epistle.

Dead to Sin and Alive to Christ

Romans 6:1–2 “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid” Paul returns to the question raised in 3:31, “Do we then nullify the Law through faith? (NASB). Paul answers loud and clear—NO. Those who deliberately sin, abuse, or take advantage of the Savior’s gift do. (He repeats this idea in 6:15.) He argues that when we are “dead to sin,” or receive forgiveness by our Redeemer, we should have no desire to return to our sins or repeat our follies. It logically follows that after disciples receive their Master’s gift of forgiving grace, they need to offer the gift of service to Him through good works.

Romans 6:3–4a “all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (BSB) Baptism includes the beautiful symbolism of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. When Paul writes, “we are buried with him” he not only infers baptism by immersion, but also, the symbolic idea of burying our old life, to take on a new life in Christ’s covenant. By accepting baptism, Christians accepted the Lord’s atoning in a very memorable way. When early Christians were baptized, they symbolically walked through Jesus’ burial, starting by stepping down a few steps into a large-sized baptismal font—as if they were figuratively being buried in a watery grave on Good Friday—and laying down under the water—as if in the tomb on Saturday—and then ascending out of the



Aguas de Mormon by Jorge Cocco.

water, up the stairs to the other side of the font, rising up to a new life—as like His resurrection Sunday morning.³⁸ It also symbolizes dying with the Lord and burying our sins.

In Matthew 3:13, we discussed that the Greek word underlying “baptize,” which meant more than to ceremonial immerse, meant to actually cause a change. We become softer—like a cucumber becoming a pickle.³⁹

Romans 6:4b–5 “. . . we also should walk in newness of life” Paul does not see Jesus’ death as a tragedy, but as a part of God’s plan to atone for our sins that opened the way for new life. The newness of life is another way of saying “born again.” When converts agree to the baptismal covenant they promise to serve the Lord and God. It releases us from all our previous obligations with sin to start over from scratch in this new life serving Christ. (See Moses 6:59.)

Romans 6:6–8 “our old man is crucified with him” Carrying the symbolism even further, Paul describes baptism as crucifying “the body of sin,” or sinful desires. The JST addition adds, “dead *to sin* is freed from sin” (Romans 6:7) The cleansing power of the Holy Spirit has that power to take away addictions and attitudes that cause us to sin. It can give us a new heart to have no more desire to say and do anything that might offend God.

In the Book of Mormon, King Benjamin describes this: “If ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sin, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls . . . always retain [it] in remembrance” (Mosiah 4:11).

Romans 6:9 “death no longer has mastery over him” (BSB) If death has no more power or “dominion” over Jesus, does that also mean He has no more physical pain or effects of aging on the mind and body? What about the emotional pain from the separation of death?

Romans 6:10 “he died to sin once for all” (BSB) Jesus had no sin, but by dying to sin, he covered all sins. I do not think this verse means that sin will not exist in the next life. We know we will still have agency and can choose selfishness, which is a sin.

Romans 6:11–14 JST “Yield yourselves unto God . . . For in so doing sin shall not have dominion over you..” Paul warns that “sin” can remain a temptation after baptism and it requires active combat. Sin should not be our master or have control over our appetites. Only righteousness begets more freedom.

The bondage of sin comes in part because satanic deceptions teach that we cannot change. This idea denies the atonement. No one is permanently addicted to sin. Thanks to God’s grace, we are all free to choose—“they are redeemed from the fall, they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law” (2 Nephi 2:26; 10:23).

Romans 6:15 “Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? God forbid” By repeating similar words from 6:1, like two book ends, Paul reinforces the need for obedience to God.

The Cost of Christian Discipleship—Servants of Righteousness

Romans 6:16 “to whom ye yield yourselves servants . . . ye obey” We choose who we will follow. It is when we yield our all to God that we become His servants. Even though our paychecks may come from another employer each month, as Christians, we work for God. When we follow the Spirit’s bidding from morning until night, God will pay us with Eternal Life. We must not limit His plan for us by avoiding promptings due to insecurities or stubbornness. God’s inspiration leads in the best, most direct route. And God’s timing is part of His plan, too. When we obey the Lord’s commandments and the Spirit’s promptings, we serve our Divine Master.

Romans 6:17 “ye were not the servants of sin” (JST) By adding “not,” the prophet Joseph attacked the concept of original sin that he repeatedly found in the KJV. Here are three verses to compare the JST with the KJV.

KJV—ROMANS 6:7, 17, 19

7 For he that is dead is freed from sin

17 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

19 I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.

JST—ROMANS 6:7, 17, 19

7 For he that is dead *to sin* is freed from sin.

17 But God be thanked, that ye *are not* the servants of sin, *for* ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

19 I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh; for as ye have *in times past* yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.

The Book of Mormon clarifies this issue as well: “Little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them and the law of circumcision is done away in me” (Moroni 8:8).

Romans 6:18 “Ye became the servants of righteousness” In a culture where one third of the Roman Empire were slaves and half of the city of Rome were either servants or slaves, Paul used words that they understood better than we do. Slave or servant, was the same word. Servants worked more as indentured servants in that time, and slaves usually had a time limit (seven years for Jewish men, and age thirty to forty for Romans).⁴⁰ They served their masters as doctors, teachers, scribes, personal assistants, farmers, household help, and garbage men. Servitude was so widespread that even slaves owned slaves. The audience had a better understanding of what was required by obeying one’s master. This gave a stronger commitment to the call, “become servants of the Righteous One.”

Romans 6:21–22 “now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruits unto holiness” The fruits of holiness or righteousness are the fruits and gifts of the spirit. This is another favorite topic in Paul’s other Epistles. The fruits include: “love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, [and] temperance” (Galatians 5:22–23; 1 Corinthians 12–13; also see D&C 46:8–30; and Moroni 10:8–20).

Romans 6:23 “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus” (BSB) This is the greatest of all of God’s gifts that He can give to his children. Both Paul and Joseph Smith taught that being “saved in the kingdom of God . . . is the greatest of all the gifts of God; for there is no gift greater” (D&C 6:13).

ENDNOTES

1. The Old Testament was not canonized by this time (not until the Christians began closing their tome, did the Jews see the need), but an open body of ancient sacred writings are referenced by “holy scriptures.”
2. Ignatius of Antioch (AD 50–108) referred to seven New Testament books as scripture Marcion of Sinope (AD 85–160), recorded the first list of 10 exclusive Pauline Epistles and one Gospel as scripture. The Muratorian list from AD 170 includes over 20 books that were considered as scripture. Origen of Alexandria (AD 184–253) recorded a list of our twenty-seven New Testament books as scripture. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/muratorian-metzger.html> (accessed 7/26/19).
3. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 169–180.
4. Lynne H. Wilson, “A New Pneumatology: Comparing Joseph Smith’s Doctrine of the Spirit with His Contemporaries and the Bible,” *BYU Studies*, 51.1 (Winter, 2012). The five main Calvinistic doctrines know as TULIP (all of which were denounced by the Prophet Joseph Smith). It helps to be aware of them in order to recognize their influence in the KJV translation.
 - a) Total depravity of humanity: from infancy to adulthood, all are sinful until God elects them for regeneration
 - b) Unconditional election: is for those who were predestined to Eternal Life without any effort, only by God’s grace
 - c) Limited atonement: meaning the Savior’s atonement only covers those whom God predestined, not all
 - d) Irresistible Grace: the elect humans, whom God chose, have no ability or agency to resist His choice
 - e) Perseverance of the Saints: those whom God elects are the saints who will persevere eternally
5. The Book of Acts has better Greek than Paul’s Epistle to the Romans.
6. Only Roman citizens were allowed to have three names: *Praenomen* (personal given name) *Nomen* (clan or gens name), and *Cognomen* (family name). Paul’s Hebrew name, Saul, recalls the first Israelite King and star of Benjamin. As Benjaminite’s themselves, his parents chose to name their son after the most famous person in their tribe. The word Saul means “desired” in Hebrew. According to a description of Paul by Joseph Smith on January 5, 1841, (which he may have quoted from a biblical dictionary that has a similar description, or perhaps from revelation), “He is about five feet high, very dark hair; dark complexion; dark skin; large Roman nose; sharp face; small, black eyes, penetrating as eternity; round shoulders, a whining voice, except when elevated, and then it almost resembled the roaring of a lion. He was a good orator, active and diligent, always employing himself in doing good to his fellow man.” (Joseph Smith with Alma P. Burton compiler, *Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1965). 264.
7. Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: Romans, A New Translation* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1993), 231.
8. James Strong, *The New Strong’s Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995, reprint 1890) All Greek or Hebrew definitions are taken from Strong’s.
9. For references see Topical Guide: “Jesus Christ, Prophecies about,” and “. . .Types of”

10. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: Romans*, 235.
11. *Elders' Journal*, vol. 1 (August 1838), Far West, Missouri, August, 1838, No. 4, 49). This statement follows Joseph administering the washing and anointings by two years, but it predates the first endowments given in 1842 in the Nauvoo Red-brick store. Joseph may have been referring to something else too. Later in Nauvoo, he also taught that “Paul . . . knew . . . all the ordinances, and blessings were in the Church (Andrew Ehat and Lindon Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 9–10; 42, 210, 327–331). Similarly, at a Relief Society meeting in Nauvoo, in 1842, Joseph taught: “The society should move according to the ancient Priesthood” and that he “was going to make of this Society a ‘kingdom of priests’ as in Enoch’s day—as in Paul’s day” (Ibid. 110).
12. John K. Carmack, *New Testament and Latter-day Saints* (Orem, UT: Randall Book, 1987), 279.
13. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 178.
14. Spencer W. Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, 80–86.
15. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: Romans*, 4.
16. Ezra T. Benson, *Beware of Pride*, General conference, April 1989.
17. Rebekah Wilson, not published, July 21, 2019.
18. Anderson, *Anchor Bible: Understanding Paul*, 175.
19. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 327.
20. Even the flood was a gift of love to give everyone one either side of the veil a chance to learn without the wicked traditions blinding their minds and hearts.
21. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible*, 334.
22. For more on the oral laws see previous commentary from Matthew 8:2–4 and John 3:1.
23. Romans 3:1, 9, 19, 20, 21, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31. For more on Judaizers see xx.
24. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:355.
25. The book of Jubilees recorded that Abraham was “Perfect in all his deeds before the Lord” and “pleasing in uprightness all the days of his life” (Jubilees 23:10). “None has been found like him in glory; he has kept the law of the Most High” (Ecclesiasticus/Sirach 44:19–20).
26. Joseph Fitzmyer, *Spiritual Exercises based on Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995), 65, 235. Citing 2 Apocalypse Baruch 57:2.
27. Matthew 3:9 and Luke 3:8 record John the Baptist correcting the Pharisees and Sadducees: “[You] say within yourselves, ‘We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.’” Jesus understood the universality of Abraham’s promises as he said in Matthew 8:11, “many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham . . . in the kingdom of heaven.”
28. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: Romans*, 380; quoting Genesis Rabbah 48:8.
29. Genesis 12:2, 7, 12; 13:14–17; 15:4; 17:8, 16, 19; 18:18.
30. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:554–55.
31. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:252–253.
32. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: Romans*, 388.

33. Raymond Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament* (New Haven, CT: Doubleday, 1997), 567.
34. D&C 24:8; 31:9; 54:10; 66:9; 98:23–24; 67:13; 122:7; etc.
35. Robert Millet, ed., *Studies in Scriptures: Acts to Revelation* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1987), 47. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, “we must tell them they cannot be saved by the works they are doing, for man cannot save himself. Instead they must turn to Christ and rely on his merits and mercy and grace.”
36. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 559. Proceeding Nibley’s quote it reads: “The Arabic *kafara* puts the emphasis on a tight squeeze, such as tucking in the skirts, drawing a thing close to one’s self. Closely related are Aramaic and Arabic *kafat*, meaning a close embrace, which are certainly related to the Egyptian *hpet*, the common ritual embrace written with the ideogram of embracing arms. It may be cognate with the Latin *capto*, and from it comes the Persian *kaftan*, a monk’s robe and hood completely embracing the body. Most interesting is the Arabic *kafata*, as it is the key to a dramatic situation.
37. NA, *Life and Teaching of Jesus and His Apostles* (SLC, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of LDS, 1979), 318.
38. Millet, *Acts to Revelation*, 49. “The godly anguish and suffering of the repentant soul is typical of the excruciating pain experienced by the laboring mother as birth of the infant is imminent. The water used in the baptismal proceedings is symbolic of a body of water in which dirtiness and uncleanness are washed away. Paul taught that the process of being taken down into the water is representative of Christ’s burial in the tomb for three days. The rise from the watery grave is in the likeness of the Master’s rise to a newness of life in the resurrected state. Further, the innocent and pure state of the new candidate for the kingdom is like unto the wholly innocent newborn at birth. Baptism thus becomes the channel by which one is both legally initiated into the church and also spiritually initiated into the blessings of the atonement of Christ.”
39. James M. Boice in the “*Bible Study Magazine*,” May 1989. “The clearest example that shows the meaning of *baptizo* is a text from the Greek poet and physician Nicander, who lived about 200 B.C. It is a recipe for making pickles and is helpful because it uses both words. Nicander says that in order to make a pickle, the vegetable should first be ‘dipped’ (*bapto*) into boiling water and then ‘baptized’ (*baptizo*) in the vinegar solution. Both verbs concern the immersing of vegetables in a solution. But the first is temporary. The second, the act of baptizing the vegetable, produces a permanent change. When used in the New Testament, this word more often refers to our union and identification with Christ than to our water baptism (eg. Mark 16:16. ‘He that believes and is baptized shall be saved’). Christ is saying that mere intellectual assent is not enough. There must be a union with Him, a real change, like the vegetable to the pickle!”
40. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 4.545. Ken Campbell, ed. *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 135.



ROMANS 7–16

WHO IS ISRAEL?

These chapters of Romans continue Paul’s persuasive discourse on Christ’s power to change lives (chapter 7), which allows disciples to become joint heirs (chapter 8) as the true vine of Israel (chapters 9–11), in a new life (chapter 12). For an introduction to the Epistles in general, and Paul’s Epistle to the Romans specifically, please see the first pages of last week’s commentary on “Come Follow Me” of Romans 1–6.

ROMANS 7

Christ’s Power to Change Lives

Chapter 7 discusses how Christ changes our sinful nature from the natural man. Paul’s argument is filled with twisters of both the tongue and mind that make it harder to understand. In the Book of Mormon, King Benjamin gives a similar, clearer argument, “the natural man is an enemy to God” (Mosiah 3:19). Much of Christianity has been plagued with gross misunderstandings of Paul’s discussion of the law and sin.¹ They interpret this chapter as teaching the depravity of man.² The JST is helpful in interpreting this chapter. Paul covers three main points:

1. 7:1–6—Leave the deadness of the old law.
2. 7:7–13—Relationship of sin to the law.
3. 7:14–25—The propensity of the flesh to sin.

Leave the Deadness of the Old Law

Romans 7:1–6

Romans 7:1 “Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law” (NIV)

Paul is mindful about addressing the women in his audience, but the KJV and most other English translations came from a generation when the English language did not distinguish between gender. The majority of his Epistles include far more positive recognitions of women than negative.³

Romans 7:2–4 “For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive” (NIV)

Paul equates the Law of Moses to a married couple who are bound while they both live. “Just as a woman is not being unfaithful to a deceased husband by remarrying, neither is modern Israel unfaithful to the law of Moses by transferring allegiance to the Savior.”⁴ The Book of Mormon similarly teaches, “The law hath become dead unto us, and we are made alive in Christ because of our faith” (2 Nephi 25:25).

Romans 7:5 “. . . sins, which were not according to the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death” (JST) The Prophet Joseph Smith turned the meaning of this verse completely around by adding “not.” This is the first of fourteen times in this chapter that the Prophet added a word to reverse the meaning. Many of the JST changes are just word preferences for clarity, or sometimes an addition of words that may have been accidentally missed. However, in this chapter, with so many negations, it appears that Paul’s text had been deliberately changed to confuse his message.

Romans 7:6 “to serve in newness of the Spirit, and not in oldness of the letter” (BLB) This sounds as if Paul were addressing an issue that he had had with new Jewish converts who felt all Christians should still live the Law of Moses (Judaizers). Paul explains that serving God by the letter of the Law of Moses led the Israelites to become so absorbed in the minutia that they missed its message. It is the blessing of the Holy Spirit that allows disciples to serve God where He needs them. It is the Spirit that can testify of truth and empower followers with greater faith.

Relationship of Sin to the Law

Romans 7:7–13

Romans 7:7 “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay . . .” Lest we do not follow Paul’s entire argument, he repeats these rhetorical questions periodically to make sure his audience understands his message. He does not want to claim the Law is corrupt or sinful.

Romans 7:8 “It was sin that used this command as a way of making me have all kinds of desires . . .” (CEV)
This verse can be interpreted as saying that sin only exists if there is a law, but I disagree. With God, there is right and wrong, truth and error, and good and bad regardless of whether a law labels it so.

Romans 7:10 “*when I believed not the commandment of Christ which came, which was ordained to life, I found it condemned me unto death*” (JST) There are so many JST changes in Romans 7:9–25, that it helps to compare the texts, so I will present them in parallel manner.

KJV—ROMANS 7:9–25

9 For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died

10 And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.

11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.

12 Wherefore, the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.

13 Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.

14 For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

15 For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.

16 If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.

17 Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.

JST—ROMANS 7:9–25

9 For *once* I was alive without *transgression of the law*, but when the commandment of Christ came, sin revived, and I died.

10 And *when I believed not* the commandment of *Christ which came*, which was ordained to life, I found *it condemned me* unto death.

11 For sin, taking occasion, *denied* the commandment, and deceived me; and by it *I was slain*.

12 *Nevertheless, I found* the law to be holy, and the commandment to be holy, and just, and good.

13 Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin by that which is good *working death in me*; that sin, by the commandment, might become exceeding sinful.

14 For we know that the *commandment* is spiritual; but *when I was under law*, I *was yet* carnal, sold under sin.

15 *But now I am spiritual*; for that which *I am commanded to do*, I do; *and that which I am commanded not to allow*, I allow not. For what *I know is not right, I would not do; for that which is sin*, I hate.

16 If then I do *not* that which I would not *allow*, I consent unto the law, that it is good; *and I am not condemned*.

17 Now then, it is no more I that do *sin*; but *I seek to subdue that sin which* dwelleth in me.

18 For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me, but to perform that which is good I find not, *only in Christ*.

19 For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.

20 Now if I do that I would not. it is no more I that do *it*, but sin that dwelleth in me.

21 I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:

23 But I see another law *in* my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord, so then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

19 For the good that I would ***have done when under the law, I find not to be good; therefore***, I do it not: but the evil which I would not ***do under the law, I find to be good***; that, I do.

20 Now if I do that, ***through the assistance of Christ***, I would not ***do under the law, I am not under the law***; ***and*** it is no more that ***I seek to do wrong***, but ***to subdue*** sin that dwelleth in me.

21 I find then ***that under the*** law, that when I would do good, evil was present with me;

22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man.

23 ***And now*** I see another law, ***even the commandment of Christ, and it is imprinted in my mind***. But my members are warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

24 ***And if I subdue not the sin which is in me, but with the flesh serve the law of sin***; O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord then, ***that*** so with the mind I myself serve the law of God.

Romans 7:22–25 “if I subdue not the sin which is in me, but with the flesh serve the law of sin; O wretched man that I am!” Paul acknowledges the challenges of natural appetites, temptations, and opposition, but he insists that disciples have the tools to overcome and find freedom from our mortal weaknesses. Then-President of Brigham Young University, Jeffery R. Holland elaborated these verses:

Too often we are also in servitude to our own bodies. Paul said, I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity.” (Romans 7:22–23.) I don’t mean just the dramatic sins—the anger that leads to murder, or the passion that leads to sexual transgression, or the lust that leads to theft. There are more common kinds of bondage than these. The war in the body of someone who is a little overweight that makes him huff and puff by the time he gets to the top of the stairs, the war of the mattress on his back that he somehow cannot shake in the morning so he misses those precious and most inspirational hours of the day, the war of grooming and personal hygiene that could do much for us—all these are restrictive to our freedom if we don’t control them. But of course certain limitations are sometimes beyond our control. God has given disciples power to control the natural man through the power of His Spirit; “For in my inner being I delight in God’s law” (7:22, NIV). The Book of Mormon repeatedly teaches that by follow-

ing God's laws and Spirit, we can overcome our mortal propensity to sin, "Ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free" (Helaman 14:30; 2 Nephi 2:13–14; 10:23; etc.). It is only the tempter and addictions to sin that reduce our power to act. Through the cleansing power of our Redeemer, implemented through the Spirit, we can become free from the bonds of sin and regain full agency.⁵

ROMANS 8

God's Love Extends to All People

In Romans chapter 8, Paul focuses on the Spirit's role (repeated twenty times from 8:1–27), to help saints become joint heirs with Christ. The Lord's love is the power, like a magnetic pull, that draws disciples to overcome wickedness in order to take full advantage of His at-one-ment.

Holy Spirit

Romans 8:1–4

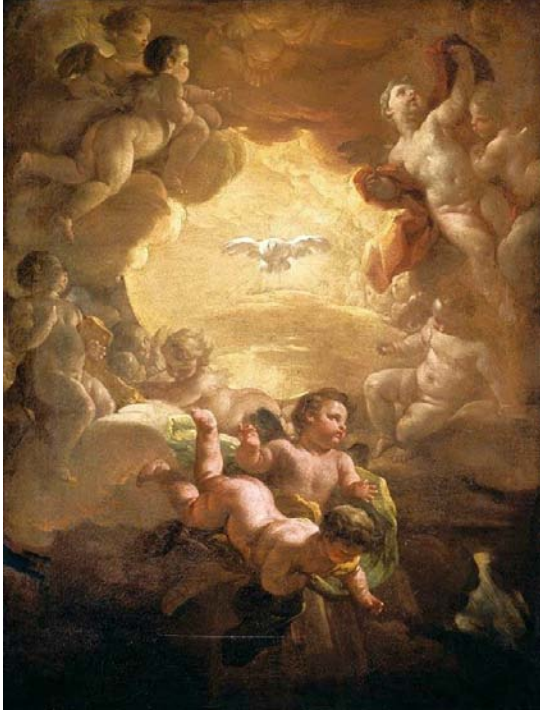
Romans 8:1 "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ" (NIV) Paul speaks to all those who are "in Christ" or in other words, those who obey God, exercise faith, seek repentance, and are baptized. Once forgiven, they are freed from God's condemnation. If they sin again, without repenting, they offend the Spirit and return to condemnation. If this verse is taken out of Paul's context, it can be misunderstood to claim that there will be no punishment for believers. That was not Paul's intent. He refuted this misunderstanding three times in Romans 8:2–4 by referencing the law of Christ saving us, Christ's condemnation of sin in the flesh and the need to "walk not after the flesh."

"Walk . . . after the Spirit" Only the KJV includes this last sentence here. Other translations include it in Romans 8:4 (where KJV repeats it). Disciples who receive Christ's image in their countenances are "alive with Christ" (Ephesians 2:5). In contrast, those who live solely under the Law of Moses cannot be saved through their animal sacrifices. The old law continues as a moral and ethical guide but is not the *source* of salvation.

Romans 8:2 "in Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life has set you free" (BSB) This is the only time we find the phrase, "law of the Spirit" in scripture. This use of the "law" does not refer to the Mosaic Law (nor "law of God" in Romans 8:7)."

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free" In the KJV, the same phrase links the Spirit with "life in Christ," as if they were interdependent in creating freedom. It evokes both the Spirit that gave *life* to Adam and his posterity in the Garden of Eden as well as the life that Christ gave through His resurrection. We

The Holy Spirit by Corrado Giaquinto, 1750s.
Image via Wikimedia Commons.



find this topic taught in the Book of Mormon, with an even clearer reference to immortality: “the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection” (2 Nephi 2:8).

Romans 8:3 “God . . . condemned sin in the flesh by sending his own Son . . . as a sin offering” (CSB) This is an interesting way of wording Jesus’ mission “in the form of sinful flesh” or a mortal body (ABPV). This verse refers to the prophecy given in Eden that the woman’s seed would have power to “bruise” or “crush” Satan and his seed (Genesis 3:15, NIV, Moses 4:21;). Paul describes God and Jesus as two separate beings.

Romans 8:4 “the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us” (NIV) With a Christological interpretation of this verse, we see the Christ as the One who fulfilled the law when He vicariously fulfilled all requirements to redeem fallen humanity from of the Fall in behalf of Christians who walk after the Spirit, not their selfish instincts. In the KJV, it is harder to see Jesus as the source of fulfillment, but the text points to Him. The clearest scripture on this point is from King Benjamin, “the natural man is an enemy to God, . . . unless he yields to the . . . Spirit . . .” (Mosiah 3:19).

The Natural Man vs. The Man of The Spirit

Romans 8:5–13

Romans 8:5 “Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires” (NIV) This verse invites a little self-examination. Paul reiterates the Lord’s warning; when one serves the devil, one can’t serve God (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:9).

Romans 8:6–7 “To be carnally minded is death” The Greek word for “flesh/carnal/*sarx*” is the base of operations or “human nature.” The phrase is literally, “the mind of the flesh.” The early Latin translation changed it to “body.” Because of that, some Christians interpret this passage as saying that Paul viewed the physical body as inherently evil (as did the Greeks at that time and the Gnostics), but taken in context (with verses 5–6), we see that Paul did not mean that. Paul’s use of the flesh elsewhere makes it clear that he does not see it as an inherently evil thing (also see Galatians 5:13; 6:8; 1 Corinthians 7:3–4; etc.). He actually addresses the law of the harvest again: we reap what we sow.

Romans 8:8–9 “**they that are after the flesh . . .**” (JST). The JST replaces “in” the flesh to “after” suggesting that it is a choice to follow nature rather than hinting that the body is evil: “the realm of the flesh,” or “follow our desires” (CEV). Paul taught that saints should seek after the Spirit, thus serving God.

Romans 8:10–11 “**If Christ be in you, *though* the body shall *die* because of sin, *yet* the Spirit is life . . .**” (JST). No matter what happens to us physically, if disciples have the Spirit guiding them, sin and physical challenges can become opportunities to draw closer to God. Those alive with a testimony of the Savior receive the Spirit that creates a quickening of hope in this life and the next. The problem Paul addresses here is the need to curb the “natural man,” by applying self-control to our natural appetites so that the body can work at its best within the guidelines of the Lord. Paul is not denouncing the body. When our spirit and body work in harmony, we can nourish and benefit from both.

Romans 8:12 “**brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to [the Spirit]**” (NIV) I appreciate the translation reminders that in the Apostolic Church, both men and women learned and served to build the Kingdom of Heaven. This was unique in that era where most Jewish religious practices for women were not in the public setting, but in their homes. This changed in Christianity.⁶ The KJV metaphor of “debtors” comes from the business world, where we are debtors to our Redeemer. This debt should lead us to live righteously.

Romans 8:13 “**mortify the deeds of the body**” Literally, Paul asked his readers to “render extinct,” or destroy all evil and damaging (spiritually, socially, and physically) habits in our lives. Giving up sin is a constant battle. As President Russel M. Nelson taught, “Nothing is more liberating, more ennobling, or more crucial to our individual progression than is a regular, daily focus on repentance. Repentance is not an event; it is a process.”⁷

The prophet Joseph Smith felt that adoption was an important concept for the gentiles to become Israelite.⁸ When asked, “How do we become of the house of Israel, by adoption or by direct lineage?” Joseph answered,

Every person who embraces the gospel becomes of the house of Israel. In other words, they become members of the chosen lineage, or Abraham’s children through Isaac and Jacob unto whom the promises were made. The great majority of those who become members of the Church are literal descendants of Abraham through Ephraim, son of Joseph. Those who are not literal descendants of Abraham and Israel must become such, and when they are baptized and confirmed they are grafted into the tree and are entitled to all the rights and privileges as heirs.⁹

Regenerative Powers of The Spirit

Romans 8:14-17

Romans 8:14 “those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God” The Spirit has the transforming power through the cleansing *baptism by fire* to bridle our natural selfish instincts and purge sin in order to create daughters and sons of God. This can be felt as a tangible burning, or by receiving the fruits of the Spirit, including hope and peace.

Romans 8:15-16 “you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but . . . the Spirit of adoption” (ESV) When Christ adopts His disciples as “children of Christ,” they are spiritually begotten and can pray, “Abba! Father.” (Paul includes the Aramaic and Greek words together, just Jesus did in Mark 14:36.) The early members of Christianity labored to enjoy the companionship of the Holy Spirit. In so doing, they began the processes of spiritual rebirth. Children of Christ become members of a new family. They take on a new family name and are expected to live by the family rules and regulations. Perhaps the most beautiful part of the Lord’s adoption is the Spirit’s comforting witness of love and a feeling of belonging to God.

Romans 8:17 “Then we are . . . heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (NIV). Paul builds his argument toward this capstone to his thesis, starting with faith (Ch. 3-6), its relation to works (Ch. 6), overcoming sin (Ch. 7-8a), and all building up to God’s reward of exaltation (Ch. 8b). Christ offers all faithful disciples the opportunity to become heirs with Him, to inherit the family treasure: Eternal Life.

Chronologically, Paul had already taught the saints in Corinth about the three degrees of glory in 1 Corinthians 15:40-42 (a year or two before this letter was written). In 1 Peter 3:7 and Ephesians 3:6, women are among the joint-heirs. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, there is a similar idea expressed with other words (Hebrews 2:11-13; Galatians 4:7).

In 1832, the prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation that acted as a prelude to this doctrine in D&C 84:37-39, “He that receiveth me receiveth my Father; And he that receiveth my Father receiveth my Father’s kingdom; therefore all that my Father hath shall be given unto him. And this is according to the oath and covenant which belongeth to the priesthood” (also D&C 76:58).

In April 1844, at General Conference, one of Joseph’s sermons doubled as King Follett’s funeral address. His impromptu sermon pulled many previous revelations and teachings that he had been teaching over the past decade. He addressed becoming joint-heirs with God by inheriting exaltation.

God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who

upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible,—I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with him, as one man talks and communes with another. . . It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another, and that he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did.¹⁰

The Lord had revealed earlier that His glory and works would always be greater, He will always be our God, but those who become joint-heirs, can dwell with Him, and progress as He does (Moses 1:39). Most Christians share the hope of living with Him again. Rodney Turner explained:

While this may seem incredible to the rational mind that fallen mortals with all of their weaknesses could dare hope to attain the moral and spiritual stature of the very Son of God, yet this is precisely what must occur if the saints are to become “joint-heirs with Christ” to the riches of eternity. Hence the indispensable need for divine grace as primarily manifest in the atonement, the resurrection, and the sanctifying gift of the Holy Ghost. (Alma 5:54; 3 Nephi 27:20.)¹¹

All Creation Anticipates Future Redemption and Glory

Romans 8:18–27

Romans 8:18 “our present sufferings are not comparable to the glory that will be revealed in us” (BSB) Paul again returns to suffering (Romans 5:3 “. . . tribulation worketh patience”). The sufferings of our probationary state can teach reliance on the Lord, humility, and empathy (Heb 2:10). The Lord revealed the same encouragement to our dispensation, “For after much tribulation come the blessings. Wherefore the day cometh that ye shall be crowned with much glory; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand” (D&C 58:4; and also see Ether 12:6). It requires great faith and trust to look beyond our present sufferings in order to hope for a better life hereafter.

Romans 8:20 “the creation was subjected to frustration” (NIV) The nineteen times “creation” is used in the New Testament the word refers to God’s creations. Paul knew from many first-hand experiences that mortality is subject to “tribulation” (JST), not necessarily vanity or futility (RSV). This deliverance may not occur until our next estate. When we accept that our probationary estate as a time of sorrows and work, we do not boast of an entitled attitude, “I deserve better.”

Romans 8:21 “The creation looks forward to the day when it will join God’s children in glorious freedom from death and decay” (NIV) In Paul’s timeline of the earth, there will be an end of decay. Does this mean that all of God’s creations will be set free of corruption? Revelation 20:1–3 describes a millennium when Satan will

be bound. In the Book of Mormon, we learn how that binding will occur: “because of the righteousness of his people, Satan has no power” (2 Nephi 22:26; also see D&C 43:30–31).

Romans 8:22 “we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth” (NASB) The imagery of childbirth, as if the earth were about to deliver something may be part of all the natural disasters prophecies in the last days. The prophet Joseph revealed that the earth has a spirit as well, which reacts to gross sin (as was seen at Jesus’ death, 3 Nephi 8:5, 19; Matthew 27:45). We also understand that animals have spirits (D&C 77:2–4).

Romans 8:23 “the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption” (ESV) The saints anxiously awaited the Spirit’s witness to transform their hearts from wickedness to righteousness. The “firstfruits of the Spirit” include “the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith” (Galatians 5:22; also see Ephesians 5:9). The “first-fruits” are given as witnesses. They are different from the Gifts of the Spirit, which are given to disciples to bless and serve others. The later fruits include the Second Comforter’s promise of exaltation.

Romans 8:24 “we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope. . . why doth he yet hope for?” The Book of Mormon refers to hope in a similar definition, but adds faith and knowledge: “Faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true.” This pattern of finding dozens of biblical topics elaborated in greater detail is one of the geniuses of the text. We also find an answer to Paul’s hypothetical question in Mormon’s sermon: “What is it that ye shall hope for? Behold I say unto you that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal.”

God Calls Us to Share His Glory

Romans 8:26–30

Romans 8:25–27 “then with patience we do wait for [the Spirit]” (JST) The Spirit’s witness of truth—the cleansing and sealing power— has the means to connect and even bind mortals to Christ. The Spirit’s intercession helps humans overcome our weaknesses. The Spirit’s cleansing and sanctification implement the Savior’s atonement to the repentant. When we pray with the Spirit, we can be guided by the Spirit to know what to pray for. Seeking and asking the Spirit allows disciples to learn the language of the Lord and find answers. It is a symbiotic experience.

Romans 8:28 “all things work together for good to them that love God” This glorious promise is not always seen in the short term, but disciples who patiently trust with an eye of faith can agree with Paul. God and His angels work on behalf of the disciples. The Lord told the prophet Joseph Smith a similar principle in Liberty

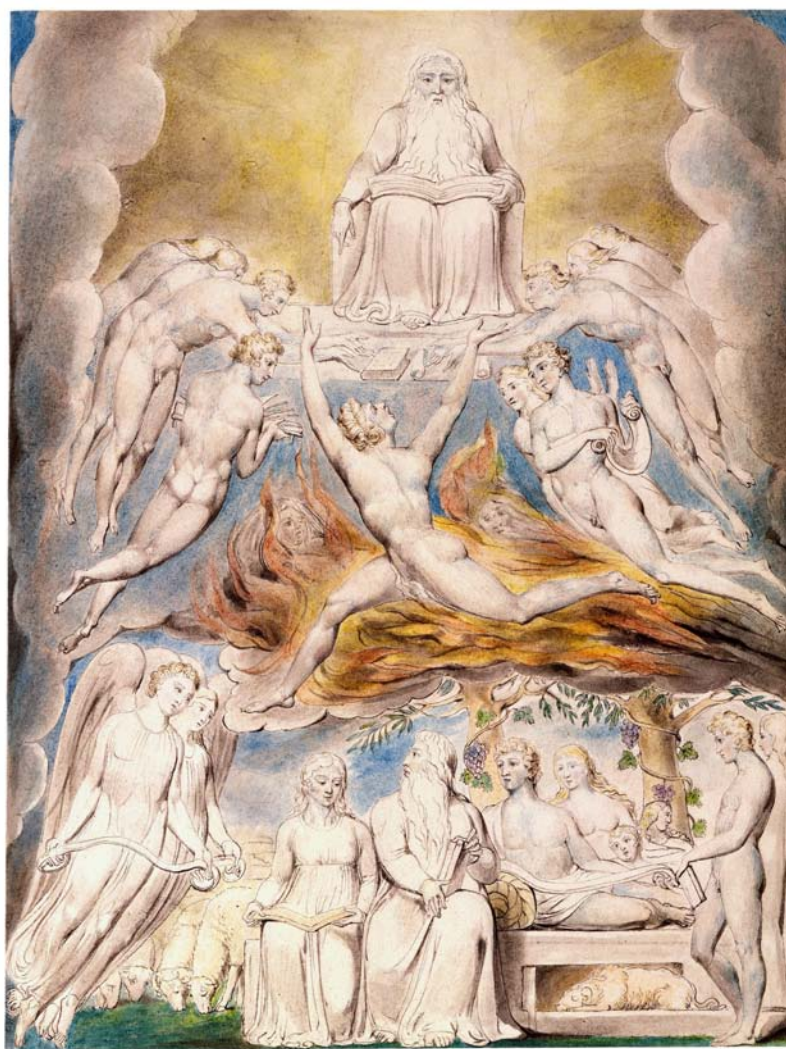
Jail, “all these things shall give thee experience and be for thy good.” Looking at life’s experiences as learning opportunities allows one to see God’s hand in one’s life. This works if we love God and strive to do His will. The Jerusalem Bible reads, “We know that by turning everything to their good, God co-operates with all those who love him.”

Romans 8:29 “For those God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed” The English word, “predestinate” does not leave room for agency. Yet, the Greek word does. Rather, it means: “to define before or a boundary given before; to determine [our potential destiny] beforehand.” Other English translations use “his chosen ones” (CEV), or “He chose specially long ago” (JB). This Greek word appears five other times in the NT—but it is not necessarily translated as predestination in the KJV, while it is in other translations (1 Corinthians 2:7; Acts 4:28). It helps to remember the KJV translators were Reformed Protestants who came from a culture touched by Calvin’s emphasis on the predestination of the elect. The Swiss reformer, Calvin, misunderstood the doctrine and said,

By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation. And accordingly as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestined to life or to death.¹²

This doctrine took away the role of agency and dominated the early American religious beliefs in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This misunderstanding was clarified by the Prophet Joseph Smith, “We can choose to be chosen by how we think and act.”¹³ Likewise, the Book of Mormon teaches: “humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest” (Alma 13:13).

Satan Before the Throne of God, by William Blake. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Romans 8:30 “. . . *him whom he called, him he also sanctified*” (JST) The prophet Joseph felt inspired to change justified to sanctified. Justification refers to the working of the Spirit that applies the Savior’s atonement in our lives (2 Nephi 2:5–6), while sanctification is the process of becoming holy and pure, by the Savior’s atonement, purging all sin from the soul (Alma 13:12; Moroni 10:33). In the restored church, we define this doctrine very differently from most Christians. We all see the Savior as key, but for us it is not a battle between faith or works. Instead, on the day the Church was organized Joseph said, “We know that justification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true” (D&C 20:30). And later when translating Genesis he wrote, “by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified” (Moses 6:60). We believe both are needed.



Portrait of Jean Calvin by Titian. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

A Hymn to God’s Love

Romans 8:31–39

Romans 8:31–32 “**If God be for us, who can prevail against us?**” (JST) Ultimate failure is out of the question for disciples of Jesus. No person can thwart God’s plan. Jesus suffered, and our Heavenly Parents allowed it, all because of Their love for us. They are doing everything in their power to help all their children return to them. Most of God’s children will be exalted, since over the history of the earth, the majority of those born have died before the age of accountability, and “are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven” (D&C 137:10).

Romans 8:33 “**God’s elect**” or “chosen” (NIV). For most Christians since Augustine, the elect of God included those who were baptized or who had covenanted with Him. King James’ translators and most Protestants from the 16C interpreted the elect as those who God predestinated to success.¹⁴ The basic beliefs of Reformed Christian doctrine of election are summed up in TULIP.

4. Total depravity (from birth to adulthood, all are in sin until God elects them for regeneration)
5. Unconditional election (predestined for Eternal Life without any effort, only by God’s choice)
6. Limited atonement (the Savior’s atonement only covered the few whom God elected)
7. Irresistible Grace (humans have no ability or agency to resist His choice of election through grace)
8. Perseverance of the Saints (those whom God elects are the saints who will persevere eternally)

The Book of Mormon denounces all five of these points and claims that Christ’s atonement was for all earthlings—humans and animals.¹⁵

1. Against total depravity: “little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin . . . for awful is the wickedness to suppose that God saveth one child because of baptism, and the other must perish because he hath no baptism . . .” (Moroni 8:8, 12, 19, 22)
2. Against unconditional election: “They were a wicked and perverse people . . . [saying,] O God, for we are a chosen people unto thee, while others shall perish” (Alma 31:16–31)
3. Against a limited atonement: “it must needs be an infinite atonement” (2 Nephi 9:11, 26)
4. Against irresistible grace: “teach—repentance and baptism unto those who are accountable and capable of committing sin” (Moroni 8:10)
5. Against perseverance of the saints: “if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish” (Mosiah 4:30; 3 Nephi 18:15, 18).

To further combat this prevailing false doctrine, Joseph Smith published an article on election: “This is the election that we believe in . . . in the words of the beloved Peter and Paul, we would exhort you to ‘work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure’ (Phil. 2:12, 13).”¹⁶

Romans 8:34 “Christ . . . maketh intercession for us” This is beautiful doctrine. With our Savior pleading our cause, Paul asks, “Who is there to condemn us?” No one can compare. This is better than the world’s best attorney defending your case, or the best surgeon healing you. All will work out eternally for those who receive the Savior’s atonement.

Romans 8:35 “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Paul pictures God’s love as a song. This is the most encouraging message of hope and love—nothing can stop God’s love from blessing us, from separating us from Him. Yet during times of trial (“tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword”), it is hard to realize these are also gifts of love. Our limited perspective requires that we build faith to trust that God is in the heavens directing the world for our benefit, “conquerors through him that loved us” (Romans 8:37).

Romans 8:36 “we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered” (BSB) Paul quotes Psalm 44:22, with Jesus as the sheep being slaughtered. Lambs are one of the few animals that do not protest at the time of slaughter—they are submissive to the end. Jesus too went “. . . as a lamb to the slaughter. . .” (Isaiah 53:7).

Romans 8:38–39 “I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers . . . will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (NIV) This is so beautiful, it requires no explanation, just time to ponder until it sinks into our hearts.

CHAPTER 9

Israel Chosen Through Faith

In the next three chapters, Paul explores, “Who is Israel?”¹⁷ He looks back to the Old Testament. So far in Romans, Paul cites Old Testament scripture in Romans 1:17; 2:24; 3:4, 10–18, 20; 4:3, 7–8, 17, 18, 22; 7:7; and 8:36. In this chapter, he doubles that number, by referring to over twelve more Old Testament witnesses from Abraham, Isaac, Esau, Moses, Hosea, Isaiah, and even makes references to Sodom and Gomorra. He opens new ideas on what it means to be the chosen people or elected by God.

The KJV translates “*ekloge/chosen*” as “election,” in part because of the Reformed or Calvinistic translators believed in predestined election to grace. The prophet Joseph Smith clarified Paul’s message:

The election of the promised seed still continues, and in the last day, they shall have the Priesthood restored unto them, and they shall be the ‘saviors on Mount Zion,’ the ministers of our God. . . . The whole of [Romans 9th] chapter had reference to the priesthood and house of Israel; and unconditional election of individuals to enter into Eternal Life was not taught by the Apostles. God did not elect or predestinate that all those who would be saved should be saved in Christ Jesus, and through obedience to the Gospel; but he passes over no man’s sins, but visits them with correction and if His children will not repent of their sins, He will discard them.¹⁸

For readers from modern covenant Israel, this chapter begs the questions, “*What are we chosen for, or elected to what?*”

Paul’s Lament About His People

Romans 9:1–5

Romans 9:1–2 “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart” Ironically, just after Paul’s song of God’s love, the next words are filled with anguish over the plight of his kinsmen (“*suggenes*” means related by blood). He gives a sad reflection, similar to Moses’ prayer in behalf of his wicked people in Ex 32:32. Paul calls on the witnesses of Christ and the Holy Ghost to the truth of his sorrow in behalf of his brethren. Note the parallelism between the Savior and the Spirit.

Romans 9:3 “(For once I could have wished that myself were accursed from Christ)” (JST) This parenthetical in the JST, is a flashback as Paul recounts his days as a staunch Pharisee, rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, and persecuting the saints.

Romans 9:4 “who are Israelites of whom are the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants . . . and the service of God” (JST) Paul explains that the laws and blessings of the Gospel are available to all—they universally apply whenever and wherever one lives. Rather than using their political name, “Jews,” instead Paul uses their honorific title, “Israelites.” The present tense is significant too. The Jews still have the right to boast of their heritage with their God-given name.¹⁹ The Lord made covenants with Abraham, Moses, and several other prophets. The “giving the law,” was the five books of Moses, or the *Torah* (means “instruction”).

Romans 9:5 “the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen” (NIV) Paul refers to Christ God. This is accurate as He is the Creator of this earth, the God of the OT, and our spiritual Father as we are born again. Kelly Ogden explained these verses: “Paul was emphatic in his love for the Jewish people, but their way was not the way of salvation, even though Christ came through them. Because the Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah, they forfeited great blessings. Still the word of God had not failed. The Gentiles accepted the gospel and were adopted into the house of Israel.”²⁰

God’s Promises to Israel Have Not Failed

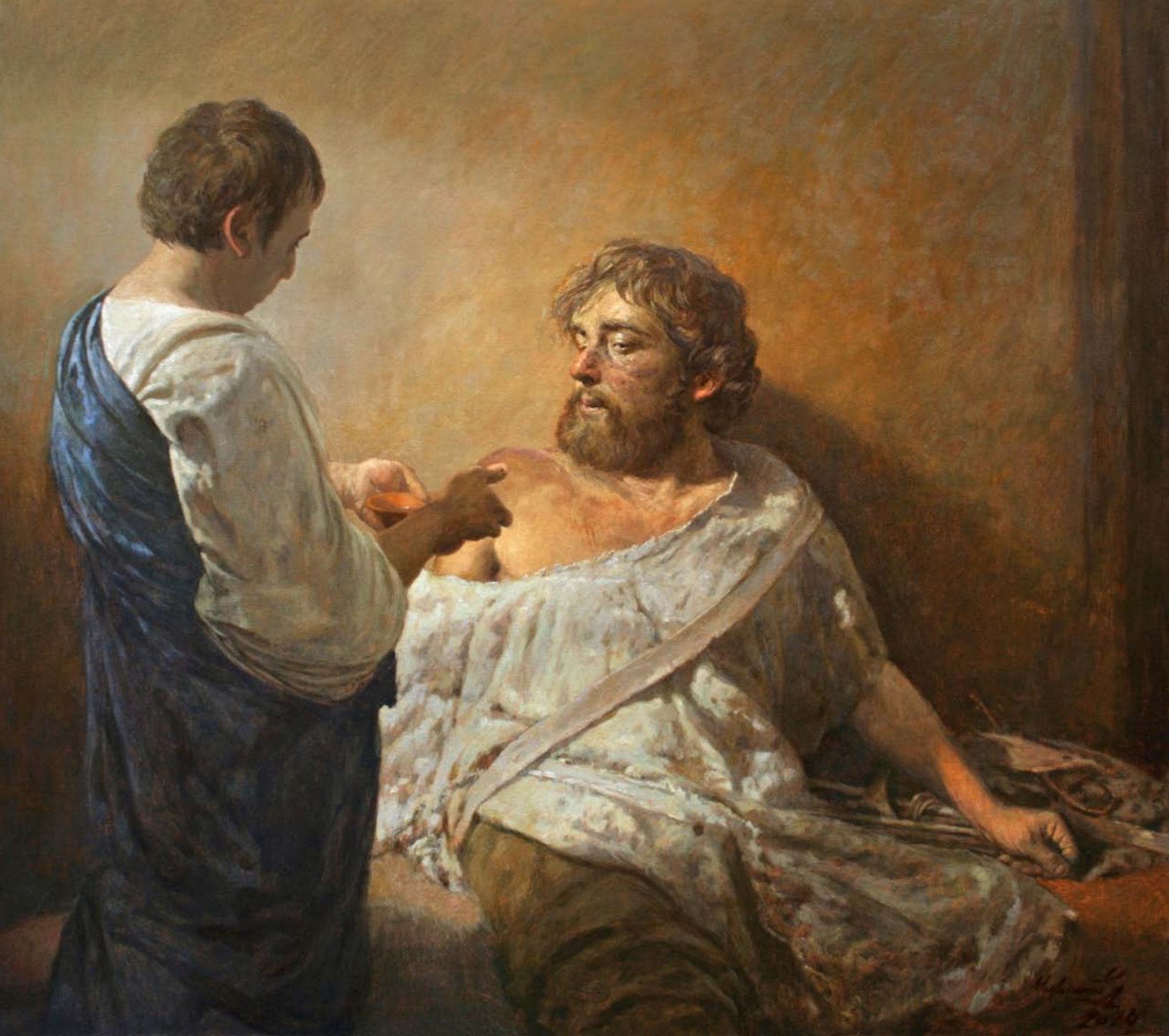
Romans 9:6–18

Romans 9:6 “They are not all Israel , which are of Israel” The birthright of Israel is not enough for Paul. He preaches that we must live up to their covenants. In the Christian setting, baptism is not enough either. Christians must receive the cleansing of the Spirit and live worthy of its direction and sanctification to become children of Christ. This verse has led some to question, “Does Israel’s failure to receive the Messiah mean God’s purposes have failed? Have not God’s promises to Israel ended in nothing as far as the Jews are concerned?” Paul answers, “No,” and then illustrates with God’s dealings with Israel in the past. God kept His promises, even though they did not.

Romans 9:7–8 “In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring” (NIV) More than a birthright, one needs a heart like Abraham’s in order to be his child. It is those who obey God who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring. The Bible records eight sons born to Abraham, but Isaac is the promised one who carried the priesthood. (Hagar bore Ishmael, Sarah bore Isaac, and Keturah bore Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah.)

Romans 9:9–10 “For this was how the promise was stated: “At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son” (NIV) Sarah, Rebekah, Isaac, and Jacob are mentioned as examples of God’s foreknowledge, as well as those who kept their covenants with God.

Romans 9:11–12 “before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand” (NIV) Paul describes the twins, Jacob and Esau, as innocent before their birth.



Jacob and Esau by Andrey Miranov, 2014. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

This speaks of a premortal existence and the lack of depravity at birth—both of which are unique doctrines of the restoration. “Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be. All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence” (D&C 93:29–30).

Romans 9:12 “The older will serve the younger” (BSB) In Jacob’s day, the birth-order meant the birthright (to the inheritance, priesthood, and more). God’s direction was shocking and sounded unfair. Nevertheless, it is in keeping with the Lord’s teachings to Abraham as to why he chose one over another, “... if there be two spirits,

and one shall be more intelligent than the other . . . [they both] have no beginning; they existed before, they shall have no end. . .” (Abraham 3:18).

Romans 9:13–14 “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Certainly not!” (BSB) According to some translators, “hated” also means “displeased with” or “rejected.” Our view of God does not include hating his children. We believe that God’s omniscient design looks at the eternal needs, not just mortal status. All this falls next to Romans 8:37–38, reminding us that God loves all His children (also see Moses 1:39). God will address unfairness here when we return to heaven.

Romans 9:15 “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy” Paul quoted Exodus 33:19. The translation and theological bent sound like Augustine and Calvin with their ideas of election in verses like this. This also developed the idea that man was helpless in controlling his destiny, but only God had control and man was helpless to wait. This is a misunderstanding of the truth as described in 2 Nephi 19:17; Alma 5:33; 24:42; D&C 88:40; 97:2.

Romans 9:16 “It depends not on human will or exertion, but on God” (ESV) God intervenes with mankind according to His wisdom, love, omniscience, as well as human behavior. But this verse does not mention that He honors our agency, so that our actions have an eternal impact.

Romans 9:17 –18 “God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden” (BSB) God’s purposes are higher than our mortal envying and hierarchy. He describes who will be blessed with mercy in Alma 13:3, “this is the manner after which they were ordained—being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place being left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such.”

Without the witness of the Book of Mormon assisting its interpretation, this verse is one of many that mixed up Calvin and other Reformers into thinking that God had complete control over the saved, and taught humanity to remain passive in their spiritual search. This Puritan doctrine preceded modern “Born Again” rationalism which believes a one-time spiritual experience is sufficient to assure individuals that they are elect.²¹ Joseph published a sermon on this topic on June 1, 1841 in the Times and Seasons.

Paul gives Pharaoh credit for *hardening his own heart* in Greek, even though in English you are left wondering who is doing the hardening. Actually, the Old Testament usually gives God credit for doing everything. It was the literary and theological practice of honoring God in all things (Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 4:4,17; etc.).

In addition, if we interpret this as saying God controls all, then it is inconsistent with everything Paul has said in Romans (even in this chapter 9) about the importance of doing the works of Abraham so as to be called a child of Abraham, and about doing God's works, so as to be called the children of God.

We Cannot Counsel God, But Should Heed His Guidance

Romans 9:19–23

Romans 9:19–21 “**Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?**” Paul answers that we cannot counsel God. We can trust God's will because He is omniscient, divine, good, noble, and knows what's best for us. The answer to this question could be Jacob 4:10 “. . . seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand. For behold, ye yourselves know that he counseleth in wisdom, and in justice, and in great mercy, over all his works.” Paul again uses familiar OT imagery of the potter and clay from Jeremiah 18:6, Isaiah 29:16 and 45:9.

Romans 9:22–23 “**What if God, intending to show His wrath and make His power known . . . prepared for destruction?**” (BSB) God's punishment will roll forward when the wicked are “ripe for destruction” (i.e. Alma 10:19; 37:28; 45:16; Helaman 13:14). We also have the promise that “God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

Romans 9:23 “**vessels... afore prepared unto glory.**” We see this referring to our premortal life (as does Acts 17:26). But Calvinists' interpret this as evidence of God's predestination.

God Does Not Act Arbitrarily

Romans 9:24–29

God promised blessings in store for those of us adopted into the house of Israel as well. Verses 25–29 are actually a string of four different OT scriptures that show God's foreknowledge by giving the prophecies that testified of whom make up the “real” Israel.²²

Romans 9:25–29 “**I will call them my people, which were not my people**” To show that God does not act arbitrarily, Paul turns to the Old Testament prophets Hosea (Osee) and Isaiah (Esaias) to show how God always planned to have the Gentiles become part of his covenant people, too.

- Hosea 2:23, “And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to [them, which were] not my people, Thou [art] my people; and they shall say, [Thou art] my God.”
- Hosea 2:1, “Thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, ye are not my people” (KJV). Paul quotes this from

the Septuagint (LXX), as were most verses in the NT, as it was the Bible used most often in that day.²³ This is in part why the text did not repeat the Hebrew text exactly as we have it in our Old Testament.

- Isaiah 10:22, “a remnant of them shall return,” and be saved. We know one remnant became the Book of Mormon peoples.
- Isaiah 1:9 “Except the Lord of Hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom . . . and Gomorrah.” In the New Testament, Paul translates “Lord of Hosts” from the Hebrew, *Sabaoth*, for hosts or armies, “a military epithet of God” (which is also in James 5:4; D&C 88:2; 87:7).²⁴ Interestingly, when it is used in D&C 87:7, it fits this military definition. Yet, in D&C 95:7, the prophet Joseph’s scribes recorded the same spelling with a modified definition that fits more with the title, “Lord of the Sabbath.” I presume that as Joseph dictated the revelation, it was heard wrong, or a spelled wrong: “The Lord of Sabaoth . . . by interpretation, the creator of the first day, the beginning and the end” (D&C 95:7).²⁵

Romans 9:28 “He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness” This is our hope! Our prophet, Russell M. Nelson reported in General Conference that our “time is running out.”²⁶

Israel’s Stumbling is Derived From its Own Lack of Faith

Romans 9:30–33

Romans 9:30–31 Paul returns to his argument for the benefits of faith. He concludes that God has not been unfaithful to His promises, and continues to offer mercy and faith. At the same time, Paul praises the living gentiles for their faith to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. The book of Romans leads all New Testament books for the number of times the words “grace” and “faith” are used harmoniously.

Romans 9:32 “They sought it not by faith . . . for they stumbled at the stumbling stone”²⁷ That stone was Jesus, their Messiah (1 Peter 2:7–8). The Jewish nation and beyond knew of Jesus and His works and teachings, but without faith they did not see His Messiahship. This returns us to Paul’s early theme: “[Salvation] is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed” (Romans 4:16.). Perhaps they did not have the faith needed to receive Him, because they did not have meekness. Elder Maxwell wrote,

Meekness permits us to seek spiritual things by faith. Ancient Israel failed, said the Apostle Paul, for “they sought it not by faith.” Without real faith, individuals find one issue or another to stumble over. Unfortunately, it is difficult to show the proud things, which they “never had supposed,” especially religious things they do not want to know.

Our culture may fall into the same trap and not hear Paul or the other powerful New Testament testimonies of the Christ Jesus because the “arguments against the over-obedient people must not be misunderstood by the under-obedient secular cultures today.”²⁸ Jesus is the stone that the Jews stumbled over (1 Peter 2:7–8)

Romans 9:33 “I lay in Sion a stumbling stone . . . whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed” Paul again quotes Jesus’ fulfillment of two other Old Testament Isaian prophecies. Without knowing the scriptures, we may miss the things being fulfilled. Paul did not fall into that trap. He cites parts of Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16, “And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. . . . Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner [stone], a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.”

ROMANS 10

Who is Israel?

Chapter 10 examined two aspects of pursuing righteousness. Paul again quotes at least six Old Testament scriptures, suggesting that either his audience was filled with Jewish converts to “The Way” or Christianity, or else they had a problem with Judaizers arguing the Gentile-converts to live more of the Law of Moses.

Israel’s Future Salvation Comes From Faith in Christ, Who Fulfilled The Law

Romans 10:1–5

Romans 10:1 “My . . . prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” Again Paul reaffirms his deep love for his fellow Israelites so as not to offend those he corrected. Like the parent of a wayward child, he still hopes they might recognize their Messiah as the source of their redemption. The people of Israel will be saved from death—but only faithful Israel will be saved in the “third heaven” (2 Corinthians 12:2).

Romans 10:2 “they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge” Earlier in Romans 9:3, Paul recalled his own zeal gone awry, and now diagnoses it as one of the Jew’s stumbling blocks too. The Jews intimately knew the details of their Law, but they did not understand what it pointed to. They did not see where God wanted their zeal. The Prophet Joseph Smith warned the newly organized Relief Society of the same tendency in April 1842. Eliza R Snow recorded, “[He] commended them for their zeal, but said sometimes their zeal was not according to knowledge”²⁹ We, too, live in a world of zealous people without the knowledge of God’s will. We each need personal revelation to refine our good zeal towards God’s better and best ways to use our energies to build the kingdom of God on earth.

Romans 10:3 “they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto . . . God” Paul juxtaposes, “God’s righteousness” with the Jew’s “own righteousness.” Most often, “righteousness” used in a Jewish setting meant justice or justness.

Righteousness / dikaiosune,

Justification; also integrity, virtue, purity of life, correct-ness of thinking feeling, and acting . . . to attend a state approved of God.

Romans 10:4 “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth” They missed that it typified of their Messiah who was the author and finisher of their Law. Paul agrees with the Book of Mormon prophet Nephi’s perspective: the purpose of the Law was to prepare the way for their Messiah.

My soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him” (2 Nephi 11:4; also Mosiah 3:15; 13:31; 16:4; etc.)

The Law was only temporary; like spiritual training wheels, its purpose was to teach them to find more spiritual balance to take them someplace else. The goal or “*end of the law*” meant: a thing is finished, termination, and in a relative sense, eternal. The last phrase, “for everyone who believes” (AB) is a key to understanding the rest of the chapter.

Romans 10:5 “The one who does these things will find life in them” (AB) To illustrate Jesus as the finisher of the law (Romans 10:4), Paul cites Leviticus 18:5. It can be read as referring to Israelites, as well as to Jesus as “the man” or “the one” who doeth or completed the Law. I’ve chose this translation, rather than the KJV, because it points to the Savior as the source of life. Whether or not you see a Christological meaning in this text, with a human interpretation, we all can find meaning and purpose to life by living the commandments of the gospel.

The New Way of Righteousness—Open to All with Faith

Romans 10:6–13

Paul enters into a discussion on faith. In contrast to the Law of Moses, where statutes prescribed specific rules (like counting one’s Sabbath steps), Jesus’ high law required disciples to walk by *faith*. During His mission Jesus asked disciples to “follow Me,” without knowing where He lived nor the details of their journey (John 1:39). Paul teaches the same thing: faith opens the door for trusting God, humbly believing, with the Holy Spirit as the guide. Paul gives evidence for the need of faith, by quoting more Hebrew scriptures.

Romans 10:6–9 “The righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise . . . the word is . . . in thy heart . . . confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus” Paul uses a Midrashic explanation of two verses in Deuteronomy and one in Psalms (Deuteronomy 9:4; 30:11–14; and Psalms 71:20). Rather than examining them microscopically, by looking at Paul’s larger argument from the first thought in verse six to verse nine, he teaches that faith growing in our heart can lead to the courage to confess Jesus. Faith leads disciples to follow Jesus wherever that is.

Romans 10:10 “Such faith of the heart leads to uprightness; such profession of the lips to salvation” (AB) Repentance and confession must come from the heart. Some Christians who take this verse out of context, use it as evidence that confession alone is needed. Yet, that is not Paul’s message. This verse is part of his thesis that disciples need to develop faith to confess the Lord and follow His commandments (see Romans 6:18; 7:4, 10:16; 12:1–14:23; etc.).

Romans 10:11 “For the scripture says, ‘No one who believes in Him shall be put to shame’” (AB) Paul cites Isaiah of 28:16, which prophesies of the Lord as a tried foundation stone, and ends with “he that believeth shall not make haste” (Is 28:18, KJV). Some who read this verse understand, “belief” as Abraham’s, which develops into a strong, sure knowledge. Others take a predestined interpretation, claiming that if one receives God’s gift of belief, then they cannot forget or change their position, because of the absolute “perseverance of the saints” (i.e. TULIP, see Romans 8:33). The Book of Mormon again gives us clarity on how to interpret this verse, in the Tree of Life vision. Lehi and Nephi saw how those who partially “believed,” were affected by the temptations of the world over time, and become ashamed and let go of the rod, or “the word of God,” thereby forfeiting their goal to partake of the fruit of the Tree of Life (1 Nephi 8 and 11). The inability to change one’s station speaks against our view of the atonement and repentance as well.

Romans 10:12 “For there is no difference between the Jew and Greek: for the same Lord over all” In a society with severe class distinctions, this was shocking for both the Jews and Gentiles in Paul’s audience, especially in Rome, where “citizens” had great civil rights, wore togas, and received bread and circuses, in contrast to half the population who were either servants or slaves. Nephi’s concluding sermon includes a longer elaboration on this universality of God’s invitation to “partake of his goodness” (2 Nephi 26:33).

“rich unto all that call upon him” Without the worldly counterfeit view of material riches, God makes one rich by richly blessing those who call on Him. Those rich blessings are the enjoyment of His Spirit, His commandments, and covenants.

Romans 10:13 “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” To save is the work of the Savior’s atonement.³⁰ Paul quotes a portion of Joel 2:32, which in the KJV translation reads: “whosoever shall

call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call.” Joel’s context speaks of the last days when the gifts of the Spirit will be poured out on believers and there will be mutual communication between the Lord and those who find deliverance on the temple mount in the holy city. Paul’s audience may have understood this temple context, but without that background we lose the significance of where and how the “deliverance” or “saving” comes. In this dispensation we learn that those who keep their covenants and call on the Lord in the temple will receive saving ordinances and find “deliverance.” It makes sense that Paul intends to evoke the temple as a place of deliverance if he chose to quote that portion of Joel.

Saved / sózó: heal, preserve, rescue (principally, “God rescuing believers from the penalty and power of sin.”)

You may ask, “what did Paul know about temple work on Mt. Zion? Did he think of the Mosaic rites of animal sacrifices, priestly washings and clothings?” By the time he wrote this Epistle, he had been a participant in the Aaronic Temple sacrifices regularly for his entire life (Acts 21:26). He also had been a Christian apostle for years. To answer, “how did Paul interpret Joel’s deliverance at the temple?” it helps to know that the Book of Hebrews speaks of the price and promise of the temple with Christians making Melechizedek covenants. Also, Joseph Smith taught “Paul . . . knew . . . all the ordinances, and blessings [that] were in the Church.”³¹ We have archeological and written evidence that baptisms for the dead, washings, anointings, prayer circles, and clothing endowments were given in the apostolic church. The New Testament writings of Paul and Peter offer clear ties to modern temple vocabulary and practices (xx). With this as evidence, it is probable that Paul understood parts of the teachings of modern temples. This is probably why he chose this verse from Joel, which spoke of temples as places of saving, and ordinances.

The Necessity of Preachers Called by God

Romans 10:14–21

Romans 10:14–16 “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?” Paul uses a step-by-step style of logic to describe that the need to seek or call on God must be preceded by belief, hearing, preaching, and authority from God to preach (apostle / *apostellósín*: one sent [from God], messenger, commissioned). Paul does not just ask for a preacher, he asks for either apostles or those who have been called of God to preach—as we see in our full time missionaries, teachers, and everyone whom God calls to share the gospel and do His work.

Paul culminates his list with the wonderful prophesy from Isaiah 52:7, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” But then, he contrasts this hopeful message with the sad observation, “Lord, who has believed our report?” (Isaiah 53:1).

Romans 10:17 Like Paul in this verse, Joseph Smith also taught, “Faith comes by hearing the word of God, through the testimony of the servants of God; that testimony is always attended by that Spirit of prophecy and revelation.”³²

Romans 10:18–21 I like to read the NIV parallel formatting, to which I’ve added the four Old Testament references below.

But I ask, Did they not hear? Of course they did:

*“Their voice has gone out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.” (Psalm 19:4)*

Again I ask, did Israel not understand? First, Moses says,

*“I will make you envious by those who are not a nation;
I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.” (Deuteronomy 32:12)*

And Isaiah boldly says,

*“I was found by those who did not seek me;
I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.” (Isaiah 65:1)*

But concerning Israel he says,

*“All day long I have held out my hands
to a disobedient and obstinate people” (Isaiah 65:2)*

Paul shows that even though the Gentiles were not a single nation forged by God like Israel was, they still understand that the heavens testify of God’s glory. Israel itself is responsible for their rejection by God because of their disobedience.

ROMANS 11

The Remnant of Israel Chosen By Covenant

Paul continues to answer the question, “Who is Israel?” He answers with examples of Israelis by lineage, land, and covenant. He warns the Gentile converts that the Jews are still beloved of God. To illustrate the need for the two groups to work together, he gives an allegory of an olive tree with branches grafted in. Nearly one-third of the text (28%) comes from Old Testament citations.

God Has Not Rejected His People—They Have Stumbled, But Not Fallen

Romans 11:1-6

Romans 11:1 “Did God reject his people? By no means!” (NIV) Paul spends the rest of the chapter elaborating on the answer to his question, “If the Jews rejected Jesus, how can they be saved?” This question opens the discussion of the “mystery” of God’s love (vs 25).

As we look at the Book of Mormon, we find many parallels between Romans 11 and Jacob 4 and 5 (especially the grafting of the olive tree imagery). For example, “The Jews were a stiffnecked people; and they despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets . . . blindness came from looking beyond the mark . . . how is it possible that these, after having rejected the sure foundation, can ever build up it, that it may become the head of their corner?” (Jacob 4:14).

Romans 11:2-5 “Do you not know what the scripture says in the passage about Elijah . . .?” (NASB) As usual, Paul finds answers to his questions from the Old Testament prophets. The first example he offers is “*Elias/ Elijah*” who complained that all of Israel had denounced God, but the Lord who knows the heart of all, knew of seven-thousand who had not bowed to the foreign God, Baal (I Kings 19:10, 14, 18). This remnant would be saved.

“a remnant according to God’s gracious choice” (NASB) One of the most consistent parallels between Jacob 4 and Romans 11 is the idea that a “*remnant*” is chosen and saved by grace. Paul uses the word “election” as a term of God’s conditional selection. The KJV word choice “election” appears seven times in the New Testament, with four in Romans. It does not suggest a dictator’s nomination.

ELECTION/EKLOGE

the act of picking out, choosing a thing or person.

Romans 11:6 “If it by grace, then is it no more of works . . .” Paul makes it clear that Jesus is the Savior. Yet, at the same time, in Romans he repeats over and over that righteousness is a condition of full salvation (even in this section, Romans 11:22). However, Paul emphasizes here that the grace of God—not the righteousness of those saved—brings salvation. Grace is particularly demonstrated in God’s ability to turn the fall of Israel into the salvation of the Gentiles and the grafting or adoption of the Gentiles into the house of Israel. Trouble comes when this verse is taken out of Paul’s context: how God can still keep His covenant with the Jews. Neither Paul nor the Lord ever denounced the need for obedience (Paul even lists the Ten Commandments in Romans 13). He wants to teach Christ’s miraculous gift of redemption and grace, outside of the Law of Moses, even for the Jews who rejected Him (also see James 2:17-18).

The Irony of Israel's Temporary Stumbling

Romans 11:7-15

Romans 11:7 “What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did, the others were hardened” (NIV) Even though Israel, generally speaking, did not recognize nor accept their Promised Messiah, He still saved them!

Romans 11:8–10 “As it is written . . .” Paul corrects a potentially dangerous attitude of superiority among the Roman saints by quoting Deuteronomy 29:4, Isaiah 29:10; and Psalm 69:22 where Israel was described as “in stupor or sluggish/slumber.” It is fascinating to study these two accounts of the allegory of the olive tree to see their shared key words.

JACOB 4

“Because they desired it God hath done it,
that they may stumble”

“Killed the prophets” (4:14),

“blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they
must needs fall” (4:14)

ROMANS 11

“Have they stumbled that they should fall?” (11:11)

“they have killed the prophets and digged down
the altars” (11:3)

“the rest were blinded...eyes that should not see ...
let their eyes be darkened that they may not see ...
and the consequence of their fall (11: 7–8, 10, 11)

We find these themes throughout the Old Testament, though nowhere but in these two texts—Jacob and Romans—do we find them together. Furthermore, both are followed by the allegory of the olive tree.

Romans 11:11–12 “Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy” As He always does, God used the situation to open another doorway. His foreknowledge allowed Him to plan this in a way that would motivate the Jews to look anew for their Savior.

Romans 11:13–15 “I am the apostle of the Gentiles . . . in the hope that I may show arouse my own people” The Lord often teaches us through ironic settings. During Jesus’ mission He battled repeated irony. God also molds us so that we are in a position to do exactly what we previously detested. We see this here in Paul, who was a strict Jewish “pharisee of the pharisees,” and yet a few decades later, God called him to welcome Gentiles into the fold.

Allegory of the Olive Tree

Romans 11:11-24

Romans 11:16 “. . . if the root be holy, so are the branches” Paul leads into his allegory of the wild olive tree by establishing that the health of the branches come from the root. It is theoretically possible that Paul has access to Zenos’ record, or perhaps more probable, that a third text quoted (or even preceded Zenos).

There are several differences between Jacob’s recounting of Zenos’ Allegory of the Olive Tree in Jacob 5, and Paul’s imagery. For example,

1. Jacob has at least five trees, Paul has one.
2. Jacob emphasizes the fruit, while Paul the branches.
3. There is no “Lord of the vineyard” in Romans, but there is in Zenos’ account.

These differences suggest that Paul does not exactly quote Zenos’ allegory as Jacob did. Yet, the similarities are consistent enough between Jacob 5 and Romans 11 that we can safely assume that Paul probably references a similar secondary source. (Throughout the Old Testament, we find olive trees with symbolic interpretation in Judges 9:8-9; Hosea 14:16, Psalm 52:8; 80; Isaiah 17:6, 24:13; Jeremiah, etc.).

For Paul, the olive tree is Israel, and grafted branches represent different groups of people: Israelites and Gentiles. Whatever branch is grafted into the tree, it becomes holy because of the strength of the root. Paul probably means for the root to symbolize the covenant made with the fathers, or perhaps the Savior-Jehovah—He does not say.

Romans 11:17 “. . . some of the branches being broken off . . . a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them”

The Lord of the vineyard works to save the trees, by changing what they presently are to something better. Both Jacob and Romans use the image of the olive tree as a promise and a warning. Traditionally, the wild olive tree is the Gentiles.

Romans 11:18-19 “Boast not against the branches . . . the branches were broken oft, that I might be grafted in” Paul uses the grafted branches to illustrate—as a warning to the Gentiles (again)—to not think themselves superior to the Jews, even though the Jews at large had not accepted the message of Christianity.

Romans 11:20-22 “. . . they were broken off because of unbelief . . . If God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either” (NIV) Again Paul warns the gentiles against “haughtiness” (KJV) or “do not become proud” (RSV), “conceited” (NASB), or “arrogant” (NIV). The Gentiles, as “adopted children of the covenant should have a profound sense of gratitude to Israel for opening the door of salvation.”³³ Gratefully, the Jews preserved the oracles of God. (3:1-2).



The Tree of Life by Hannah Butler. Submitted to the 2018 Book of Mormon Central Art Contest.

Hannah Butler 2018

Romans 11:23–24 “God is able to graft them in again” Grafting becomes an agricultural image for adoption. Figuratively speaking, the gentiles became part of Israel (e.g. Ruth, the Moabitess, became the grandmother to King David). We believe that baptism also is an adoption into Israel through covenant making. The Gentile conversion was completely unexpected by the Jews. But as Paul and Jacob taught, the new branches do not change the nature and destiny of Israel. Rather Israel is still the chosen family and guardian of the Abrahamic covenant. Ironically, by grafting in the wild branches of Gentile converts, Israel became rejuvenated.³⁴ As James Faulconer said, “The olive tree shows, Israel can trust the Lord because only He has power to save his people, in spite of what might appear to us to be impossible odds. Our choice is to despair or to trust the Lord.”³⁵

The Final Reconciliation

Romans 11:25–36

Romans 11:25 “blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in” The “fulness of the Gentiles” referred to that time and forward—when the Gentiles have the opportunity to accept the gospel. The Jews had that blessing before the meridian of time, and the Gentiles have first priority now, but later the Jews will have another chance. That is the “mystery” of how God’s love and gift of Salvation is extended even to the Gentiles. Yet, Paul again warned them against haughtiness in their new found status as adopted children of the covenant. He hopes the Gentiles will have a profound sense of gratitude for Israel as those who received and the prophecies of God.

Romans 11:26–27 Paul quoted two sections of Isaiah 59:20, 21 and 27:9, filled with hope of the Lord’s cleansing.

*The Deliverer will come from Zion,
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob
and this will be my covenant with them
when I take away their sins*

Romans 11:29 “for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable” (NIV). The KJV “repentance” is actually just a negative participle, “without regret.” It means that God will honor His side of our covenants.

Romans 11:30–32 “for God has not consigned all men to disobedience” (RSV) These three verses communicate different messages depending on the translator’s understanding of God’s purpose. Some sound as if God intentionally made humanity disobedient so that he could show more mercy; “For God has imprisoned all in disobedience, so that He may have mercy on all” (HCSB). That would not fit the God we worship, nor the loving God that Paul just described (Moses 1:39; Romans 8:37–38). It is true that we become spiritually imprisoned by our sins, “in making all mankind prisoners to disobedience” (NEB). However, God did not make us wicked. It is our rejection of God that causes our imprisonment, not the other way around.

The Book of Mormon again provides a clearer understanding God’s role in disobedience and mercy.

- 2 Nephi 2:4 “And the way is prepared from the all of man, and salvation is free” (also 2:5–9)
- 2 Nephi 9:6 “The fall came by reason of transgression”
- Mosiah 4:6 “The atonement which has been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord.” (also 4:7–11)
- Alma 42:12 “Man had brought fallen state upon himself because of disobedience”

Romans 11:33–36 This is a beautiful poetic conclusion that is filled with Old Testament scriptures. The NIV translation it reads:

Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

“Who has known the mind of the Lord? (Lev 24:12)

Or who has been his counselor?” (Isa 40:13)

“Who has ever given to God that God should repay him?”

For from him and through him and to him are all things. (Job 41:11)

To him be the glory forever! Amen.

CHAPTER 12

Living Sacrifices Our Conduct In Relation To God

Paul’s “greatest epistle on grace is also the greatest epistle on keeping God’s commandments.”³⁶ This is one of the ten chapters in Romans that deal with “the relationship of the Jewish law to the Christian gospel.”³⁷ More than any other Pauline letter, Romans includes rules for righteousness. Just between the next few chapters (chapters 12 to 15), Paul lists over fifty Christian commandments.

Romans 12:1 “**brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy . . . offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship**” Paul pled with his audience to become clean for the Lord’s work. This can only be done through the atonement. Once cleansed we can better serve God. The idea of offering or presenting a sacrifice to God evokes the Old Testament Temple rites. We usually think of our Savior as the unblemished lamb on the slaughter, but Paul encouraged the saints to offer their lives—time, gifts, desires, generosity, thoughts—as a perfect unblemished sacrifice to the Lord.

**How can you make your life a living sacrifice to the Lord?*

Like the unblemished animals, our lives can be a clean offering, through repentance. As actions speak louder than words, the action Paul required spoke louder than the interpretation of his theology. Paul established a bridge between grace and keeping our covenants. “We establish the law” (Romans 3:31) became the bridge with the last phrase in Romans 21:1, “which is your reasonable service.” This evoked a Temple-sacrifice theme.

Romans 12:2 “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (BSB)

How do we renew our minds? The Spirit has power to transform us from natural men and women into holy priests and priestesses to the Most High God. This idea was restated in Paul’s earlier advice to the Thessalonians, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Many Christians often rephrase Paul’s words here into the oft quoted passage, “be in the world but not of the world.”

Christin Conduct to Others

Romans 12:3-20

Romans 12:3 “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought” (BSB) Paul called for humility in Christian thought and conduct. Everyone had received a “measure of faith” from the Spirit, and he reminds them to respect one another and not look down on others (remember the Roman Empire had a segregated class system with one-third as slaves and servants). Galatians 6:3 and D&C 136:19 repeats the same council.

Romans 12:4-5 “So in Christ we who are many are one body, and each member belongs to one another”

(BSB) God loved variety in people and in His creations—all are different, and all are important. Our gifts are diverse while still conforming to God’s commands as we become “one body in Christ.” In 1 Corinthians 12:21 Paul also wrote about each person’s responsibility to serve to build the kingdom in “the body of Christ”

Romans 12:6-7 “we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one’s faith, if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching” This is a shorter version of the Gifts of the Spirit that Paul is known for in 1 Corinthians 12 (or D&C 46 and Moroni 10:8-19). These God given gifts are not for personal aggrandizement, but only to serve others and honor God (D&C 46:12). Paul encouraged the members in 1 Corinthians 14:12 to seek the gifts of the Spirit (also see D&C 46:8, “that ye may not be deceived seek ye earnestly the best gifts, always remembering for what they are given”),

Romans 12:8 “he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence” The translation choice of “*simplicity*” is confusing. I like other translations better, “liberality” (RSV), “generously” (NIV)

Romans 12:9 “Let love be without dissimulation” Jesus finishes the gifts of the Spirit with the most important, love” Paul used the form of divine love often translated as “charity/*agape*.” We need sincere genuine love, “without hypocrisy” (RSV). Paul repeated these from other Epistles.

Romans 12:14 “Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not” Paul next recounted Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:44, as does Romans 12:21).

Romans 12:15 “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” Paul now paraphrased a phrase from Jesus’ parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:6). Also see Mosiah 18:8–9; D&C 42:25 where the same these was revealed in this dispensation.

Romans 12:16 “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited” (NIV) Paul encouraged the saints to “associate with” those different than yourself and be humble (RSV).

Romans 12:18 “as far as it depends on you” (NIV) or “Do all you can” (JB), hints of the Law of Consecration.

Romans 12:20 “if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink . . .” As always, we are admonished to feed the poor, even if they are our enemy.

Romans 12:21 “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” *How do you do that?* By returning kindness for anger, love for hate, honesty for deceit, generosity for greed, forgiveness for resentment, selflessness for egotism, faith for despair. The Lord’s balance of law and punishment is beautifully described in 2 Nephi 9:25–26.

25 Wherefore, he has given a law; and where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation; and where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of him. 26 For the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them, that they are delivered from that awful monster, death and hell, and the devil, and the lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment; and they are restored to that God who gave them breath, which is the Holy One of Israel.

ROMANS 13–14

Fifty Christian Commandments

CAESARS FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT TIME

Augustus (27 BC– 14 AD): Jesus' birth

Tiberius (14–37 AD): Jesus' ministry

Caligula (37–41): Paul served in Antioch

Claudius (41–54): Paul's first missions

NeRomans (54–68) Galba (68) Otho (69) Vitellius

HISTORY: ROME AND EARLY CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION

From AD 41, Emperor Claudius demanded that Jews stop holding meetings. In AD 49 he expelled them from Rome. (The Roman historian, Suetonius in AD 120, recalled that Gentile-Christians were not deported at that time.) Also at that time, it appears that the church grew in Rome with gentile converts. In AD 54, after Claudius Caesar's death, the Jews were allowed back into Rome—including Jewish Christians such as Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16:3).

Caesar NeRomans (AD 54–68) reigned over the Roman emperor at the time of Paul's known Epistles. Even though, by AD 59, NeRomans had not singled out the Christians for persecution, yet, undoubtedly Paul was aware of the political unrest. A few years later, the elite Roman writer, Tacitus, recorded that NeRomans began brutally persecuting the saints, including giving them the blame for the great fire in Rome in AD 64.



Statue of Augustus via Wikimedia Commons.

In these chapters, Paul dealt with the specific problem of unifying the Jewish and Gentile Christians. Their efforts to integrate were exacerbated by the Roman persecution that removed all the Jews from Rome for several years. When the Jews returned to Rome, a rift developed between the two groups of converts. This problem of brief Jewish persecution affected the early saints in Rome.

ROMANS 13

Respect for Authority

Romans 13:1-7

Romans 13:1 “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power *in the church* but of God” (JST) The first commandment of this chapter is: *be subject to higher powers*. Another translation reads, “You must all obey the governing authorities” (JB). But, the Prophet Joseph changed this from a discussion of the state to “in the church.”³⁸ For Joseph this is all about following the Lord and His leadership. Commentaries without the JST wonder if there were some political unrest spurring on this counsel? The community of saints in Rome would have been especially more conscious of imperial authority.³⁹

Without the JST, Paul seems to be supporting the Roman propaganda that Caesar and other political figures were divinely appointed. As the Greek reads now, Paul works under the assumption that all power was given by God. Even Rome’s imperial authority came from God, although the Jews may have been reluctant to admit it. It does not seem possible for Paul to share this perspective. He saw unrighteous government leaders first hand—from the martyrdom of James (Acts 12:2), and Peter’s imprisonment (Acts 12:3,5), to his own repeated abuses (Acts 20:23; 21:27, 30–33; 23:3; etc.). In addition to the Roman world, the perspective of the King James’ translators may have agreed.

It makes sense that this would certainly have been a delicate subject in the age of Christian persecution. I think similar counsel is still in place. In 1842, even though the US government did not protect Joseph Smith, nor the rights of the church members, in the same decade that the saints were being chased out of three states, Joseph penned: “We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law” (12th Article of Faith).. The point the text tries to make is that we must be good law-abiding citizens.

Romans 13:2 “Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves *punishment*” (JST) In keeping with teachings of the Restoration, the Prophet Joseph changed “*damnation*” to “*punishment*.” The Greek word: “*ordinance/diatage*” can be defined as “institution” or “ordinance” (and is used only one other time in the NT, Acts 7:53; more often “ordinance” was translated from

“*paradoseis* and *ktisei*”). The reference to an “ordinance” seems consistent with JST’s change to make this a discussion about the church not the state. Also, in keeping with a church perspective, Paul only references the citizens’ responsibilities not the authorities.”⁴⁰

Romans 13:3 “Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended” (NIV) This verse includes the second commandment of this chapter: “do what is right.” It can be read from either the previous JST perspective—of God’s authority— or from the political authorities. For the new Christian church that had already faced persecution in the Roman Empire, it is important for Paul to teach about being good citizens. The JB reads, “Good behavior is not afraid of magistrates; only criminals have anything to fear.” This sounds as though Paul had great faith in his government—but it is quite ironic in the face of his past torture while obeying the laws. Through Joseph Smith’s perspective, church leadership sought to do good.

Romans 13:4 “He is God’s servant, an agent of retribution to the wrongdoer” (BSB) Religious leadership is often referred to as being in servitude to God. On the other hand, political authority included its delegated or vicarious role across the Empire. The local and national leaders could also enforce the law with the “sword” (a symbol of penal authority, or power, legitimately possessed to coerce recalcitrant citizens to maintain order for the common good).

Romans 13:5 “submit to authority, not only to avoid punishment, but also as a matter of conscience” (BSB) As Christians, we hope to do well not because we are motivated from fear of punishment, but for the sake of goodness. Shortly before this Epistle is written, in AD 58, Caesar Nero passed a decree to regulate tax collection. Tacius recorded that the people in Rome complained about publicans collecting indirect and unfair taxes, so Nero ordered that all taxes be publicly posted and enforced.⁴¹

Romans 13:6 “also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing” (ESV) This third commandment is: *Pay tribute*. (It is also the third time Paul mentions the delegated nature of authority, vs. 1, 4, 6.) In the KJV, Paul emphasizes civil duty as part of citizenship in God’s kingdom, as well as in the Roman Empire. Christians’ “heavenly” citizenship does not remove them from their civil duties.

Romans 13:7 “Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour” Remember “fear/*phobon*” also can mean “reverence” (AET), or “respect” (RSV). Jesus likewise emphasized paying tribute to Caesar (Matthew 22:17–21). The verse includes three Christian commandments: #3, render dues, #4, fear those whom one fears; #5, honour.

Love fulfills the Law

Romans 13:8-10

Romans 13:8 “Owe no man any thing, but to love one another” Paul counsels Christians to not go into debt, or “leave no debt outstanding” (RSV). The one exception is the debt of “love/*agapao*/charity” (also in Romans 13:10). The obligation of charity sums up the whole Mosaic Law. This summarizes all the obligations of Christian life as well. Paul speaks of love as something we owe our neighbor, and God.

Romans 13:9 “For, ‘You shall not commit adultery . . . murder . . . steal . . . covet . . .’” (BLB) Paul expounds on exactly which laws he meant, by quoting the last five of the Ten Commandments (that each deal with loving one’s neighbor).⁴² Nearly all of the Old Testament commandments are summed up in “the golden rule.” (Jesus used almost the same words in Matthew 19:18 ; Mark 12:28–34; Deuteronomy 6:4–5; Leviticus 19:18). The Ten Commandments became part of the Christian Laws of the Gospel. Of the fifty commandments that Paul lists in these two chapters, over a quarter deal with loving one’s neighbor. Paul probably knew of Jesus’ *new commandment* that He introduced at the Last Supper, to love as He does (John 13:34). One fourth of the commandments in these two chapters deal with loving or helping one’s neighbor.

Romans 13:10 “Love is the one thing that cannot hurt your neighbor; that is why it is the answer to every one of the commandments” (JB) The message of love became one of the most oft-repeated themes in Paul repeats. John the Beloved came to this same conclusion (1 John 2:5; 3:16; 4:7–18; etc.).

Awake Spiritually

Romans 13:11-14

Romans 13:11 “It is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed” Paul refers to wake from our spiritual slumber, to end our spiritual complacency and prepare to meet the Savior. This verse has an eschatological (end of the earth) motivation. The early saints expected the Lord’s Second Coming within a generation or two (1 Corinthians 7:29; 1 Peter 4:7; 1 John 2:18; etc.).

Romans 13:12 “the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light” Paul often uses the imagery of “day” and “night,” figuratively. The night represents evil and spiritual darkness, which can be dispelled through the Holy Spirit (similar in Ephesians 5:8; the “day” represented the present and the time to work (1 Thessalonians 5:8; Hebrews 10:25). Paul’s dressing with light, or “putting on the armor of light” can be literal as well. The Holy Spirit’s guidance and protection is real and can become armor against the adversary. If we do nothing to offend the Spirit, it can even become more powerful than metal armor. Disciples put on this armor of light each day as they pray, study the scriptures, and repent. There are many ways to don the armor, from church and temple worship to service and missionary work. We never want to be scantily clothed in this way! Earlier, in 1 Thessalonians 5:8, Paul describes the armor of God as faith, charity and

hope. Earlier still, Jesus taught us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation...” The Spirit’s armor disappears when we succumb to temptation or lose our focus doing God’s will. (We will discuss this more in Ephesians 4 and 6.)

Romans 13:13 “Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing . . . drunkenness, . . . immorality . . . debauchery . . . dissension and jealousy” (NIV) In this verse, Paul lists seven more commandments to become better citizens of God’s kingdom that are also in the Old Testament.⁴³

Romans 13:14 “Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh” (NIV) Paul’s twentieth command, to “clothe ourselves with the Lord,” is another of Paul’s favorites and is repeated in Galatians 3:27 and 5:16; This can include asking the Lord to help us live as we should. Paul’s twenty-first commandment in this chapter—to avoid lusts of the flesh—is also repeated in Galatians 5:17, and many letters. The word “*enduo*” or “clothe” is also the word for “endow.” As we put on the Lord’s clothing of light we are empowered with Jesus’ atonement and the robes of righteousness.

ROMANS 14

Striving for Unity in the Church

Paul turns from his general message of love to address specific issues that challenged the Roman saints. He offers thirty more commandments in the process. Most of their local challenges dealt with the Jewish purification rites, holy days, and dietary codes. The Epistle is filled with evidence that some of the Jewish-Christians clung to their Judaic oral laws even after converting to Christianity. These Judaizers tried to enforce the oral laws or Jewish traditions for all Christian converts. After Paul’s first apostolic mission, the Jerusalem Counsel attempted to settle that issue once and for all. Peter, and James the Evangelist, set the parameters for the entire church (Acts 15:7–20).⁴⁴ Earlier in this Epistle when Paul attacked the Judaizers he used Old Testament scripture, but here he paraphrases Jesus’ words to hopefully end the clash of opinions.



Fresco of early Christian holding chalice in the Agape Feast. Catacomb of Saints Pietro e Marcellino (Saints Marcellinus and Peter), Via Labicana, Rome, Italy. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

No Contention

Romans 14:1-12

Romans 14:1 “Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters” (NIV) The schism between the weak and strong saints may have started in AD 49 with the expulsion of the Jews from Rome. The early second century historian, Suetonius, looked back on the reign of **Claudius Caesar’s** reign (AD 41–54) and he recorded: “As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.”⁴⁵ If only the Jews were driven out of Rome, then the Christian church would have developed with only Gentile-Christian converts. When the Jewish–Christians were allowed to return to Rome after Claudius’ death, they were probably startled to find their fellow church members no longer living any Mosaic laws. It is to this divided group that Paul pleads to have patience, moderation, and compassion.

Romans 14:2 “one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs . . .” Even though there was not a Jewish prohibition against *all meat*, some (like Daniel) abstained. Many Jews avoided meat in a gentile community because most of the meat sold in the market had been previously sacrificed to idols. Avoiding meat offered to idols was one of the four rules that the Jerusalem Council passed onto Christians (Acts 15:20). Many other groups also avoided meat at that time—Orphics, Dionysiac mystics, and Pythagoreans—and perhaps some of the Christians were from those groups as well.

Romans 14:3–4 “Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not . . . who art thou that judgest another man’s servant?” Paul begins with an imperative or commanding voice (which he repeats dozens of times in these last four chapters). Paul cares more about the inappropriate judging and lack of fellowship than the dietary rules. The “servants” are Christ’s disciples, and the “other man” is the Lord. His message is that we should not judge God’s servants; they are trying to follow Him.

Romans 14:5 “One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike” (NIV) The Jewish holy days, including the Sabbath, had many traditions and rules depending on to which Jew-



Bust of Emperor Claudius via Wikimedia Commons.

ish sect one belonged. It sounds as though some Christians still observed them meticulously, and others did not. Paul himself continued to celebrate some of them (i.e. to be at the temple for Passover or Pentecost, Acts 18:21; 20:16), and yet he encourages the saints to let everyone decide for themselves. This is really the promise of Discipleship—everyone needs to “be fully persuaded in [their] own mind” (14:5). Trying to persuade anyone against their will “only requires more arduous backpacking and backtracking!”⁴⁶

Romans 14:6 “Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God” (NIV) I love the idea that every day belongs to the Lord. Every meal can honor God by giving Him thanks for the meal and dedicating our strength to His work.

Romans 14:7–9 “For none of us lives to himself alone, and none of us dies to himself . . . for this reason Christ died and returned to life” (BSB) We cannot choose when we live or die—that is God’s choice. We also do not live alone but have a community to influence, bless, and serve. We cannot selfishly go about each day, because we owe a debt to our Redeemer every day for our breath. The most important one in our life is Christ who lived and died to allow us to live more fully.

Romans 14:10 “Why dost thou judge thy brother? . . . for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” Paul challenges the saints to greater heights by putting the matter of judgment into the hands of the Lord. He confronts his readers with the same questions that Jesus did: “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged” (Matthew 7:2). In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, he followed “judge not” with a cross-examination of why we see only the faults of others: “And why do you look at the splinter in your brother’s eye, but not notice *the* beam in your *own* eye?” (Matthew 7:3–5, BLB). Paul’s parallels conform in words and content to two sections of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. This example, and previous extensive use of the Sermon on the Mount, suggest that it was available in some form to Christians such as Paul, even before Matthew wrote his Gospel.

Romans 14:11 “For I live, saith the Lord as it is written, and every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall swear to God” (JST) This great day may be at the Second Coming. Paul adds another Old Testament quote from Isaiah 45:23 (which he repeats in Philippians 2:10). Similar promises are found in modern revelation, too (D&C 76:110; 88:104). Even telestial inhabitants will have to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, but unfortunately, they will not have made His gospel part of their lives. Elder Maxwell repeatedly elaborated this verse:

Submitting, but only episodically, is a telltale sign. Such reluctance is evidence of weak faith. So is putting off obedience. Sufficient submissiveness to kneel now means we will not be strangers to that posture later when “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Christ” . . . It will take no faith to renounce worldly things when these are among the ashes of a melted planet . . .”⁴⁷

Romans 14:12 “then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” In Paul’s mind the judgment is going to include a stewardship accounting from each person to God.

Christ’s Rules

Romans 14:13–21

Romans 14:13 “Let us no longer judge one another” (CSB) While the Bible tells us not to judge each other, we also learn from our own experiences how to judge between good and evil. We find the tool to accomplish both in the Book of Mormon: “the light by which ye may judge . . . is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with the same judgment which ye judge ye shall also be judged. . . search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may know good from evil; and if ye will lay hold upon every good judgment” (Moroni 7:18). The antithesis of righteous judgment is pride. It is the root of all evil.

“**Instead decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in the way of your brother or sister**” Intentionally wanting someone to fall or trying to step on another to raise oneself up comes from pride—the root of unrighteous judgment (Mormon 8:38, 36).⁴⁸ Among the attributes of charity is building others up (1 Corinthians 13:5). Rather than judging one another unkindly, the Spirit can teach us how to love. Elder Carlos Asay quoted this verse and then encouraged, “Look for the good in others and learn. Give sincere credit where credit is due. Spend less time fault-finding and more time identifying strengths. Yes, try to catch others doing good! Don’t put a stumbling block before others; instead, give them a step upward in the form of a recognized success.”⁴⁹

Romans 14:14 “by the Lord Jesus, that *there is nothing unclean of itself*” To Paul’s Jewish audience this had connotations of clean vs. unclean in foods and washings. To Christians, though, the Lord’s cleansing left nothing unclean. The Greek word here for “unclean/*koinos*” means “common.” It also looks as if Paul were familiar with Jesus’ judgments on ritual purity (recorded now in Mark 7:15), “There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him.” The parallel between Paul and Mark is even closer in Greek. Mark’s use of “*defile*” means, “to make unclean or common.” In the KJV of Romans 14:14, “persuaded by the Lord Jesus,” the Greek preposition “*by/en /in*” is regularly “through” or “persuaded because of the Lord Jesus.” Paul’s ideas probably came from reflecting about Jesus’ statement—objects do not cause impurity of themselves. Paul quotes Jesus to sensitively address this subject rather than fight it on his own.

Romans 14:15 “If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love . . .” (NIV) Paul asks them to put matters of these indifferent things into the perspective of the redemption. If your behavior offends a fellow saint, especially a “weak member,” stop it. Allowing people to fall away over little matters of indifference is wrong. There should be no vaunting by the strong causing falling of the weak.⁵⁰

Romans 14:17–19 “The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace,

and joy in the Holy Spirit” (BSB) These verses also point to the early church’s problem of unity among the unique cultural backgrounds of the converts. At times when other’s differences or faults become annoying, it helps to keep an eternal perspective of life and emphasize what really matters. “The essence of the kingdom does not consist in freedom from such things as dietary regulations, but in the freedom of the Christian to react to the promptings of the indwelling Spirit.”⁵¹

Romans 14:20–21 “Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food” (BSB) In conclusion of this specific problem, Paul repeats the same message he gave in verse 13, “Please do not offend your fellow disciples over these little issues!” Christianity was becoming an international church, and the Jewish saints had to learn to take a broader view.

Romans 14:22 “Do you have a conviction? Keep it!” (AB) The Anchor Bible referred to these issues of Jewish dietary and holiday practices as “conviction.” Separating out what really matters, with enteral implications, from a social practice is good advice for our day, too.

Romans 14:23 “But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin” (NIV) Paul teaches that doubt is spiritual poison. He also teaches that whatever we do without faith—or whatever we do that is *not* motivated by our dedication to Jesus Christ—is spiritually inert and is ultimately a sin. On the other hand, our actions and thoughts that are motivated by the Spirit will empower the believer. The same is true of the fruits of the Spirit; they lift and lighten.

REVIEW OF ROMAN’S VOCABULARY

The book of Romans has Paul’s greatest treatises on the need for grace, as well as the need for good works. Twenty percent of the Epistle deals with grace, and thirty percent on the need for good works. Romans 13 falls into the good works category. In chapters 13 and 14 he includes over fifty Christian commandments.

Paul used some words repeatedly, which allows the modern reader to get a better understanding of his definition when we study them. Here are three theologically-packed words that he used often:

4. **Salvation/*soteria***: Romans 1:16; 10:10; 11:11; 13:11; 2 Corinthians 7:10; Philippians 2:12; and Ephesians 1:13.³²
5. **Justification/*dikaiosis-dikaioo***: Romans 2:13; 3:20, 30; 4:25; 5:1, 9, 16, 18; 8:30.
6. **Grace/*charis***: Romans 1:5, 7; 3:24; 4:4; 4:16; 5:2; 15, 17, 20, 21; 6:1, 14, 15; 11:5, 6; 12:3, 6.

ENDNOTES

1. Robert Millet, ed., *Studies in Scriptures: Acts to Revelation* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1987), 50.
2. The “depravity of man” means that because Adam and Eve fell, every human infant to adult is enslaved to sin. In their fallen nature of God they are completely unable to choose. Only God can help them. They cannot refrain from evil on their own. The Book of Mormon denounced this doctrine in Mosiah 3:16–18, and Moroni 8:8–14.
3. This will be demonstrated in more detail in discussions on 1 Corinthians 11 and 14.
4. Millet, *Acts to Revelation*, 50.
5. Jeffery R. Holland, “How Ever Long and Hard the Road,” Brigham Young University Devotional, January 18, 1983, 58. <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/jeffrey-r-and...t-holland/however-long-hard-road/> (accessed 7-20-19).
6. We will discuss the handful of troubling verses that seem to detour from this practice as they come up in 1 Corinthians, etc.
7. Russel M. Nelson, “We can Do Better Be Better,” General Conference April 2019.
8. E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 269. John Wesley’s teachings on adoption and how it related to the witness of the Spirit dominated Methodist thought in the nineteenth century, and may be why Joseph was interested in it initially. Methodists interpreted a spiritual adoption as an immediate and inward testimony of the Holy Spirit, giving an assurance of forgiveness. This was the doctrine through which they interpreted the ecstatic emotional experiences of the revivals. The witness of the Spirit assured them their salvation was “immediate, palpable, and emotional.” Methodists saw a dual nature in the role of the Spirit: first conversion and second sanctification. It was the Spirit that allowed them to experience perfection after their “new birth.”
9. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* (SLC, UT: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 3:245–46.
10. Andrew F. Ehat, and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Orem, Utah: Grandin, 1991), for original text from four scribal accounts. Spelling here from Joseph F. Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 545–546.
11. Millet, *Acts to Revelation*, 119.
12. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.21.5.
13. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1844. Reprint 1980), 6.252–253: “The doctrine [of election] that the Presbyterians and Methodists have quarreled so much about—once in grace, always in grace, or falling away from grace, I will say a word about. They are both wrong. Truth takes a road between them both, for while the Presbyterian says ‘once in grace, you cannot fall,’ the Methodist says: ‘You can have grace today, fall from it tomorrow, next day have grace again; and so follow on, changing continually.’ But the doctrine of the Scriptures and the spirit of Elijah would show them both false, and take a road between them both; for, according to the Scripture, if men have received the good word of God, and tasted of the powers of the world to come,

if they shall fall away, it is impossible to renew them again, seeing they have crucified the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame; so there is a possibility of falling away; you could not be renewed again, and the power of Elijah cannot seal against this sin, for this is a reserve made in the seals and power of the Priesthood.” (For original spelling see Ehat and Cook, Words of Smith, 334.)

14. *The Westminster Confession* 3.6 (finished in 147), reads, “As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, fore-ordained all the means thereunto.” Again in 12.1 and 3: “All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death . . . this effectual call is of God’s free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit.”
15. Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:343.
16. *Ibid.*, 4:266 The article continued: “‘Giving all diligence to make your calling and election sure’ (2 Peter 1:10); for this is that sealing power spoken of in Ephesians (1:13, 14)—‘in whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth; the gospel of your salvation, in whom also, after that ye believed ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, until the praise of His glory’ (2 Peter 1:11); ‘For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.’”
17. Millet, *Acts to Revelation*, 53.
18. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:359–360.
19. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: Romans* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1993), 545.
20. Kelly Ogden, xx, 180.
21. “John Calvin’s doctrine of predestination, the unconditional election of the House of Israel to eternal life, was repulsive to Joseph Smith. Founded in the doctrine of human depravity, this notion asserted that God in his almighty wisdom had elected some men to eternal salvation and relegated others to eternal torment. Joseph Smith believed that the Saints might make their calling and election sure through the righteous use of free agency” (WJS, Ehat and Cook, p.94).
22. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: Romans*, 572
23. The Septuagint is the earliest Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures. It is estimated that the first five books of the Hebrew Bible were translated in the mid-3rd century BC and the remaining texts were translated in the 2nd century BC. It was so universal by the 1st century, that very few Jews knew the Hebrew version.
24. James Strong, *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Atlanta, London: Thomas Nelson, 1995, reprint); all Greek and Hebrew translations in my commentaries come from this source.
25. Joseph Smith Papers for D&C 95:7 read the same as was published. “Sabaoth, which is by interpretation . . .” <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/>
26. Russell M. Nelson, “We can Do Better and Be Better,” General Conference April 2019.
27. The JST reversed the order of phrases to help elucidate Paul’s meaning. “Wherefore they stumbled at that stumbling stone, not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law.”

28. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 173.
29. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4.605.
30. Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Have You Been Saved?” General Conference April 1998. “Good Christian people sometimes attach different meanings to some key gospel terms like saved or salvation. If we answer according to what our questioner probably means in asking if we have been “saved,” our answer must be “yes.” If we answer according to the various meanings, we attach to the terms saved or salvation, our answer will be either ‘yes’ or ‘yes, but with conditions.’ . . . Every sincere Latter-day Saint is ‘saved’ according to this meaning.” The definition in the text box is taken from Strong’s Concordance accessed 8/2/19, via: <https://biblehub.com/greek/4982.htm>
31. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 9–10; 42, 110, 210, 327–331.
32. Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:379.
33. Millet, *Acts to Revelation*, 54.
34. Stephen D. Richs and John W. Welch, eds., *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive , the Bible, and Jacob 5* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 524.
35. *Allegory of the Olive Tree*, 363.
36. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 192.
37. *Ibid.*, 173.
38. In the scribal notes from Joseph’s Smith’s rendition of the Book of Romans, we find only three clear changes in Romans 13 (verses: 1, added “in the church,” 2, added punishment, and 14—gratify), and possibly one word in verse 4 (rod). See original papers in: <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/new-testament-revision-2/192>
39. Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: Romans, A New Translation* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1993), 35.
40. William Tyndale, one of the first translators of the Bible into English, noted the lack of responsibilities listed for the leaders in Romans 13. On October 2, 1528, he published a pamphlet to address Rom13, known as, *Obedience of the Christian Man*. He spoke of the constraints on leaders and subjects. He counseled those who held powers as kings, the ultimate ruling authority: “If kings would be Christian in deed and not only name, then let them give themselves altogether to the wealth of their realms, following the example of Christ. Let them remember that the people are God’s, and not theirs – indeed, they are Christ’s inheritance and possession, bought with his blood. The most despised person in his realm is still the king’s brother, a fellow-member with him, and equal with him in the kingdom of God and of Christ. Let him therefore not think himself too good to render service to his people, or seek anything other in them than a father seeks in his children, indeed, than Christ sought in us. The king, in the temporal regiment, stands in the place of God, and represents God himself, and is better than his subjects, without compare. Yet let him put that off, and become a brother, doing and leaving undone all things with regard to the commonwealth, so that all men may see that he seeks nothing but the profit of his subjects.”
41. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: Romans*, 35.
42. The order does not coincide with the Greek Septuagint version—LXX, of the Bible, but not the later Hebrew Mesoric Text (MT) which the KJV translated.
43. #13 Walk honestly (in old English, “honestly” meant “honorably”), #14 No rioting or revelry, #15 Nor drunkenness, #16

- & #17 No chambering and “wantonness” (meaning sexual immorality), #18 No strife or contention, #19 No envy
44. Acts 15:20; 1. abstain from idols, 2. fornication, 3. things strangled, and 4. eating blood.
 45. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: Romans*, 37.
 46. Neal A. Maxwell, *Not My Will, But Thine* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 2001). 12.
 47. Ibid. Also, “We do not now know precisely how God handles things in the spirit world so that life there is an extension of walking by faith. Death does not suddenly bestow upon the disbeliever full awareness of all reality, thereby obviating the need for any faith. Instead, what follows death is a continuum of the basic structure in mortality—until the Judgment Day, when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Christ (see Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10; D&C 76:110). Until then, we ‘walk by faith, not by sight’” (*That Ye May Believe* , (SLC, UT: Bookcraft, 1992). 94.
 48. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (SLC, UT: Bookcraft, 1966), 593, “Pride.”
 49. Elder Carlos Asay
 50. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: Romans*, 696.
 51. Ibid.
 52. The Pauline letters have been scrutinized by textual scholars for generations. His Epistles may have fallen into at least various categories: he wrote the letter, he dictated the letter to a scribe record his dictations, he delegated a trusted disciple to record his thoughts, or he gave someone an assignment to send an Epistle. The Epistles that are most consistent and contain his name and style are: Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon. Ephesians is within the category of a “Deutero-Pauline,” or letters probably edited or written by another in Paul’s behalf. Ephesians was the only Epistle that did not fall within the literary stylometry test of authored by Paul. Unpublished research by John L. Hilton and Bruce Schaalje, Brigham Young University.

apostolic mission (Acts 18:1–11). Paul had a vision instructing him to remain in Corinth, despite the persecution: “Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee . . . I have much people in this city” (Acts 18:9–10).

Paul kept in touch with the saints in Corinth after his departure (1 Corinthians 1:11; 5:9; 7:1; 16:10–11, 17). He wrote 1 Corinthians a few years later on his next mission (probably in Ephesus during the spring of AD 57, 1 Corinthians 16:8).² It appears that he wrote to Corinth more than any other place—as there are traces of seven letters. What we refer to as “First Corinthians” was not the first.



Ancient Corinth by Ronny Siegel

CORINTH

Archeologists estimate the area had been settled for thousands of years before the Romans conquered it in 146 BC. In 44 BC Julius Caesar made it a Roman colony. In AD 27 it became the capital of the Roman province of Achaia (southern Greece). The area also enjoyed fertile soil. It became an international magnet for rich and poor peoples, including Romans, Greeks, Asians, Egyptians, and Jews. (Archeologists found a synagogue.)

Geographically, Corinth lies northwest of Athens, Greece at the strategic four-mile wide isthmus between northern and southern Greece. It was narrow enough that anciently sailors unloaded small ships and dragged them across the land, rather than sail around Greece. Nero attempted to dig a canal through the rock (but the project was not successfully finished until 1893). Romans built a citadel on Acrocorinth, which stood 1,850 feet high to defend and dominate the isthmus.

With two adjacent seaports, it had a double portion of all the vices of a port city. Their temple to the Roman goddess Venus housed one thousand priestesses who served as prostitutes to the goddess of love. Corinth also boasted a double portion of promiscuity as words and phrases developed such as:

- “to live like a Corinthian,” was to live a dissolute life.
- “to play the Corinthian,” was to visit a house of prostitution.
- “to fornicate” was to *korinthiazomai*.
- “a Corinthian girl,” meant a prostitute.
- “Corinth” became a metaphor for fertility.

When Paul visited the 200-year-old Roman city, it was a worldly boomtown in need of Christianity.

Outline of 1 Corinthians³

In the first half of the letter (1 Corinthians 1–6), Paul deals with disturbing reports that he had heard from trusted local saints—especially one sister Chloe whose home was used as their “house church” for their worship services. In the second half (1 Corinthians 7–16), Paul answers their questions. Both halves include lots of corrections, almost like verbal spankings.

FIRST HALF		SECOND HALF	
ADDRESSING DISTURBING REPORT		ANSWERS TO CORINTHIANS’ QUESTIONS	
1:1–9	Introduction	7:1–11	Value of Marriage and Intimacy
1:10–4:21	Division vs. Unity Among Members	7:12–16	Marriage with Believer vs. Unbelievers
1:10–17	Dissensions at Corinth	7:17–24	Obedience vs. Status
1:18–30	The Wisdom of the world	7:25–40	Advice on When to Marry
2:1–3:8	The Wisdom of God and His Spirit	8:1–11:1	Idol Sacrifices
3:9–23	Ye Are the Temple of God	11:2–15:58	Divine Worship, New Covenant
4:1–21	False Teachers	11:2–16	Women wearing Veils in Prayer
5:1–6	The Severity of Sexual Sins	11:17–34	The Lord’s Supper
5:7–13	Jesus as the Symbol of Passover	12–14	Spiritual Gifts
6:1–8	Lawsuits and Courts	15	Resurrection
6:9–20	Immorality	16	Conclusions: Exhortations and Salutation

1 CORINTHIANS 1

Paul's Greeting

1 Corinthians 1:1-3

1 Corinthians 1:1 “Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ” In Greek, *apostello* means, “a messenger, one sent on a mission.” Paul was sent as a representative of Jesus the Christ, but we are not told if he were a member of the Twelve or another type of apostle.⁴ Paul also mentions Sosthenes, who probably acted as his scribe (1 Corinthians 16:21). In Acts 18:17, a Jewish man in the same town, with the same name was “the chief ruler of the synagogue,” and was beaten in Ephesus. If it is the same person, then Paul knew him, and the two worked together in Ephesus.

1 Corinthians 1:2 “to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people” (NIV) or “saints” (KJV). Learning of these titles in Greek can open new importance to their meanings. The “saints” represent the Lord’s holy people who are sanctified or purified by repenting and calling on their Redeemer for the cleansing power of His atoning sacrifice for forgiveness of their sins. The saints join all disciples, apostles, and missionaries in that sanctification to take on the name of the Lord as His messengers.⁵ Paul uses it as a unifying title for purified believers.

1 Corinthians 1:3 “Grace and peace” (BSB) Greek speakers used the standard salutation, “Grace/*charis*,” as a noun. The Hebrew speakers used, “peace/*shalom*.” Paul combined these two greetings into one, “Grace and Peace” to use for both the Gentiles and Jewish converts. The greeting summarized the gospel message of Jesus’ at-one-ment.

Thanksgiving

1 Corinthians 1:4-9

1 Corinthians 1: 4-7 I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus” (NIV) Paul begins with a heart full of thanksgiving. But unlike his earlier letter to the Thessalonians, Paul does not

Christ and the Twelve Apostles by Taddeo di Bartolo, ca. 1400. Image via the Met Museum.



mention the Corinthian saints' fruits of faith, love, and righteousness. This audience had not enjoyed that level of spiritual gifts.

1 Corinthians 1:8 “in the day of our Lord” Paul used “day” to mean the “time of Salvation.” In this sense, it can refer to the Second Coming of our Savior.

1 Corinthians 1:9 “God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (NIV) Paul mentions the name Christ nine times in this introduction! This emphasis becomes a prelude to the later discussion on the need for unity, not factions among those who are baptized in His name.

Church Divided over Leaders

1 Corinthians 1:10–1:17a

1 Corinthians 1:10 “I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord . . . that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought” (NIV). Paul starts off with an urgent plea (just slightly less than a command) for unity. Though the KJV uses “brethren,” Paul’s regular use implied that he includes sisters. Paul calls on the authority of “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” as the voice of the letter (Remember, “Christ” is the Greek for Messiah, meaning, “anointed”).⁶ This is the tenth reference to Messiah/Christ so far in the epistle.

1 Corinthians 1:11 “My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you” (NIV) Paul must have known that her “house-church” had a trusted reputation among the saints to have acknowledged the source of his delicate and negative information. Paul has probably developed respect for Chloe and her household during his eighteen-month-long stay in Corinth on his second mission. We learn that she was trustworthy as a respected source of information, that her home could house several members for worship, and that she could afford parchment (or something for letters) and servants to carry messages to Paul.

1 Corinthians 1:12–13 “. . . every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ” All of Paul’s epistles mention the ideal of unity. A divided church violates Christ’s will (John 17:11, 18, 20–21). These divisions may have been within, or between, multiple house-churches in Corinth. Cephas refers



to the Apostle Peter (rock). We are introduced to Apollos, the Alexandrian Jew, “an eloquent man,” who was well versed in the scriptures in Acts 18:24–26. When he came to Ephesus, he “taught diligently” in the Jewish synagogue “the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.” But the dynamic missionary couple, Aquila and Priscilla, taught him, and then sent him to Corinth on a mission. There Apollos exhorted, “mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ” (Acts 18:27–28). Apollos’ labor at Corinth helps us date this letter. Later in Titus 3:13, Apollos continues his faithful work in the church.

1 Corinthians 1:14–17a “**I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius . . . also the household of Stephanas . . . Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel**” Paul is not reducing the importance of *baptism*, but only *who* baptized them (see 1 Corinthians 12:13; 16; 18). It sounds as if the Corinthians may have claimed prominence or possibly promoted factions depending on who baptized them. Paul clarifies that he spent most of his time preaching—and only occasionally baptized. He remembers especially three baptisms—each of whom was mentioned again in the New Testament: 1) “Crispus,” a leader of the local synagogue in Corinth (Acts 18:8), 2) “Gaius,” (Acts 19:29; 20:4; Ro 16:23; 3 John 1:1) and 3) Stephanas and his household (1 Corinthians 16:15, 17).

Christ Crucified is God’s Power and Wisdom

1 Corinthians 1:17b–19

1 Corinthians 1:17b “. . . **preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect**” Coming from a capital of elocution, the city of Tarsus, Paul knew the difference between eloquent philosophy and the Spirit of God that penetrated hearts. He chose to only teach with the latter as he taught the doctrine of our Redeemer. Preaching the cross testified that Jesus was the Son of God and unjustly killed. Then as part of God’s plan, God rose Him up on the third day. Likewise, we can defeat the terror of the world. To the secular mind, death is the greatest power over morality, but God is mightier than death. God raised his Son from the grave, and moreover, will raise all life from the dead.

1 Corinthians 1:18 “**message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God**” As a missionary in Corinth, Paul had to deal with the Greek philosophy that taught: “it was impossible for the divinity to be overcome by weak and fallible men. A divine being could not suffer as men do, and therefore it was unthinkable that a Son of God, a being with divine characteristics, could endure death like a criminal.”⁷ Consequently, the claim that the Son of God was tortured and died through crucifixion as a common crook was “foolishness.” Notwithstanding, it was still the most crucial message in the universes. Paul testifies that God’s power and Spirit would bless those who receive this saving message.

1 Corinthians 1:19 “**I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent**” Paul cites Isaiah 29:14 from the Greek Septuagint. (Paul probably did not have his own private

set of scripture scrolls, but as a wealthy man, perhaps he had one or two favorite scripture scrolls/books.) He and other biblical writers either used a copy from the synagogue or more likely, quoted it from memory (like most well educated Jewish boys did).

Isaiah prophesied that God would humble those who claimed to be wise—or use only their mind (“prudent”). Paul emphasizes the word, “wise/*sophos*,” which shares roots in “philosophy,” because it was valued so highly in that culture. In the last phrase, “prudent” means, “the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate” (NIV), or “the cleverness of the clever I will set aside” (NASB). This warning against false teachers sounds similar to 2 Nephi 28:9, “there shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false and vain and foolish doctrines, and shall be puffed up in their hearts, and shall seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord; and their works shall be in the dark.”

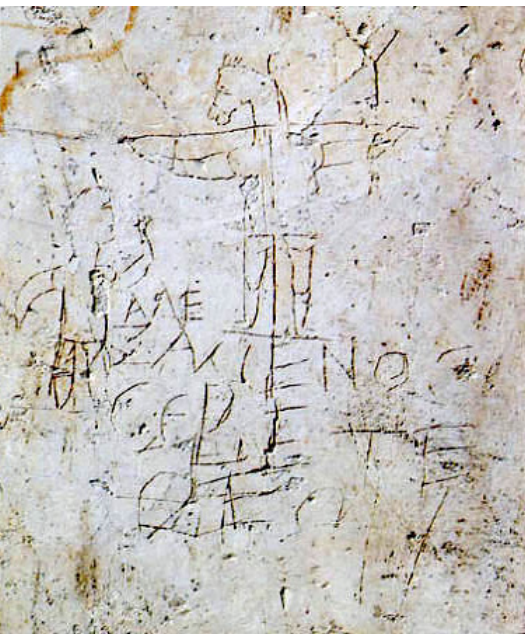
The Septuagint (LXX) was the translation of the Law, Prophets, Writings, and Apocrypha into Greek. It was used extensively at the time of the New Testament. The process began in Alexandria in the third century BC by seventy-two elders (six from each of the twelve tribes, according to Philo of Alexandria) and finished in 132 BC.

The Foolish to Shame the Wise

1 Corinthians 1:20-1:31

1 Corinthians 1:20–23 “the world through its wisdom did not know . . . God” (BSB) Although it may seem foolishness to the learning of the world—Jews wanted a political sign of their conquering Messiah, Gentiles wanted “wisdom/*sophie*/philosophy”—but Paul boldly proclaimed that God will save those that believe in Jesus as their Savior. In the overall context, Paul asked his audience to go beyond human reasoning and secularism to seek spiritual teaching and learning. “Preaching” can also be translated as, “the proclamation” (AB) or “*what we preach*” (RSV).

The Jews expected a conquering Messiah who would reveal Himself by signs in the sky and on the earth and inaugurate a glorious kingdom, powerfully sweeping away all wicked who opposed God. To proclaim that their promised King had come as a poor builder who broke their laws and traditions, was crucified, and died, was offensive to the Jews and Gentiles. In the Roman parlance of the day, crucifixion was “the slave’s punishment,” which labeled Jesus in the lowest social class.⁸ The Judeo-Greco-Roman world rationalized that “Jesus could not have been God’s promised agent since he was maltreated, scorned, and put to death as a lawbreaker.”⁹ The worldly expectations sought a more superior god than Jesus of Nazareth. But Paul denounces their philosophical expectations and calls for humility to accept what they had called, “foolishness.” To join the saints and come unto Christ requires meekness. That “unity requires humility.”¹⁰



The Alexamenos Graffiti, ca. AD 200. This inscription highlights how the Greco-Roman world disparaged death by crucifixion, and mocked Christians for their belief in a crucified God. The graffiti depicts a man, presumably Alexamenos, standing next to a crucified donkey in worship. This inscription reads something to the effect of “Alexamenos worships [his] God.” Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

1 Corinthians 1:24–25 “To those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God . . . wiser than human wisdom, and . . . stronger than human strength” (NIV) Those who are called by God and build faith in Jesus as their Savior will prove to have more power and strength through the cleansing of the atonement, the gifts of the Spirit, the sanctification of Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:26 Brothers and sisters, think . . . [how] God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong” (NIV) The highly educated, powerfully privileged, prosperous businessmen, and government officials rarely accept the gospel. In our world, “reason knows little of the eternal dimension.”¹¹

1 Corinthians 1:27–30 “God chose the lowly things . . . so that no one may boast before him . . . that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (NIV) These verses answer the questions: “Why does God use the weak to confound the wise? Why do only the humble (KJV, “base”) turn to God?” God wants to teach humility so people can see their need for redemption. God blesses the humble with holiness. The Book of Mormon also teaches that “there is opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11). To all good, Satan finds a counterfeit to detour and distract mortals from recognizing truth, and eventually from recognizing God.

1 Corinthians 1:31 “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord” (NIV) The KJV verb, “glory,” is also understood figuratively, as to live with God-given confidence. That confidence is built on charity, humility, and trust. It offers the perspective that all in life will turn our thanks to our Savior.

1 CORINTHIANS 2

The Wisdom of God

1 Corinthians 2:1–9

1 Corinthians 2:1–6 “so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom . . .” (NIV) Paul continues to build on his previous message by sharing his own personal experience. Paul has the perspective of knowing both the world’s wisdom and God’s power.

“so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power” (NIV). Paul’s example allowed the Corinthian saints (and we readers) to see what he means by “God’s wisdom.” He explains his meaning of the gospel as the demonstration of God’s wisdom and power and elaborates on it in the next three sections.

1 Corinthians 2:7 “which God foreordained before the ages for our glory” (BSB). The gospel plan was in place before time came to the earth. We get a feel for the translators’ understanding of God by the way they translate this verse: “God ordained” (KJV), or “God destined” (NIV), or “God predestined” (NASB), or “God had planned” (GWT). The Greek word, *“proorizó,”* can represent all of these meanings. This is why modern revelation is so valuable to understand the forethought and liberality of God who does not coerce or force human action; “. . . prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works; in the first place being left to choose good or evil” (Alma 13:3; also 16:14–15). We believe that all are called but only those who choose to follow honor their foreordained calling to demonstrate God’s power through His Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2:9 “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” This beautiful, motivating promise, is actually a mosaic of several phrases from Old Testament scriptures (i.e. Isaiah 64:4; 52:15; 65:17; and Jeremiah 3:16). The early church father, Origen stated that Paul’s quote came from the “Apocalypse of Elijah” (1st century).¹²

The Spirit of Revelation

1 Corinthians 2:10–3:3

1 Corinthians 2:10 “God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit” The source of divine revelation and truth is God’s Spirit. Paul does not want anyone to be confused with philosophy or the Gnostics (who claimed they alone knew deep things). God alone can reveal even deeper things through His Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2:11–12 “no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God . . . [to] understand what God has freely given us” (BSB) Paul defines the human spirit in contrast to God’s Spirit. Humans cannot receive revelation without a connection with God. Our Heavenly Father wants us to understand the “mysteries” or His eternal nature and plan. This learning can only come from the Spirit witnessing to us either personally, or by prophets (living or recorded in scriptures). Paul reviews the power of the Holy Spirit in the next half of the chapter.

1 Corinthians 2:13 “we speak . . . in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words” (BSB) The Spirit’s language is Truth. It can sometimes be heard through “spiritual words,” but more often than not, in thoughts and feelings. Learning that language requires asking, seeking, humility, and regular repentance. We who seek to have the constant companionship of the Spirit to receive heavenly learning and direction, must

act like a blind person holding onto the leash of a seeing eye dog. As we are blind to heaven, it requires that we never let go of that leash to heaven. We cannot offend the Spirit through unholy thoughts or disobedience and must follow where the Spirit leads us.

1 Corinthians 2:14–15 “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit” Tyndale and KJV use, “Natural man” and the RSV, “unspiritual.” The prophet Joseph Smith used this biblical couplet when he translated Mosiah 3:19, “the natural man is an enemy to God” (also see Alma 26:21).¹³

1 Corinthians 2:16 “who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ” Paul uses this same quote later when he wrote (or dictated) Romans 11:34. Both paraphrased Isaiah 40:13, from the LXX. Having “the mind of Christ” requires that disciples follow Him in their thoughts and desires. In this case, it also witnessed that Paul, as an apostle, had directed the church as Christ had wanted.

1 CORINTHIANS 3

1 Corinthians 3:1–3 “Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food” (NIV) Paul claims that he only taught the saints in Corinth with spiritual “milk” because they were babes in their understanding of Christ. He denounces their worldly attitudes of jealousy, envy, quarreling, and strife. Paul used the same metaphor of milk as baby food in the book of Hebrews when he wrote: “such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat . . . But strong meat belongeth to them . . . [who] discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:12, 14).

Building the Church on Jesus’ Foundation

1 Corinthians 3:4–15

1 Corinthians 3:4–5 “Who then is Apollos? And . . . Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord has given to each” (BLB) Paul brings up the problem of divisions again with the reminder that missionaries, leaders, and saints are merely ambassadors of Christ. When we choose to join the Lord’s church, we covenant to become His “servants” or “ministers” (KJV). When we do so, God “assigned to each his task” (NIV).

1 Corinthians 3:6–9a “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase” Paul uses the metaphor of agriculture to describe the church’s growth when the saints work in conjunction with the Lord’s principles.

1 Corinthians 3:9b–13 “foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” Paul compares the church to a building with the foundation stones as Jesus the Christ. Each member represents a different type of building material, starting with the most precious stones down to stubble (which will burn easily).

Image by Johannes Plenio via Pixabay.

1 Corinthians 3:14–15 “If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. [But] if any man’s work shall be burned . . . he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” Paul uses fire either with a refining message (“refined us like silver” Psalms 66:10), or with an eschatological tone, possibly referring to the fire burning at the last day as described in Revelation 8:7 (which Paul thought was eminent).



Ye Are Temples Of God

1 Corinthians 3:16–21

1 Corinthians 3:16–17 “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” Paul moves his analogy one step further. He identifies the building that the saints had been building as God’s House or Temple. In the Old Testament, when the tabernacle and Temple were received as God’s house they were filled with His Spirit as represented as a cloud

Picture of the Sapporo Temple of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by Tomoyuki Miyauchi.
Image via Wikimedia Commons.



by day and pillar by night (Numbers 14:14; Isaiah 4:5) Think about what the Temple meant to the Jews—it was the holiest place on earth, the means of fulfilling the law which brought them salvation. The Temple was the House of God, a place where God’s Spirit was found.

Paul explains that the saints also had that potential. If their hearts and minds housed the Spirit, they could become a temple of God. As the saints worked on building the kingdom, they were actually working on becoming more Christlike and worthy of the companionship of the Spirit. God’s Spirit can dwell in our houses/bodies, if we keep them undefiled. Paul turns that around to talk about the worth of a soul. But he returns to elaborate on the temple theme in 1 Corinthians 6:19.

1 Corinthians 3:19–21 “Let no one deceive himself . . . Therefore stop boasting in men. All things are yours” (BSB) Paul attempts to teach that things of this world are not worth fighting or living for—but blessings of God are greater all those other things. Between these two warnings, Paul quotes two more Old Testament scriptures: “He catches the wise in their craftiness” (Job 5:13), and “The LORD knows the thoughts of man, that they are futile” (Psalm 94:11).

1 Corinthians 3:23 “Ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s” As Jesus is the One who bought us back from death and damnation, He is our Redeemer, and we are His. Whether or not we fully understand our dependence on Him in mortality, when we take a cosmic view of the plan, we are His. It is beautiful to think of the price He paid for our immortality. He also promises us even more if we will align our allegiance to serve Him, thus becoming like Him. As Paul describes the Godhead in these verses as three unified individuals, so He challenges the saints to become unified under their names to join them.

1 CORINTHIANS 4

Christ’s Servants

1 Corinthians 4:1–5

1 Corinthians 4:1 “. . . regard us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (BSB) The word “*ministers*” (KJV) is “servants,” and emphasizes the relationship between Paul, Apollos, Peter, and Jesus. God has asked them as His servants to teach the gospel and explain the mysteries. With so many slave-servants in the Roman Empire (one-third of the population), I presume his audience understood the ramifications of servitude better than we do.

Jesus entrusted the apostles with the administration of the “mysteries of God.” In Strong’s Concordance, “*mystery/mysterion*” represents “a secret, of which initiation is necessary.”¹⁴ The mysteries may have included tem-

ple ordinances. In this Epistle, Paul refers to special prayers where women must veil their faces, eternal marriages where couples are joint heirs, and baptisms that are efficacious for the dead (1 Corinthians in 11:2–11; 15:29). All these would be included as necessary initiations, or saving ordinances in the restored church. In other letters, we also find evidence of washing, anointing, clothing, and receiving new names (Ephesians 6:11–15; Hebrews 1:9, 14; 5:1–6; 7:1–10:22; 1 John 20:27; Revelation 3:12; etc.).

1 Corinthians 4:2–5 “It is required of stewards that they be found faithful”

A “*steward*” was an entrusted servant who administered his master’s business or property. The steward devoted his time, ability, and energy to his master’s interests, not to

his own. To serve as one of Christ’s stewards, faithfulness is required. The Lord knows the integrity of His stewards and is their judge (not by the Saints or the world). There are constant judgments made by the Holy Spirit and Christ’s final judgment on judgment day (John 5:22; 8:16; 9:39; etc.). As Paul pleads for less criticism of the leaders, it sounds like the prophet Job’s lament, “my conscience agrees that I am innocent” (Job 27:6, CEV). Only the Lord has the authority to judge Paul because he is Paul’s master.

1 Corinthians 4:5 “expose the motives of the heart” (NIV) In the ancient world it was thought that people’s “understanding” and “will” belonging to the “*heart*.” So, God will disclose the purposes of each person’s thoughts, and most important the sincere desires of the heart, on His judgment day.

Do Not be So Proud and Judgmental

1 Corinthians 4:6–13

1 Corinthians 4:6 “you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other” (NIV)

Paul harkens back to 1 Corinthians 1:12 (“I follow Paul . . . Apollos . . . Cephas” ESV) and says not to feel so proud of one leader that it comes at the expense of another. He asks the Corinthians not to feel “**puffed up**” or “inflated” with an attitude of “pride” rather than charity, cooperation, mutual respect, and forgiveness.



The first mural fresco in the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii. It is thought these frescoes depict the initiation of a young woman into a Greco-Roman mystery religion. This fresco depicts the reading of the rituals. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Paul enjoyed a friendly relationship with Apollos and Peter; he was not criticizing them (only his argumentative audience). He asked the Corinthians to “not think above that which is written” nor to live according to the scriptures (meaning books of the Old Testament).

1 Corinthians 4:7 “who makes you so superior? What do you have that you did not receive?” (BSB) Paul asks if they felt so superior that they could criticize their leaders and claim that one was better than another? He also refers to the fact that they received their strengths and weaknesses as gifts from God. So, even in their strengths they should not boast, but receive them humbly to do God’s work.

1 Corinthians 4:8–9 “Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us!” (NIV) Paul speaks ironically. He asks if they really thought that they did not need guidance from the apostles. Or, if they had been raised to be kings in God’s kingdom without the probationary testing and persecutions that Paul had endured. As the church leaders endured much persecution, Paul compares himself (and possibly Peter and Apollos) to “*men sentenced to death*,” like condemned criminals at a spectacle.

1 Corinthians 4:10 “. . . we *are* weak, but ye *are* strong; ye *are* honourable, but we *are* despised . . .” Paul sets up an inverse relationship between himself and the Corinthian Christians. In their prideful state, the Corinthians are looking down upon the leader’s advice as foolish and weak. (Do you see that today?)

1 Corinthians 4:11–12a “Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted” Paul reminds them that he was still living as a hungry homeless man while serving God as a missionary. His reference to working with his own hands referred to tent or leather working (see 9:15–18; 2 Corinthians 11:7–11; 12:13–15; 1Thessalonians 2:9; Acts 20:34; etc.).

1 Corinthians 4:12b–13 “When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly” (NIV) Paul paraphrases Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:39–45). This suggests that Jesus’ sayings had been recorded and were already circulating before the Gospels were written. “Defamed” or slandered by the Judaizers (Jewish-Christians who wanted all converts to live the Law of Moses).

Paul’s Warning

1 Corinthians 4:14–21

1 Corinthians 4:14–16 “I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children” (NIV) Paul stops teasing and warns the Corinthians of their faulty ideas. He asks them to remember his role as their spiritual “father.” The KJV “followers of me” is more often translated, “imitate me/*mimétés*,” meaning to follow his example. Interpreting this in Paul’s immediate context gives evidence that Paul does not intend to usurp Jesus’ role, but as their missionary, or spiritual father figure, he sets an example for them (1 Corinthians 3:4–15; 4:1; etc.).

1 Corinthians 4:17–21 “I have sent you Timothy . . . But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord is willing” (BSB) Paul sent Timothy previously to help restore order in the Corinthian church, and Paul hopes to come himself. But he wonders, if he goes, will they need a spanking? Or, will they have repented by then?

1 CORINTHIANS 5

The Severity of Sexual Sins

1 Corinthians 5:1–6

1 Corinthians 5:1 “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you” It is not surprising to find in a city like Corinth that was known for its sexual lewdness, that new church members had challenges in this area. The KJV translates “fornication,” but the Greek word, “*porneia*,” included all illicit sexual behavior. A stipulation against sexual immorality was also one of the four areas that the Jerusalem Council wanted all Gentile-Christians to adopt from the Law of Moses (Acts 15:20). The text sounds like the Corinthian saints were so tolerant and excepting that they did not draw the line at serious immoral offenses denounced by God.

1 Corinthians 5:2–6 “I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present . . .” (BSB) Paul feels inspired to condemn the sin of incest even at a distance (Leviticus 18:6–8, 29). He advocates for excommunication for those who broke serious moral laws so that the sinners could begin repenting. It is actually better for the sinner’s eternal good to pay the consequences and repent in hopes of regaining the companionship of the Spirit again. The image of leaven in the bread was used by Jews for pride, puffing up. Forgiveness is so glorious, that it is worth the cost of repentance.

Jesus as the Symbol of Passover

1 Corinthians 5:7–13

1 Corinthians 5:7 “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (NIV) Paul connects this wonderful paschal lamb symbol to Jesus as the fulfillment of the Passover bones (Lev 23:5–8). The Law of Moses designated first born, male lambs as the vicarious recipients of the sins of the offerors and of Israel (Leviticus 5:15–16). The Passover lambs were also unblemished with no broken bones (Exodus 12:5). The animal offerings typified Jesus’ passion—from Gethsemane to Golgotha. Sin-offerings “point[ed] to the great and last sacrifice . . . the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal” (Alma 34:14).

The night following the Passover Seder, the Children of Israel began their week long Feast of Unleavened Bread. Paul builds on that image of the leaven representing pride/sin and asks them to “Get rid of the old yeast.” Everything with leaven was removed from their homes (Exodus 12:15). That practice represented the absence of corruption and pride connected with the unblemished lamb.

1 Corinthians 5:8 “Keep the feast, not with old . . . but with . . . sincerity and truth” The “feast” may have meant more than the Passover; it may have also been the weekly Lord’s Supper. The early Christians renewed their covenants and remembered the Savior’s Passion and Resurrection during their weekly remembrance of the Lord’s Last Supper (sacrament).

1 Corinthians 5:9–11 “I wrote unto you in an epistle . . . but now I have written . . .” This is one of the evidences mentioned at the beginning of Paul’s multiple letters that are no longer available nor canonized.

1 Corinthians 5:12–13 “God judgeth” Paul clarifies that he did not judge non-Christians in their sexual life, but only those who had made baptismal covenants. Within the church, Paul calls for regulation and keeping a standard of moral integrity. He also encourages the saints to not allow sinners to partake of the ordinance, so they will not be held accountable. Later in this letter Paul builds on this warning that a sinner who partakes “*unworthily* is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:27, 29).

1 CORINTHIANS 6

Settle Lawsuits Among Believers

1 Corinthians 6:1–8

1 Corinthians 6:1–8 “The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means . . . you yourselves cheat and do wrong, even against your own brothers!” (BSB) Paul asks the Corinthian saints to suffer wrongs rather than go to the Gentles to settle disputes between their fellow saints. He is exasperated that they cannot work out their disputes, especially because he knows they think that in the future they will be called on to judge angels and the world (1 Corinthians 6:2–3; Daniel 7:22). Elder Joseph F. Smith explained how this will be possible:

Because the resurrected, righteous man[kind] has progressed beyond the pre-existent or disembodied spirits, and has risen above them, having both spirit and body as Christ has, having gained the victory over death and the grace, and having power over sin and Satan... He possesses keys of power, dominion and glory that the angel does not possess. . . . [until] passing through the same ordeals and proving equally faithful.¹⁵

Sexual Immorality

In the next several verses of chapters six and seven, Paul addresses two groups who had opposite ideas regarding sexuality. It appears that he first addresses the Libertines who felt everything was permissible, particularly in sexuality (1 Corinthians 6:9–13). Then Paul answers the ascetics’ questions. They depreciated all sexual relations of every kind (1 Corinthians 7:1–11). Their extreme ideas may have developed in reaction to the Libertines.

Repent

1 Corinthians 6:9-13

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 “the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God . . . But you were washed, you were sanctified” (BSB) Paul’s list of sins that disqualify one from heaven is similar to the lists found in D&C 76. Yet, with the Redemption of the Son of God, even these sinners can be cleansed, justified, and sanctified. God prepared His Son’s atoning sacrifice for repentant seekers, and the Spirit executes that cleansing on an individual basis offering forgiveness to each returning prodigal.

1 Corinthians 6:12-13 “Some of you say . . .” (CEV) Paul turns to a few statements—like a question answer—to correct the false ideas expressed by members of the Corinth congregations. He answers each one with a warning.

- “We can do anything we want to.’ But I tell you not everything is good for us” (CEV)
- “Foods for the belly and the belly for foods,” but God will destroy both (BLB)

The Scandal of Fornication

1 Corinthians 6:14-20

1 Corinthians 6:14 “the body is not intended for sexual immorality, but for the Lord” (BSB) Since sexual immorality was rampant within the Corinthian culture, many of the issues Paul deals with had something to do with this problem. Paul returns to his attack against sexual sins—this time in the context of agency or freedom. “Freedom does not mean license to do what one wants without any regard for one’s obligations”¹⁶ The body that Christ paid so high a price for, should be used for His work, to honor and help Him.

1 Corinthians 6:15-18 “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then . . . unite them with a prostitute? Never!” (BSB) Paul pleads with the saints to “flee from fornication.” Sexual immorality



hurts the person's own body—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. He reminds the Corinthian Christians that Christ bought them back, He carried their sins on His body, thus the saints are to become one with Him: “The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him” (1 Corinthians 6:17, NASB). Certainly, our God-given bodies should not be prostituted with a perverted counterfeit or harlot.

In light of the restored Gospel, the ability to unite to create life is a God-given gift that may carry on into the next life for those who desire it with all their hearts. This is one of God's greatest gifts. Yet, sadly, in our culture as it was in Corinth, that is not appreciated, and in fact, it is profaned in the worst ways. Sexual immorality is one of those principles that Satan works the hardest at debasing and abusing because God holds it in the highest regard. The devil has counterfeited and corrupted it to the degree that chastity is no longer recognizable as one of God's most precious gifts.

1 Corinthians 6:19 “**Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which* is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?**” This is another detrimental outcome of breaking the law of chastity—the Spirit will leave. Those who had been baptized, confirmed, and washed clean through the Savior's body and then turned to sexual sin have cheapened the gift, and lost the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 6:20 “**For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body**” We are not our own—someone else has paid a high price for our lives. The ransoming of humanity by Jesus was that price. Those who adulterate their covenants and prostitute their bodies do demean His gift. Our bodies should be used to enter God's service, not Satan's. This is Paul's sternest chapter against immorality, while at the same time, one of his most generous about repentance. Christ's invitation is to come unto Him to be cleansed; the invitation “is not condemnation but change.”¹⁷

CHAPTER 7

BEGINS SECOND HALF OF EPISTLE: ANSWERS TO CORINTHIANS' QUESTIONS

Paul next turns to answer the questions he received from the Corinthian saints. It appears that Paul received a letter or had some communication from church members in Corinth with several questions. When he addresses other questions, he often begins, “*now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me.*” Six of the questions start with, “*now concerning*” or “*now touching.*”

- 7:1 Marriage and divorce
- 7:25 Virginity
- 8:1 Food offered to idols
- 12:1 Spiritual gifts
- 16:1 Collection of donations for Jerusalem
- 16:12 Apollos next visit to Corinth

The context also suggests that Paul answered other questions without that identical introductory phrase:

- 7:17 What about church callings and status?
- 9:1 What is apostolic authority?
- 11:2 Why do women have to veil their heads?
- 15:1–53 Was Jesus’ body resurrected as well as His spirit?

Questions About Marriage

Corinthians 7:1–9

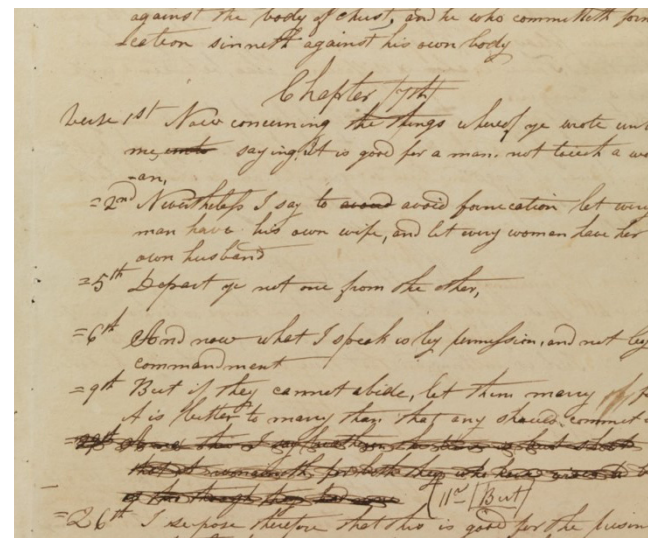
Joseph Smith taught that chapter 7 was incomplete, and written for a special circumstance of missionary work. Note the JST in the following picture, most of which are included in our LDS footnotes for chapter 7 in verses 1, 2, 5, 9, 29–33, 36, and 38.¹⁸

Text

1 Corinthians 7:1 “Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me, saying . . .” (JST) The prophet Joseph’s inspired change—which explained that 1 Corinthians 7:1 was a quotation

from the Corinthians’ letter to Paul—is consistent with many modern translations and a statement from the early church father, Origen (ca. 184–253).¹⁹ We do not have the full dialogue here, only a portion of their question. However, Joseph taught that the key to understanding the Bible is to look at the question that brought on the message. So knowing that their question was, “It is good for a man not to touch [or “have sexual relations” NIV] with a woman?” helps understand Paul’s response. It gave evidence that he disagreed strongly with their question, and other “anti-physical” agendas.

1 Corinthians 7:2 “Nevertheless, I say, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband” (JST) As mentioned earlier, “fornication/pornea” in Greek referred to all forms of immorality. We need to read this in context of all things we know about Paul. In the New Testament, he speaks positively of marriage throughout his letters. By studying it all we get a better picture of his viewpoint



(see Romans 13:9; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 11:11; Ephesians 5:21–6:4; Colossians 3:18–21; 1 Timothy 2:15). As a strict Pharisee (Acts 26:5), Paul would have valued marriage and his marriage would have been arranged and performed at around age 18 (girls were younger, age 13–15).²⁰ Rabbis at the time taught, “a man who does not marry by the age of twenty has sinned.”²¹ If a Roman man were still single by age twenty-five, or a woman by age twenty, they had to pay an extra state tax.²² The early Church Father, Clement of Alexandria (ca. AD 150–215), claimed that Paul was married to the “yolk fellow” of Philippians 4:2. Furthermore, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul knew the plan of Salvation, and the eternal importance of marriage (1 Corinthians 11:11).²³

1 Corinthians 7:3–4 “Husbands and wives should be fair with each other about having sex” (CEV) The KJV word “benevolence” is also translated, “conjugal rights” (RSV) and “his marital duty” (NIV).²⁴ Paul is candidly positive about intimate relations in marriage. Later he counters the ascetics and teaches that marriage is not a sin (7:28).

1 Corinthians 7:5–6 “Depart not one from the other, except it be with consent from a time . . .” (JST) Paul is still talking about the importance of sexual intimacy in marriage. Other translations read: “do not refuse” (RSV, JB), or “do not deprive” (NIV). Paul gives his own opinion on making an exception of abstinence for a season, “for fasting and prayer.” A period of abstinence was also allowed in the Jewish Mishnah between one week and a month. The prophet at Joseph Smith thought Paul answers a question specifically about missionaries here.

“that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency” the KJV word “*incontinency*” is usually translated, “lack of self-control.”

1 Corinthians 7:7 “each of you has your own gift from God” (NIV) He speaks of each having a “proper gift of God,” and shortly thereafter addresses callings in the church (1 Corinthians 7:17–24). Could Paul’s personal ideas on abstinence be directed specifically to those with callings of missionary service? Paul speaks from his own views, “I myself,” as at that time he served as a missionary and special witness of the Lord. The Corinthians knew what Paul’s marital stance was at the time, but sadly, we do not.

1 Corinthians 7:8 “Now to the unmarried and widows . . . as I am” (BSB) Most writers on this verse assume that Paul was a widow, or living apart from his wife while on this mission. In either case, at this time, he lived a celibate life.

1 Corinthians 7:9 “But if they cannot *abide*, let them marry: for it is better to marry than *that any should commit sin*” (JST) The JST and the Greek text change the KJV “contain” to “abide” or self-control. The KJV “burn” specifically infers sexual “passion” (NIV, RSV). Jews taught that if one fell into “fornication”/*pornea* (also meant adultery, pornography, etc.), they would burn in Gehenna/hell. Some Jews at the time of the NT put



extreme restraints around the law of chastity, like: “whosoever multiplies conversation with a woman . . . will in the end inherit Gehenna” As a rabbi walked along a road and saw a woman and said, “Hurry up and get in front of Gehenna’ (i.e. get in front of that woman so that out of sight, she may also be out of mind.)”²⁵ Paul’s example was just the opposite. He, like Jesus, interacted with women regularly and honored them.

Divorce

1 Corinthians 7:10–11

1 Corinthians 7:10–11 **A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife**” (NIV) Paul changes his own opinion, to quote Jesus’ commandment against divorce (Mark 10:2–10). In the ideal situation, if a wife or husband divorced, the next best thing was to remain single or else go back to their spouse. This is not protocol for our day. Latter-day prophets allow divorced people who are faithful to their covenants to re-marry anyone they choose in the temple.

Mixed Marriages

1 Corinthians 7:12–16

1 Corinthians 7:12–13 **“If a brother has a wife . . . [or] a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him”** (NIV) Again Paul returns to his personal counsel (not a commandment from the Lord). This discussion probably stemmed from a question that the Corinthian saints asked him, about marriages when only one spouse converts to Christianity. He encourages them to bless each other by remaining married, and hopefully the good example of the believer would help the unbelieving spouse.

1 Corinthians 7:14 **“ . . . sanctified by the [believing] wife, and . . . husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy”** On January 25, 1832, as Joseph Smith “translated” the New Testament, he asked the Lord about this verse, and received a revelation known as D&C 74. We learn that the underlying question dealt with a Jewish parent wanting his or her son circumcised, while a Christian parent wanted that tradition “done away” as little children are “holy being sanctified through the atonement of Jesus Christ” (D&C 74:7). This restored truth was also important at the turn of the nineteenth century for American Christians, as original sin and the depravity of man pervaded their view of children as born sinful.

1 Corinthians 7:15–16 **“if the unbeliever leaves, let him go. The believing brother or sister is not bound in such cases. God has called you to live in peace”** Jesus gave one exception to avoiding divorce (Matthew 19:9; if adultery were involved). Paul also gives one exception—if a saint were married to someone that did not share their religious values, and they left the marriage, then the saint could be at “peace.” Peace is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), and a sign of the Lord’s affirmation and witness in inspiration (D&C 6:23). Thus, the apostle teaches, if your companion leaves you over your religion, you can feel at peace and maintain God’s Spirit.

1 Corinthians 7:16 **“what knowest thou, O [Christian] wife, whether thou shalt save *thy* husband? or how knowest thou, O [Christian] man, whether thou shalt save *thy* wife?”** To help understand verse 16, I add “Christian” to the wife and man.

Church Callings and Status

1 Corinthians 7:17-24

1 Corinthians 7:17 “**The Lord hath called every one, so let him walk**” We seem to have a change of subject even without Paul’s standard transition to a different question (“now concerning”). It sounds like Paul begins to address the issue of Christians who are called to the faith, or perhaps called to serve in the church (church callings come up again in verse 20). It appears that when a man became a Christian, they questioned whether or not they should be circumcised. Perhaps some Christians made a distinction between members who were circumcised and non-circumcised?

1 Corinthians 7:18 “**Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised**” In addition to the surgery to circumcise a male, there was also a surgery to disguise a circumcision. Paul says, don’t go through with either surgery (the surgery had a very high fatality rate in adult men). This verse may also have to do with the D&C 74 discussion.

1 Corinthians 7:19 “**For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision**” (RSV) The emphasis in Christianity was not the sign of circumcision, but the action of keeping God’s commandments.

1 Corinthians 7:20 “**Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them**” (NIV) Some have thought that Paul refers to “calls” as missionary callings, but I think it can be generally received as good advice: Magnify your “calling/*klesis*” wherever you serve. In Greek, *klesis*, can have a broader meaning as a call to discipleship or, “the divine invitation to embrace salvation in the kingdom of God.”

1 Corinthians 7:21 “**Were you a slave when you were called? Do not let it concern you, but if you can gain your freedom, take the opportunity**” (BSB) Broader than one’s church callings, Paul addresses our positions in life, too. He basically says, whatever station of life you are in when you become a Christian, make the most of it and be content.

As mentioned earlier, servitude saturated the Roman Empire, it was more like a Feudal system, and usually slaves had a release date.²⁶ Modern Christians may ask, why didn’t the Lord and his Apostles denounce slavery? The answer I feel is that Jesus turned the culture upside down. He valued servitude, He himself came to “minister/serve” (Mark 10:45, KJV, NIV). Instead of getting rid of servants, Jesus taught masters how to serve. Yet Paul is clear, if you are a slave, gain your freedom if possible.

1 Corinthians 7:22 “**the one who was free when called is Christ’s slave**” (NIV) or “**bondservant**” (ESV) Once Christians have joined forces with their Savior, they sign up to serve Christ. Yet, when we serve God, He blesses us with greater liberty. And if we are “free” before conversion we should realize that we need to serve the Lord.

1 Corinthians 7:23–24 “**you are bought with a price . . . abide with God**” Paul repeats 1 Corinthians 6:20 probably for emphasis. God paid the price for us through the atonement of Christ.

Advice for Virgins

1 Corinthians 7:25–38

1 Corinthians 7:25 “**Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord . . .**” or “**unmarried**” (RSV) Once again, Paul begins a section with his standard transition, to address another of the Corinthians’ questions. Even though he had not learned anything from revelation on this topic, Paul mentions our “present crisis” or impending distress (RSV). This may have related to the early church’s thought that the Second Coming would be soon, or more likely that the apostasy, a war, or persecution was imminent. Paul felt with all the immanent destructions just around the corner; this was no time for marriage. With this as his paradigm, he thought that young women and young men should focus on serving missions and preparing the kingdom instead of marriage.

1 Corinthians 7:26–29 “. . . *for a man so to remain that he may do greater good . . . For I spare you not. But I speak unto you who are called unto the ministry. For this I say, brethren, the time that remaineth is but short, that ye shall be sent forth unto the ministry. Even they who have wives, shall be as though they had none for ye are called and chosen to do the Lord’s work*” (JST) Joseph’s inspired changes may address the need for missionary service to maintain truth and hold off the apostasy. As marriages were arranged often a year or more before the event, this may have addressed engaged couples, too. In that case, the question may have been, should engaged youth who are called on a mission marry first, or serve single? And, if they were already married, should they divorce before such service?

Paul answers that whatever marital status you are in, you can serve (though he admits it is harder to serve full-time with family responsibilities). Interestingly, looking back on the history of Christianity, Catholic priests married until the 11th Century. Celibacy was encouraged in some areas from AD 400. But it was not a requirement until almost a thousand years afterward. Some see that the change came from a desire to keep the land in the hands of the church, and not be passed on through a wife or family lines. Hence, they stopped priests’ marriages. This attitude has changed the way most Christians interpret these verses.

1 Corinthians 7:31–33 “. . . **magnify your calling . . .**” Paul calls on the saints to work without extraneous cares, or “free from anxious care” (NEB). He felt that it was hard to focus on missionary work while married, “therefore there is a difference for he is hindered.” These verses have so many JST changes that a comparison is helpful.

JST 1 CORINTHIANS 7:29–33

But I speak *unto you who are called unto the ministry. For this I say, brethren, the time that remaineth is but short, that ye shall be sent forth unto the ministry. Even they who have wives, shall be as though they had none; for ye are called and chosen to do the Lord's work.*

30 And *it shall be with them who weep, as though they wept not; and them who rejoice, as though they rejoiced not, and them who buy, as though they possessed not;*

31 And them who use this world, as not *using* it; for the fashion of this world passeth away.

32 But I would, *brethren, that ye magnify your calling. I would have you without carefulness. For he who is unmarried, careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord; therefore he prevaieth.*

33 But he *who is married, careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife; therefore there is a difference, for he is hindered.*

KJV 1 CORINTHIANS 7:29–33

But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none

30 And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not;

31 And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.

32 But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord:

33 But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.

1 Corinthians 7:36 “If any man thinketh he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin *whom he hath espoused . . . let him do what he hath promised, he sinneth not, let him marry*” (JST). The message is different when we realize he was referring to engaged couples. The JST change is consistent with the RSV which translated, “*virgin*” as “*betrothed*,” and the NIV, “the virgin he is engaged to.” Paul specifically speaks to engaged people who are called on missions. Should they marry first or go? The “*man*” can also be seen as her father as in the JB, “If there is anyone who feels that it would be fair to his daughter to let her grow too old for marriage.”

1 Corinthians 7:37–38 “. . . the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will” (NIV) Paul honors personal revelation to each young couple. He encourages

engaged couples, to receive divine direction. Paul's restraint about the timing of marriage is changed a few years later when he writes to Timothy, instructing young women to marry and have children (1 Timothy 5:14).

Advice for Widows

1 Corinthians 7:39–40

1 Corinthians 7:39–40 “A woman . . . is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord” (NIV) Paul speaks of widows in particular. His statement gave freedom for widowed women to choose their spouse. At the time, most first marriages were arranged, and second marriages were dependent on age, financial situation, and social class. A widow was not bound to anyone— for the first time in her life.

As a child, her father had control over her, and that charge was transferred to her husband upon marriage. The *Mishnah* speaks of widowhood as synonymous with a woman's freedom: “A wife . . . can get her freedom by divorce, or through her husband's death.”²⁷ This freedom was not relished, though, as it often resulted in abject poverty. For this reason, most Jewesses did not remain widows for long. There were tax incentives, too. In an attempt to bolster the families among Roman citizens, Caesar Augustus enacted reforms to legally and financially pressure fertile widows and divorcees to remarry within two years.²⁸ He added a penalty tax to citizens who were widowers and divorcees who did not have at least three children.²⁹

. . . The early Christian leadership showed a particular concern for widows, which stemmed from their Master's example. All three synoptic Gospels record Jesus condemning the Jewish leaders for not caring for widows: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation” (Matthew 23:14; also see Luke 20:46–47). . . . The Twelve acknowledging the widows' neglect “in the daily ministrations” that led to the calling of seven valiant men to oversee their needs (Acts 6:1).³⁰

We see the Savior and his apostles aware and working to resolve the plight of single women in the early church.

Header Image: Oxyrhynchus 209, manuscript of Romans 1:1–7. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

1. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 93. The text block on Corinth includes information from: Bromiley, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1.773. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 513. Leadership Ministries Worldwide, *1 & 2 Corinthians: The Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible* (Chattanooga, TN: Alpha-Omega, 2003), 1. Robert L. Millet, *Studies in Scripture: Acts to Revelation* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1987), 6.178, 81, 91.
2. 1 Corinthians is one of the that textual scholars most consistently agree were written or dictated by Paul are in chronological order as written: 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon. With stylometry (a statistical analysis of word order and patters generated by computers), John L. Hilton found evidence that thirteen of the fourteen books attributed to Paul include a high probability of his word patterns—the only exception being Ephesians.
3. Outline adapted from: John W. Welch, *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 14–2
4. Paul makes a connection between his apostolic office and God's will (also in 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Collosians1:1 and 2 Timothy 1:1)
5. Dallin H. Oaks, General Conference, April 1985. "It is significant that when we partake of the sacrament, we do not witness that we take upon us the name of Jesus Christ. We witness that we are willing to do so. The fact that we only witness to our willingness suggests that something else must happen before we actually take that sacred name upon us in the most important sense....our witness relates to some future event or status whose attainment is not self-assumed, but depends on the authority or initiative of the Savior himself"
6. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: First Corinthians*, 148. The messiah was expected to rule righteously over the peoples of the world and establish a utopian society. Dating back to the time of the New Testament, the Dead Sea scrolls applied this "term to the prophet who would come to acknowledge the royal messiah and to the high priest who would offer perfect sacrifices in the messianic kingdom."
7. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: First Corinthians*, 159. "Elaborate philosophical arguments had been developed among the Greeks to demonstrate the god must be free from distress and even from influence from any source outside himself.
8. Ibid, 160.
9. Ibid.
10. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 99.
11. Ibid., 98, 100.
12. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: First Corinthians*, 176–177.
13. John L. Hilton, "On Verifying Wordprint Studies: Book of Mormon Authorship," *BYU Studies Quarterly*: 1990; Vol. 30:3, Article 15. Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol30/iss3/15> (accessed: 8/6-/9). Translators can only use their own vocabular in producing the text in their own language. Joseph felt inspired to use several biblical phrases which he was familiar with in his own translation. Every word in the Book of Mormon we find in Joseph Smith's

vocabulary. Yet his writing style is very different from Nephi, Alma, or Mormon, etc.

14. All Greek and Hebrew translations are taken from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, <https://biblehub.com/> from (accessed 8/7/19).
15. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine Selections from the Sermons and writings of Joseph F. Smith* (SLC, UT: Deseret News, 1919), 23.
16. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: 1 Corinthians*, 261.
17. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 103, 104.
18. "<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/new-testament-revision> (accessed 8/8/19)
19. Gerald L. Bray, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VII: 1–2 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 58.
20. Jacob Neusner, ed, *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 223–224.
21. *Mishnah, Kiddushin*, 29b.
22. Ken Campbell, ed., *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 144. *Mishnah, Kiddushin*, 2.1; "A man may give his daughter in betrothal while she is still in her girlhood either by his own act or by that of his agent." On girl's arranged marriages see *Mishnah, Yebamoth*, 13.1.
23. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 9–10; 42, 110, 210, 327–331, "Paul . . . knew . . . all the ordinances, and blessings [that] were in the Church."
24. The KJV is quite Victorian in its vocabulary choice, but Paul used very clear words to describe the need for intimacy in marriage for both spouses.
25. F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthian*, 68.
26. See previous notes on slavery from Matthew 19–20; Mark 10; Luke 18 and John 13–17; also see Matthew 26:13; Luke 23; etc.
27. *Mishnah, Kiddushin*, 1:1.
28. Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*, 23.
29. Jackson J. Spielvogel, *Western Civilization* 7th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson & Wadsworth, 2009), volume 1, 152; "Augustus also revised the tax laws to penalize bachelors, widowers, and married persons who had fewer than three children."
30. Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: G. P., 2015), chp 6.



1 CORINTHIANS 8–13

PAUL'S Q&A:

THE CORINTHIANS' QUESTIONS, AND PAULS' ANSWERS

In the next chapters, Paul answers more of the Corinthians saints' questions and corrects their misunderstandings. He focuses on discerning dietary choice vs. idolatry, not giving offense, following the example of the Israelite wanderings as a type of Christ and His plan, the sacredness of the sacrament, the need for the gifts of the Spirit, and the preeminence of charity (1 Corinthians 1–7 has the introduction).

1 CORINTHIANS 8

Questions About Idolatry

1 Corinthians 8:1–13

1 Corinthians 8:1 “Now concerning food offered to idols” (ESV) Paul addresses another question from their letter (7:1) about eating meat offered to idols. As background behind this question, in most cities across the Roman Empire, one bought meat from the market. The market meats had been slaughtered at the pagan temples.

1 CORINTHIANS 8–13 OUTLINE

8:1–11:1 Idol Sacrifices

11:2–16 Women Veiled in Prayer

11:17–34 The Lord's Supper

12–14 Spiritual Gifts

Animals were sacrificed to idols and then eaten at temple feasts. The priest took the surplus meat to market to sell. Jews did not buy or eat meat from gentile markets because it may have been contaminated with idolatry. The Corinthian Christians questioned this too, knowing that since an idol meant nothing, was the meat okay to eat. Their knowledge of the gospel allowed them to see beyond the cultural baggage and realize the meat was not changed or unsafe to eat. This must have been a significant problem, as Paul dedicates much space to it.

Some early saints (“the weak” as Paul calls them) put down other members who worried about idols and asserted their “knowledge” to buy the meat without fear. Paul was willing to buy meat in the market, as long as no one was offended, and he could avoid the public association with idolatry. In the middle of the verse, it appears that Paul quotes their question, “all have knowledge.” Paul corrected them, “it is love that builds up; knowledge without love puffs up or inflates or is proudful.”¹ Those Christians with knowledge of the gospel may eat the market meat, but only if it does not offend others.

1 Corinthians 8:2 “If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not” (ESV) Paul repeatedly attacked the pride of his audience, as did Jesus (Luke 11:37–54; 22:24–27). He asked them to address problems with meekness. In this case, those who thought they understood the gospel, had “knowledge,” but they offended their fellow saints. Their higher understanding of the gospel allowed them more “knowledge,” which, unfortunately, led to pride. This reminds me of a statement in *Screwtape Letters*. A demon writes to his protégé, “Your patient has become **humble**; **have you** drawn **his attention** to the fact?”²

1 Corinthians 8:3 “if anyone loves God, he is known by God” (ESV) Paul contrasts the Christian God with pagan Gods. Paul identifies our God as one who knows and loves His creations. I love Jesus’ similar message in the footnote, I “know my sheep and am known by mine” (Jn 10:14).

1 Corinthians 8:4 “we know that an idol is nothing” Idols only have the power and honor we give them. Our generation has a similar problem with idolatry. We do not have temples to Diana or Jupiter, but we have temples of sports, consumerism, drinking, gambling, pornography, entertainment, soap operas, sleazy books, laziness, food, electronics, and self-indulgence—all of which can become false worship. Anything that distracts us spiritually from our God and His work is idolatry. We need to keep our priorities clear and avoid every temple of the devil.

1 Corinthians 8:5 “There be gods many and lords many” This is often described as referring to pagan gods. But the Prophet Joseph Smith saw this phrase as coming from Paul’s beliefs in conjunction with the One great Father God. His scribes recorded, “Paul says there are Gods many and Lords many; and that makes a plurality of Gods, in spite of the whims of all men. . . . You know and I testify that Paul had no allusion to the heathen gods. I have it from God, and get over it if you can. I have a witness of the Holy Ghost, and a testimony that Paul had no allusion to the heathen gods in the text.”³

1 Corinthians 8:6 “There is but one God the Father . . . and one Lord Jesus Christ” Paul’s world was saturated with multiplying gods. His understanding of one God did not negate “the Son of God, Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:19; and 1 Corinthians 1:9; 15:28; etc.).

1 Corinthians 8:7–9 “But food does not bring us closer to God: We are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do” (BSB) The meat was not the problem; believing in idols was. The meat did not entreat God. In the pagan world, it was not even a sign of the promised Messiah. For Paul, the issue was brotherhood and charity. If someone’s behavior becomes a stumbling block to the “weak,” it is better to avoid it.

1 Corinthians 8:10–13 “when ye sin so against the brethren . . . ye sin against Christ” As Jesus’ at-one-ment has bought Christians, they should be nurturers, not offenders. Rather than focusing on the food, Paul looks at the broader picture and asks Christians to be less selfish and live, so we do not offend others. He followed Jesus’ teachings: “as ye have done it unto one of the least of these . . . ye have done *it* unto me” (Matthew 25:40). This also sounds similar to King Benjamin, “when ye are in the service of your fellow beings, ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17).

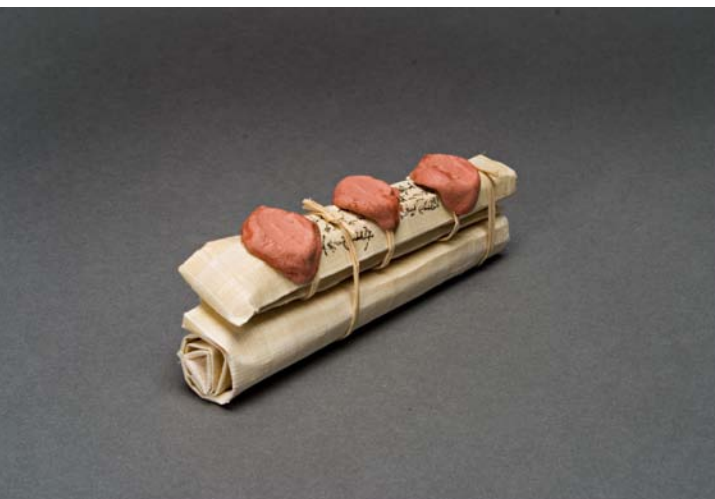


Altar that represents twelve gods of the Roman pantheon, 1st century CE. Images via Wikimedia Commons.

1 CORINTHIANS 9

Paul's Answer the Question of Apostolic Authority and use of Church Funds

1 Corinthians 9:1–2 “Am I not an apostle? . . . are not ye my work in the Lord?” The next question from the Corinthians saints deals with Paul’s authority to direct them. Paul defends his apostolic calling with the Corinthian saints as that evidence. In addition to the meaning of the Greek word “apostle/*apostolos*/sent,” Christians added a special qualification for their apostles. These were men who been called of God, seen the resurrected Savior and received a commission to testify of His resurrection (Acts 1:15–26; 22:14; Galatians 1:14–16). Paul felt as though the saints in Corinth were evidence of his missionary work and testimony.



Replica of ancient document with clay “seals” authenticating the document. Photograph courtesy of John W. Welch.

Those who were baptized were proof, or “*the seal*,” of his holy calling. What did Paul mean by this? The word “seal/*sphragis*” meant, “a seal, signet ring, the impression of a seal, that which the seal attests, the proof.” It is found sixteen-times in the New Testament—thirteen of which are in the book of Revelation (i.e. “sealed with seven seals” 5:1), and three times by Paul (i.e. “he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith” Romans 4:11). Most often it is used as a witness of who closed the document or as a witness of something that is sealed or closed for a time. With this definition, we can

understand that Paul reminded the Corinthians whom he had introduced and welcomed into the fold, that they are proof that he worked as God’s witness. They saw him use the gifts of the Spirit, heard his testimony, and felt the Spirit while he spoke.

1 Corinthians 9:3–4 “Mine answer to them that do examine me is this, have we not power to eat and to drink?” Paul tried to answer his critics’ questions about his authority and his apostolic station that allowed him to share food and housing with the saints. The word “power” (KJV) is also translated, “right” (ESV), and authority” (BLB). The broader context suggests that the question they struggled with was the housing and feeding church leaders. This is interesting in light of Acts 18:3 when it described Paul first coming to Corinth, moved in with Aquilla and Priscilla as a fellow “tentmaker . . . and he stayed and worked with them” (NIV). Repeatedly, the New Testament includes references to Paul working to provide for himself and not living off of the contributions of church members, “You yourselves know that these hands of mine have ministered to my own needs and those of my companions” (Acts 20:34; also see 1 Corinthians 4:12; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:8; etc.).

1 Corinthians 9:5 “Have we no right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas?” (BSB) He compares himself to Peter, the other apostles, and brothers of Jesus (i.e. James, Joses, Jude, and Simon, Mark 6:3). In an attempt to defend himself, Paul voices his statement regarding his marriage and family. This is our strongest evidence that he had a wife—even though earlier in this letter it sounded as if he were a widow or serving as a missionary for a period without his wife by his side (1 Corinthians 7:8). We learned of Peter’s (Cephas) marriage when Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law (Mark 1:30). The vast majority of all Jewish young men married by the time they were twenty, and young men across the Roman Empire by twenty-five, or else they had to pay an extra tax.⁴

1 Corinthians 9:6 “is it only I and Barnabas who lack the right to not work for a living?” (NIV) Paul and his first companion, Barnabas (Acts 9:27), were not serving together in Corinth, nor when Paul wrote the letter in Ephesus. It sounds as if they had plenty of means and skills, so they still chose to work for their living. This set a great example for the Saints.⁵

The Servant is Worthy of his Hire

1 Corinthians 9:7–14

1 Corinthians 9:7–9 “who serves as a soldier” (NIV) Paul likens himself to the military who received pay for their services to the state. As an apostle, because he, too, protected people and worked for them, he felt justified in receiving their financial help at times. Likewise, he gives examples of a farmer, herdsman, and the Law of Moses that states one had to make sure the oxen are fed. Certainly if God cared about His animals, He will care for His special servants (Deuteronomy 25:4 and 1 Timothy 5:18). Paul had “sown spiritual seed among” the Corinthians, but he did not “reap a material harvest” (1 Corinthians 9:11, NIV).

1 Corinthians 9:12 “If others have this right to your support, shouldn’t we have it all the more? But we did not exercise this right” (BSB) We do not know the full problem, but Paul sounds frustrated. He worked to avoid being a financial burden to the saints, “lest we should hinder the gospel,” while other leaders were financially supported. Repeatedly, Paul states that he earned his living without expressing the same exasperation (see the list in vs. 3), which suggests something else was going on here. He also says that he was not asking for any payment either (“I am not writing this to suggest that something be done for me. Indeed, I would rather die” 1 Corinthians 9:15, BSB).

1 Corinthians 9:13–14 “Don’t you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple” (NIV) Paul shares an example from the Jerusalem Temple at the time, where the priests and Levites received one-fourth of the sacrificial meat and grains as their share of the tithes for their sustenance. Jesus likewise taught “the laborer deserves his wages” (Luke 10:7). Jesus initially sent the Twelve out without purse and script, so that they would live off the people they taught (Mark 6:7–10), but this was changed at the Last Supper (Luke 22:36).

Paul the Servant to All

1 Corinthians 9:16–23

1 Corinthians 9:16–17, “When I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach . . . I am simply discharging the trust committed to me” (NIV) Paul is not bragging, rather he felt obligated to magnify his calling as an apostolic missionary. He was entrusted “with a commission” (RSV), or “stewardship” (ESV), but not necessarily a “dispensation” (KJV).⁶

1 Corinthians 9:18–19 “Though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more” Paul did not receive any local financial support from the church; he wanted to serve—which gave him freedom. Luther also used this paradox, “A Christian man is a most free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is a most dutiful servant to all, subject to all.”⁷ We can become spiritually and physically free when we submit to live within the Lord’s bounds.

1 Corinthians 9:20–23 “To the Jews I became as a Jew, . . . To those not having the law I became like one not having the law . . . I have become all things to all people” (NIV). Paul was flexible so that it helped his missionary service. We have no evidence that he flipped back and forth between beliefs, but rather in an attempt to not offend Jews, when with them, he adopted their dietary laws (i.e. extra washings, and kosher foods). Yet, he felt no compulsion to obey the Law of Moses, unless it helped his missionary service (and vice-versa for Gentiles or “those without the law”). He was a versatile missionary.

Titus Quincticus Flaminius Granting Liberty to Greece at the Isthmian Games by Jean Pierre Saint-Ours, 1780. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Run for the Eternal Reward

1 Corinthians 9:24–27

1 Corinthians 9:24–27 “Run in such a way as to get the prize” (NIV) Paul used an athletic metaphor that was very familiar to the Corinthians (as he did eleven other times).⁸ The Isthmian Games were held there every other year (from 40 BC to ca. AD 390). At these Corinthian games, only the winner of the race received a prize, but in the Christian contest, all may run (or live) and receive God’s prize if they try (D&C 76:50–70).

1 Corinthians 9:25 “Everyone who competes in the games trains with strict discipline” (BSB) Paul called on the saints to live with as much discipline and self-control (or “temperance,” KJV) as an Olympian-level athlete. The perishable wreaths used for the Isthmian games were made from parsley or wild celery, and later from pine boughs.⁹ Yet in the race of life, where we train spiritually, the prize from God is incorruptible.

1 Corinthians 9:26–27 “I do not run aimlessly . . . but I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest . . . I myself should be disqualified” (ESV). Paul’s example of disciplining his body is intense. He uses the image of a boxer. The word “discipline/*hupópiázō*” actually meant: “I strike under the eye, hence: I bruise, treat severely, discipline by hardship.” The extreme image of beating himself up or giving himself a black eye, assures his audience that he means business when he says to “subdue the body.”

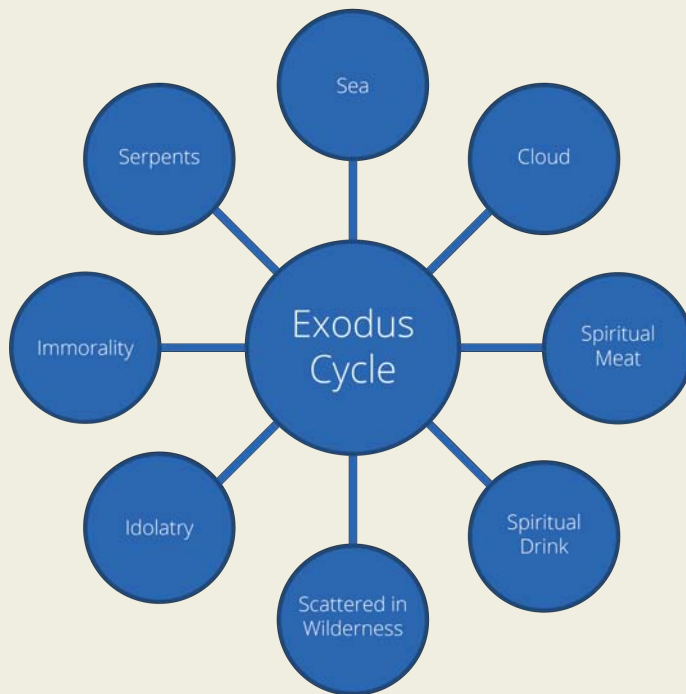
As we aim to run to the finish line, Christians live their daily lives with the goal of developing Christlike characteristics and serve Him. At the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, Joseph prayed that when the Lord comes again, we may become pure spiritual Israelites, “that our garments may be pure, that we may be clothed upon with robes of righteousness, with palms in our hands, and crowns of glory upon our heads, and reap eternal joy for all our sufferings” (D&C 109:76).

1 CORINTHIANS 10

The Exodus Cycle: Foreshadowing the Plan of Salvation

1 Corinthians 10:1–5

1 Corinthians 10:1–2 “Brothers and sisters . . . our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized . . . in the cloud and in the sea” (NIV) Earlier, Paul connects the Passover with Jesus as the Pascal lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7). In this chapter we find eight more connections between the “Exodus Cycle” and Jesus’ mortal ministry as well as a mini-Plan of Salvation. The Jews were familiar with these scripture accounts. Paul uses them as “examples” (10:6) or signs and shadows— not only to avoid idolatry, but also to testify of Jesus as the promised Messiah. His list touches on only a few of the parallels we find in the same Exodus Cycle that symbolically point us to Christ’s plan.



EXODUS CYCLE

Passover Lamb Slain

Moses called Prophet, High Priest

Crossed the Sea

Cloud by Day + Pillar of Fire

Mt. Sinai-Received the Law

Idolatry-Immortality Lust after Evil

Tabernacle¹⁰

Serpents on Staff-Look + Healed

Battle of Rephidim-raised arms
(Battle of the Dead Ones)

40 Years Wandering in Wilderness

Joshua leads into the Promise Land

FULFILLED IN CHRIST

Son of God Slain

One like unto Me, Great High Priest

Baptism

The Spirit

Sermon on the Mt- Higher Law

Temptations

Opens Veil to Holy of Holies

Suffered on Cross

Triumphed over Death-raised up
(Released Spirit Prisoners)

40 days of Fasting-Purifier

Jesus leads to Eternal Promises

PLAN OF SALVATION FOR US

At-one-ment of Jesus

Be Like Him

Baptism

Spirit's Guidance, Protection

Live the Law of the Gospel

Temptations

Temple covenants to See God

Faith in Redemption of Christ

We will be raised to Resurrection
(Immortality or Exaltation)

Probationary State

Follow Lord to Promised Heaven

Paul points out the symbolism of going through the sea as a baptism. They left their old life in Egypt (symbolic of the world and worldliness), and started anew to serve God as their King. The Israelites' physical journey became a forty-year cleansing process (Forty was the number of purifications after childbirth¹¹).

We can see their wanderings typifying our journey from our first estate through immortality, starting with Exodus 19:10–11, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day, because on that day the LORD will come.” The *Legends of the Jews*, referred to this experience as their “baptism.”¹² Yet when it was time to see the Lord, the frightened children of Israel asked Moses to go for them. They rejected this opportunity to enter into his presence and were given the lower law of the administration of angels instead.

1 Corinthians 10:3 “They all ate the same spiritual food” (NIV) Their “food/meat/*brōma*,” was described as coriander-seed like honey-wafers, but it had no name, so they called it, “*manna*/what is it?” (Numbers 11:7). This food as well as their month of meat, was divinely provided in abundance just as God’s spiritual food is given. Symbolically, it represented the “bread of life,” the Lord and His teachings.

1 Corinthians 10:4 “and drank the same spiritual drink . . . the spiritual rock that accompanied them . . . was Christ” (BSB) As Moses struck the rock and God’s gift of water flowed out, it symbolized the living waters that Jesus described to the woman at the well that sustain us eternally (Numbers 20; Jn 4). The bread and water can also symbolize the body and blood of the Savior’s atoning sacrifice as used in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

1 Corinthians 10:5 “God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness” (NIV) God *called* all the children of Israel, but many were not *chosen* because they would not soften their hearts and obey God. All of the children of Israel (but two, Joshua and Caleb), who were over twenty years old, died in the wilderness for disobedience. Paul pled with the Christians to not fall into the same tragic ending that their forefathers had. (Paul expanded on this theme in Hebrews). Symbolically, mortal life is seen as wandering in the wilderness for a purification period, as in Lehi’s Tree of Life Vision as well (1 Nephi 8).

Warnings from Israel’s Past

1 Corinthians 10:6–15

1 Corinthians 10:6–7 “Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things” (NIV) Paul had already described the Exodus stories as examples of Christian ordinances and teachings (i.e. baptism, the Spirit, etc.), and here adds a message to glean: beware of idolatry. As the children of Israel fell with the golden calf and complaining, Paul warned the Corinthians (and future audiences), of the dangers of idolatry (in its largest definition, see notes from 1 Corinthians 8:4). Paul quotes Exodus 32:6, as an apt summary of idol feasts that Corinthians attended.

1 Corinthians 10:8–10 “We should not commit sexual immorality . . . test Christ . . . [nor] complain as some of them did” (BSB) Paul references their sins of fornication, the biting serpents; and murmuring (Numbers 25:1–18; 21:5–6; 16:14, 49).

1 Corinthians 10:11–12 “these things happened to them as examples . . . as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” (BSB) Jesus was that great fulfillment. Hosea 12:10 explained that God “used similitudes by the ministry of the prophets.” God used the history of Israel as examples for future generations and to identify Jesus as the Christ (also see Mosiah 3:15; 2 Nephi 25:24, 27). Paul repeats that the history was recorded for a purpose. Later generations can learn from their lessons to not duplicate their bad examples.

1 Corinthians 10:13 “God . . . will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able” What a great empowering promise! We have an omniscient God who knows our capabilities better than we do—trust Him and overcome. Yet, many times humans succumb to their temptations from either fear, pride, or poor mental and physical habits. Fortunately, we also worship a God that gives second chances when we need to repent.



The Passage of the Red Sea by William Hole, 1925.

“God . . . will with the temptation also make a way to escape” The second half of the verse addresses our need to avoid temptations in order to escape their influence. It also addresses those times when we sin, but God provides escape plans. Through our Redeemer’s Atonement, we can find healing and cleansing.

The Sanctity of the Sacrament

1 Corinthians 10:16–21

1 Corinthians 10:16 “Is not the cup of blessing that we bless a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?” As we flee from idolatry, we can run to the source of safety and truth, our Savior. The sacrament symbols from the Lord’s Last Supper, also share symbols with the Passover tradition. The cup at the end of the meal is known as the *“cup of blessing”* (Psalm 16:5). For thousands of years, Jews have held the cup and prayed something similar to, “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe who created the fruit of the vine.” Paul ties the Passover symbols to Christ as we remember Him and “share in” (NEB) “communion of the body of Christ” (KJV).

1 Corinthians 10:17 “We are all partakers of the one loaf” (BSB) Paul emphasizes “one loaf” as a sign of spiritual unity among the saints, who strive to become one with God through the blessings of His sacrament. If we repent and take on Christ’s name, our desires can become one with His desires. This offers profound theology as a sign of spiritual unity with our God. He also wrote this to include gender, age, and national differences—all can be unified through the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 10: 18 “those who eat the sacrifices fellow partakers in the altar” (BSB) Paul reminds his audience that at the temple in Jerusalem, Israelite priests and Levites, shared the sacred sacrifice as a sacred meal with God. It shared teachings and covenants consistent with the sacrament.

1 Corinthians 10:19–21 “I do not want you to be participants with demons” (BSB) or **“devils”** (KJV) Even the Greeks and Romans had a sacred table fellowship tradition. But Paul warns them not to try to drink, eat, or live in a way that tries to combine the Lord and the devil (as the counterfeit gods in pagan worship did).

Do All to the Glory of God

1 Corinthians 10:23–11:1

1 Corinthians 10:23 “I have the right to do anything, you say—but not everything is beneficial. ‘I have the right to do anything’—but not everything is constructive” (NIV). Paul returns to the list of the saints’ questions that he quoted earlier (1 Corinthians 7:1). This verse begins with a false statement, “all things are lawful . . .” (KJV), followed with, “but.” These statements return to the ideas from 1 Corinthians 6:12, on freedom, and 8:1, on things offered to idols. These modern clarifications in the meaning are consistent with the JST: “All things are not lawfull for me, for all things are not expedient, all things are not lawfull, for all things edify not.”

1 Corinthians 10:24 “Let no man seek therefore his own, but every man another’s good” (JST). The last word in the KJV is, “*wealth*,” but it is also translated, “good” (RSV, NAS, NIV, JST), “interests” (NEB), “advantage” (JB). The idea speaks to looking out for each other’s eternal good.

1 Corinthians 10:25–26 “Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience” (BSB) The KJV, “shambles,” were the meat markets (which in Corinth, included other foods as well). Paul’s *cart blanche*: “eat whatever is sold,” demonstrated how completely emancipated Paul was from Jewish food obligations. Paul followed both Peter’s example in eating with Cornelius in Acts 11:2, and Psalm 24.

1 Corinthians 10:27–32 “If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you . . . But . . .” Paul repeats his accommodating counsel from 1 Corinthians 8, which directed the early saints to judge by the higher law of love and consideration for other’s needs. If a new convert or a pagan neighbor misunderstands your allegiance to God, then do not eat the offensive foods.

1 Corinthians 10:33 “I am not seeking my own good but the good of many” (NIV) Paul had pure motives, not trying to “please men” (Galatians 1:10) but willing to adapt in order to build the Kingdom of Heaven.

1 CORINTHIANS 11

1 Corinthians 11:1 “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (NIV) Paul admonished the Corinthians to imitate (Greek for “*follow*”) him as he tried to imitate Jesus. The Lord gave Himself to others; so too should disciples serve others. Paul uses this same phrase in 1 Corinthians 4:16, when he encourages others to be self-sufficient and work with their hands as he did.

Commendation: Unveiling the Veil

1 Corinthians 11:2–16

1 Corinthians 11:2 “Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you” Paul opens another of the saints’ questions, by commending them for keeping the “ordinances” (KJV) or “traditions” (NRSV), that he had passed down. The word “ordinances” carries significant meaning in the restored church, but the Greek word “*paradosis*” has a broader definition that includes “handing over, delivery, hence teaching committed to a

“ORDINANCE/ PARADOSIS”

Instruction, tradition, trans-mission, handing down or over, delivery, hence teaching committed to a pupil. Very few translations choose the word “ordinances,” because it had overtones of the seven Catholic sacraments, and most English translations stem from a Protestant theology. Yet Paul taught the need of several saving ordinances.

Statue of a mourning Roman woman.
Image via Wikimedia Commons.

pupil” or “transmission.”¹³ Many modern English translations of this verse read: “directions” (DBT), “traditions” (RSV, ESV, NASV), or “teachings” (NIV). In the Old Testament of the day (LXX), “*paradosis*” also described specially teachings that were handed down orally.¹⁴

To understand Paul’s definition it helps to look at his context, especially to examine how Paul uses the same word, as a noun, in his Epistles five times.¹⁵ Just a few verses later he uses the verb form of the word in 1 Corinthians 11:23, when he speaks of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper: “I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered/*paradidomi* unto you” (1 Corinthians 11:23).¹⁶ Whatever type of teachings Paul refers to with “*paradosis*,” he passed down the practice of women praying in public with a veil over their faces.

1 Corinthians 11:3 “But I would have you know . . .” or “I want you to understand” Paul uses this phrase four times in this Epistle to correct a misunderstanding (1 Corinthians 7:32; 10:20; 14:5). There must have been one ordinance that saints had—at least partially—misunderstood. Rather than restating the Christian dress code, Paul explains the underlining doctrinal background of the imagery of the head covering.

“the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God” He begins with the source of human creation: God-Christ-man-woman. God the Father was the starting point, “source, or origin” of Christ, who was the origin of man, and man,





“**Head/kephale**” has multiple meanings in both Greek and English. Most often it referred to the physical head (as part of the body). Figuratively, it meant the origin or source (as the head waters of the Nile). According to the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, this section dealt with the relationship of man and woman “at the very foundations of their creaturehood.” Outside of these verses, we find “head/kephale,” 49 times in the New Testament to describe either a physical head or the Savior.

Above: The Veiled Woman by Raffaello Monti, 1854 via Wikimedia Commons.

Below: Veiled woman, ca. 1860 via Wikimedia Commons.



via his side-rib, the origin of his partner, woman.¹⁷ We find confirmation of this throughout the Bible, including: John 1:3; 20:17, and Genesis 2:22. In a few sentences, Paul takes this order of creation and then reverses it, honoring woman as a co-creator with God as the source of the next generation (1 Corinthians 11:12).

This chain of interlocking relationships links humanity with their Creators and becomes the foundation of Paul’s instruction. He does not intend this order of creation to demean women.¹⁸ In the ancient world, linking someone with deity honored and empowered them. Three times in this section he describes the origin of intertwining genders (1 Corinthians 11:3, 8, 12). Throughout the section Paul describe men and women as connected to their Creators through a symbiotic mutuality where they shared responsibility for one another.¹⁹

Paul does not make a case for male superiority. In verses 10–12, he speaks of woman as privileged with authority and indispensable to men, and vice versa. The section encourages a positive interrelationship between the genders. This is why I do not agree with those who interpret these verses as men “ruling” over women. I do not find evidence for that in the Pauline Epistles at large, nor specifically in this section. Whenever Paul refers to a “ruler,” he uses different words—i.e., “rulers/*archon*” (Romans 13:3), “rule/preside/*proistemi*” (1 Timothy 3:5; 5:17), “rule/govern/*brabeuo*” (Colossians 3:15), and “rule/leader/*hegeomai*” (Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24)—never “*kephale*.” Furthermore, Jesus denounced unrighteous dominion and superiority of any kind (Matthew 19:16; Mark 10:17).

1 Corinthians 11:4 “Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head.”

In the setting of this “ordinance” or teaching, men who covered their heads, dishonored God.²⁰ Paul uses the dual meaning for head—first physically, if they cover it, they dishonoureth God, or their figurative head. Jewish men did not cover their heads at that time (that practice came well after the temple was destroyed).²¹ In verse 7, Paul explains that because God had created man in His image and glory, if he covered himself, he would not acknowledge that affiliation (Genesis 1:27). In other words, if man covered his head in this special prayer setting, he dishonored his origins. This devalued their Christian beliefs. However problematic male head covering was, it appears that the bigger issue was that woman were not covering their heads, as this becomes Paul’s subject for the next five verses.

1 Corinthians 11:5 “But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head”

If you read the inverse of this statement, Paul declares that women were allowed to “pray and prophesy/propheteuo/to speak forth under inspiration” in the early Christian Church. This is a huge breakthrough from Judaism’s refusal to allow women to worship with men. Yet, Paul’s argument for women is exactly the opposite of that for men. Men honor their relationship to God by uncovering their heads, and women honor their husbands and God by veiling their heads. Paul explains this dichotomy in verse 7.

1 Corinthians 11:7–9 “For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man”

What did Paul mean, “woman is the glory of man” in the context of man being the glory of God? Paul changes the statement in Genesis that said both genders were created in God’s image and limits it to males.

GENESIS 1:27

God created man in his own image,
in the image of God created he him,
male and female created he them.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:7

...he is the image and glory of God.

It appears that Paul wanted to accentuate woman as the “glory of man,” as something different from the “glory of God”—which caused this reader to ask *why*? Some limit the discussion to gender-distinctive clothing, but I see Paul exploring the theology behind human interactions with God.

Within the context of this chapter, letter, and New Testament at large, we can safely assume Paul did *not* mean that God created women solely to glorify men, nor that men could use women for glory in a manipulative or disrespectful manner.²² Paul described woman as a symbol of human potential as she facilitates human reproduction and glory. In this sense, women represent the glory of humanity because she allows humanity to achieve their glory. Nevertheless, in the hierarchy of God, the glory of humanity should not overshadow the glory of God. As children are born to a woman, she represents the “glory of man[kind].”

To some readers it does not seem appropriate that the man takes on a vicarious role of representing the “image and glory of God,” while a woman represents “glory of supplicating humanity.” Yet this is consistent with the biblical depiction of woman as God’s bride, people or the church.²³ The underlining principle that sheds light on these verses is in Moses 1:39. If God’s work and glory is “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man,” then the same should hold true for humanity’s work and glory. Without the union of man and woman, they cannot achieve their work and glory. The union is a glorious thing. Nevertheless, in the hierarchy of God, the glory of humanity should not overshadow the glory of God, so glorious woman covers her face out of respect to God.²⁴

1 Corinthians 11:10 “For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels” The KJV reads, “power” but the NIV more accurately translated the veil as a sign of her “authority.” Paul repeatedly addresses the topic of authority in this epistle. He returns to the subject again this time to focus on women’s authority in the Church. Angels were mentioned in Eden, to guard the Tree of Life. Paul adds that angels also watch over women and give them authority/power. In early Christianity, females donned their prayer veils, as “priestesses.” The biblical scholar, F. F. Bruce, explained:

The veil is not a sign of the woman’s submission to her husband’s authority, nor even of her social dignity and immunity from molestation; it is a sign of her authority. In the synagogue service a woman could play no significant part. . . . In Christ she received equality of status with man: she might pray or prophesy at meetings of the church, and her veil was a sign of this new authority. Its ordinary social significance was thus transcended. As a man in public worship manifests his authority by leaving his head unveiled, so woman manifests hers by wearing a veil. . . . By discarding the veil Corinthian women were ignoring the [blessings set up by Christ for women].²⁵

Joseph Smith made only one change to chapter 11. The JST changed “power” (11:10) to “covering.” In Joseph’s mind, a woman was to have a covering on her head as a sign to the angels. Wearing a veil opened the door to a female version of the ministry of angels (see Moroni 7:29, 37; D&C 109:76). Brigham Young taught that angels guard the entrance to heaven where both women and men give them “signs and tokens” to return to the presence of God.²⁶ This is also interesting as the Hebrew word for at-one-ment is “covering.” Eve and her children became covered through the Savior to again commune and return to God.



Roman wedding ceremony, ca. AD 250 via Wikimedia Commons.

1 Corinthians 11:11–12 “Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman” Paul ends his explanation by stressing the complete interdependence of men and women—woman was created from man, while man is born of woman. The description encompassed the Edenic creation and birth process. Each mother opens the veil to mortality, just as Jesus opened the veil of immortality. A woman’s womb symbolizes a veil of life as spirit children pass from heaven to earth through her.

“**but all things of God**” Paul intimates a covenantal relationship with God (also see D&C 132:15). Through this trio of unity, we understand the mutuality of eternal marriage.²⁷ Paul’s promotion of marital interdependence is consistent with statements made earlier in the same epistle (1 Corinthians 7:2–3, 12–14).²⁸ The interrelationship of genders speaks to the worth of women as equals to men.²⁹ I see that Paul’s request for a woman to wear a veil during prayer has nothing to do with gender inequality and everything to do with her relationships, and authority to participate in Christian worship.

1 Corinthians 11:13: “Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman [prays] unto God uncovered?” In this new Christian order, Paul taught that it was proper for women to pray and prophesy or testify. Her veil witnessed to her authority to act in that proper manner. The word “comely/*prepo*” also meant “fitting, to stand out, to be conspicuous, eminent, becoming, seemly, or fit.”

Paul concluded this subject by reminding the contentious Corinthian saints (1 Corinthians 11:16), that clothing worn during ordinances signifies the relationships between God, Christ, men, and women. They were not a law unto themselves on this matter. He calls for a unity of the faith among all the churches of God—even in the practice of women wearing veils when praying and prophesying.

1 Corinthians 11:14–16 “If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God” (NIV) These hair customs and cultural practices are not the current directions from our living prophets. Modern prophets emphasize modest dress, no excessive piercings and tattoos.

The Sanctity of the Lord’s Supper

1 Corinthians 11:17–34

1 Corinthians 11:17–19 “In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good” (NIV) Paul addressed another problem or question, relating to the Lord’s Supper. The early Christians enjoyed more than just a piece of bread, but had a meal or feast of small barley loaves and diluted wine for their sacrament.³⁰ Paul’s answer suggests they had forgotten the purpose and symbols of the Lord’s Supper, and saw it as a common meal or Linger Longer. This problem had become another “division/*schismata*,” (which Paul first addressed in 1 Corinthians 1:10). But this time, it was because of “heresies/*hairesis*.”

1 Corinthians 11:20–22 “For as you eat, many of you proceed with your own meal to the exclusion of others. While one remains hungry, another gets drunk” (BSB) Their sacrament was a meal or feast of bread and wine, but the problem sounds like they did not reverently take it together in honor of the Lord, but used it as a meal which began as soon as some arrived—even to the extent of getting drunk off the sacramental wine. While some indulged their appetites, others were left hungry.

Fresco of a Christian agape feast in the Catacombe di Priscilla, Rome, 2nd to 4th century AD. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Some scholars suggest that everyone brought some food, but did not share. Whatever they were doing, it was not in keeping with the sacred nature in remembrance of the Lord’s body and blood.

1 Corinthians 11:23–26 “I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread . . .” (NIV) This is the oldest account we have of the sacrament. Paul claimed he learned this of the Lord, but Paul was not at the Last Supper. He learned about it afterward, but we do not know if that means through other apostles or directly from the resurrected Lord in vision. Paul rehearsed the sacred text to teach the offenders reverence for the Lord’s Last Supper. Paul includes its parallels to the Passover feast, “after supper he took the cup.”

1 Corinthians 11:27–29 “Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup” (NIV) Paul taught the early Christians (and us), the necessity of a personal examination of our covenants with God, filled with humility and meekness, so that we can repent *before* we partake of the covenants, remembering Jesus’ passion or suffering on our behalf. The Greek word for “examine/*dokimazo*” also means “to test, by implication to approve.” When we examine or test ourselves, we have the perspective engage with the process of returning our whole heart to God. We can ask, “Are we aware of our sins, and are we trying to overcome them? Are we truly repentant? Are our hearts filled with hatred or anger or bitterness toward another, or do we feel at peace? Are we living more righteously this week than last? Do we truly appreciate what the Savior did for us?”³¹ In the restored church the Lord taught Joseph Smith, “By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:43).

1 Corinthians 11:33–34 “So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together . . . when I come I will give further directions” (NIV) Paul admonished them to practice more order and respect—both for each other and for God, by waiting to begin the Lord’s Supper together (In defense of the early church services, I can only imagine what it would have been like to live without clocks. Start times would have been harder). The other challenges Paul hoped to address in person.

1 CORINTHIANS 12

The Constitution of the Church—Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 12:1–11

1 Corinthians 12:1 “Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters” (NIV) Paul addressed another problem from either his list of questions or reports (1 Corinthians 7:1). Paul wanted to inform the new converts about the importance of identifying gifts of the Spirit and counterfeit manifestations from the devil. Jesus had promised that the power of the Spirit would be manifest, but the early saints were confused as to what a spiritual manifestation was and what a counterfeit from the devil was. The same problems plagued other generations, too.

Understanding spiritual gifts was an enormous problem during the Second Great Awakening in 19th Century America (1801–1837).³² Experimentation with spiritual manifestations flooded religious debate. Methodist ministers had hundreds of people experimenting with uncontrollable barking and convulsing episodes and claimed they were from God.³³ Thus, the Lord also gave Joseph a revelation on them in D&C 46, the 7th Article of Faith, and in Moroni 7 (the most extensive of the four is D&C 46).

1 Corinthians 12:2–3 “ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols” The relatively new Corinthians saints were both Judaic and Gentile converts. It appears that they confused part of their idolatry with Christian ideals. Paul referenced a pagan practice where a victim felt transported in a hypnotic or ethereal state through poppies, or something else. These rituals included “trances, seizures, rantings, and ecstatic utterances.”³⁴ They felt a frightening feeling or demonic presence that only left once they would curse the pagan god. Also, in classical Greek literature, we can read of several people speaking in strange languages—like Apollo, Cassandra of Troy, priestess of Delphi, Sibyl of Cumae, just to name a few.³⁵ The Greeks attributed fortune telling to their pagan gods. We can read a little of this “spirit of divination” and “soothsaying” in Acts 16:16. All of these are demonic counterfeits of the gifts given by God’s Holy Spirit. Paul tried to teach them the difference between divine and satanic spirits.

“No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (NIV) The early saints did not differentiate between a true witness of the Holy Spirit and the devil. So, Paul started with the basics—how the Spirit witnesses to indi-

viduals that Jesus is the Lord God. Some might be able to say that phrase without a witness of the Spirit, but to know that deep inside must come from the Holy Spirit’s witnesses.

1 Corinthians 12:4–6 “there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone” (ESV) Paul begins with some general background and instructions about the workings of the Spirit of God. Even though God assigns different disciples different gifts, or “ministries” (BSB), they are all of God.

***1 Corinthians 12:7 “the Spirit is given for the common good”** This key point helped the saints understand that the Spirit will only give the gifts to bless others and to build the kingdom. (D&C 46 repeats this qualification five times 46:9, 10, 12, 26, 29.) No selfish motives will work; the gifts exist *only* further God’s work. When we are serving others, disciples can call on the Spirit to help in a special and powerful way.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1–11	MORONI 10:7–8	D&C 46:8–31	7TH ARTICLE OF FAITH	ROMANS 12:6–12
Testify of Jesus		Know Jesus the Son Believe others’ testimony	Revelation	Exhort
Administrations		Administrations		Rule/Preside
Operations		Operations		Ministry
Wisdom	Teach Wisdom	Wisdom		
Knowledge	Teach knowledge	Knowledge		
Prophecy	Prophecy	Prophecy	Prophecy	Prophecy
Miracles	Miracles	Miracles		
Discerning of spirits	Ministering spirit	Discerning of spirits		
Interpretation of Tongue	Interpretation of Tong	Interpretation of Tongue	Interpretation of Tongues	
Tongues	Tongues	Tongues	Tongues	
Healing	Healing	Faith to Heal	Healing	
Faith	Faith	Faith to be Healed		Faith
Hope	Hope			Hope
Charity	Charity			Charity/love
	Beholding angels		Visions	
				Teaching

1 CORINTHIANS 12

D&C 46

MORONI 10

12:3 testify that Jesus is the LORD	46:13 know Jesus is the Son	
12:8 word of wisdom	46:17 word of wisdom	10:9 wisdom
12:8 knowledge	46:18 knowledge	10:10 knowledge
	46:14 belief on others' words	
12:9 faith	46:20 faith to heal	10:10 faith
12:9 healing	46:19 faith to be healed	10:11 heal
12:10 miracles	46:21 miracles	10:12 miracles
12:10 prophecy	46:22 prophesy	10:13 prophecy
12:10 discerning of spirits	46:23 discerning of spirits	10:14 ministering Spirit
10:14 behold angels		
12:10 tongues	46:24 tongues	10:15 tongues
12:10 interpretation of tongues	46:25 interpretation of tongues	10:16 interpret tongues
10:16 interpret languages		
12:13 baptism and confirmed with the Spirit		
12:28 apostles, prophets, teachers, helps, administrators, government	46:29 head 46:15 operations, administration	
13:1 charity		10:20 charity
13:13 hope		10:20 hope

1 Corinthians 12:8–11 “**To one there is given through the Spirit . . . to another gifts of . . .**” (BSB). Paul organized the gifts in pairs (except for faith), even though our verses cut those pairs. The gifts of the Spirit are so important to Christian disciples that each of the Standard Works contains a section on them. Prophets from many dispensations have encouraged believers to seek them wisely and regularly.

The Body and its Members

1 Corinthians 12:12–26

1 Corinthians 12:12 “**For as the body is one, and hath many members . . . also is Christ**” Paul used the image of Christ’s body again to explain that unity in the church depends on oneness of purpose (also in 1 Corinthians 6:15; 10:17; 11:29). Perhaps this verse initiated the practice of referring to the saints as church “members.” Paul asked the “members” to appreciate their diversity in manifestations of the different gifts of the Spirit, while he emphasized the need for individuals to cooperate for the well-being of the whole church.

1 Corinthians 12:13 “For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free” (NIV) This is the one place in the Epistles that alludes to the baptism of the Spirit. It appears that Paul may have paraphrased Jesus’ words from his sermon in Jerusalem at the Feast of the Tabernacles when Jesus invited “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink . . . rivers of living water” (John 7:37–38). After John recorded Jesus’ call, he explained, “He said this concerning the Spirit, whom those having believed in Him were about to receive” (BLB) Paul similarly explains, “we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (NIV). The Savior, His Spirit, and His teachings become the Living Water.

1 Corinthians 12:14–21 “If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?” Paul applied an analogy of body parts to the functioning of the church. He playfully explains that to fully function, the church needs all people and gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:23 “And those parts of the body that we consider less honorable, we clothe these with greater honor . . .” (CSB) Even the less obvious parts are *indispensable* (RSV). The symbolism of one phrase is especially meaningful. “We take special care to dress up” (CEV) or the Lord clothes or “bestows” (KJV) His disciples with gifts to make them better. This image is especially meaningful when we remember the Hebrew word for at-one-ment is “to cover/*kaphar*.” The at-one-ment can cover and enable the saints with God’s grace and gifts. In Genesis 30:20, the Hebrew word for “endowed” (NAS) or “endued” (KJV) can also be translated “bestowed” or clothed. The Atonement and the Spirit are given to cover and protect us as an endowment from God. God’s omniscience has everything perfectly arranged.

1 Corinthians 12:25–26 “there should be no division in the body, but that its members should have mutual concern for one another” (BSB) As our body works in harmony and inter-dependently, so should the church function. There should be no discord (RSV) or “schism” in the body or else it will become unhealthy.

The Exercise of Spiritual Gifts In Church

1 Corinthians 12:27–31

1 Corinthians 12:27 “You are the body of The Messiah and members in your places” (ABPE) This Aramaic translation kept the name Messiah rather than the Greek, Christ. Paul opened this section by using the Greek emphatic form, “YOU!/hymeis/ye.” He wanted the saints to actively work together and build the kingdom. He hoped to empower them to seek these spiritual blessings.

1 Corinthians 12:28–30 “God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second fits, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues” (NASB) Paul included in his discussion of gifts, a list of eight different church responsibilities or callings as examples (elsewhere, like Ephesians 4:1, his list varies). The early church referred to “*prophets*” as one inspired to speak from God (but not

the head or president of the church as we currently do). “*Helps*” is also translated, “*helpers*” (RSV), or “assistance” (NAB), or those with the ability to help give relief to the poor, weak or sick members. “*Governments*” or “good leaders”(JB) or “administrators”(RSV) were local authorities who supplemented the church-wide leadership. In a parallel fashion, Paul repeats the same list (only skipping helps), as seven questions.

1 Corinthians 12:31 “**Now eagerly desire the greater gifts**” (NIV) Other translations read: “earnestly desire” (RSV) “be ambitious for” (JB), “covet” (KJV), and “earnestly pursue” (JB2000) the higher spiritual gifts. I like F.F. Bruce’s translation of this verse: “And yet beyond all this I am showing you a way (to reach the highest goal).”³⁶

CHAPTER 13

Charity, the Supreme Gift of God

Paul’s thesis purports that the ability to have Christlike love surpasses the richest spiritual endowments. Richard Anderson wrote, “This is the most moving chapter in the New Testament outside of Jesus’ teachings. Like the Sermon on the Mount it teaches the disease not the symptom.”³⁷ The Greek word, “*agape /love*” is translated in the New Testament 86 times as “*love*,” 27 times as “*charity*.” (There are other Greek words used for love, but I will focus on *agape* here.) Outside of the New Testament, *agape* alone does not have the force that Paul attached to it as “divine love,” or as Moroni 7:47 defined charity, “the pure love of Christ.”

We have evidence that part of Paul’s poem on charity in 1 Corinthians 13, actually came from an earlier Christian record of Jesus’ sayings. Clement of Rome wrote a letter around AD 97 quoting Jesus as saying, “love endures all things” and nine other statements about love.³⁸ Furthermore, Jesus gave parallel priority to love, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35); and “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). If these ideas were originally from Jesus’ teachings, then perhaps He may have shared them with His other sheep. This would help explain why Mormon included similar, though not identical, phrases in a sermon, now recorded in Moroni 7:44–47.

1 Corinthians 13:1–3 “**Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal . . .**” Paul compares seven examples of great spiritual gifts with the gift of charity, to teach that no matter how wonderful other gifts and attributes may appear, without charity in one’s heart, the gift or service was not as meaningful.

1 Corinthians 13:4 “**Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself is not puffed up**” Paul progresses from *prioritizing* charity to *developing* charity. His list became a handbook on “how

to cultivate charity.” He wanted to help the saints develop Christlike love. The character of Christ is patient or “long suffering.” The next trait, “kind,” has a broader meaning than just kindness, as the Greek roots mean “useful.” Then Paul denounces jealousy or unhealthy competition that belittles another’s success. He asked the saints to avoid envy. There is no room for boasting/“vaunteth not itself,” or speaking or behaving with selfish motives. A person with charity “is not puffed up” with arrogant pride or self-centered motives. Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught that selfishness was the root of sin.³⁹

1 Corinthians 13:5 “Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil” A charitable person behaves properly, not rude, crude, and “unseemly.” To develop charity, one “is not self-seeking” (BSB) or “does not insist on its own way” (ESV) and looks outside one’s self to the needs and interests of others. If the saints have developed patience, as listed in verse 4, then they are “not irritable or resentful” (ESV), nor prone to anger or take offense. They take responsibility for their emotions without blaming another. The final phrase in this verse has many meanings. “Thinketh no evil” can apply to deliberately conjuring up problems against others, or inferring falsehoods, and gathering defamatory resentful data to stir up contention. This also includes when one figuratively steps onto another to build up oneself. This includes pornography, and other self-satisfying habits that demean others. In this way, Paul’s phrase sounds similar to Zechariah 8:17, “Let none of you devise evil in your hearts against his neighbor” (ASB). Love includes being trustworthy—emotionally.



Jesus Christ exemplifies the kindness and compassion of which Paul teaches. Image from *The pictorial Bible and commentator: presenting the great truths of God’s word in the most simple, pleasing, affectionate, and instructive manner*, 1878. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

1 Corinthians 13:6 “Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth” Someone who has felt Christlike love does not rejoice in injustice or evil but finds joy in truth. Love includes a social dimension, too.

1 Corinthians 13:7 “Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things” Charity “is always supportive” and “protects” all things (CEV, NIV). “Beareth/*stegó*” also means “to cover closely (so as to keep water out), generally to bear up under” and is used to “conceal, ward off, bear with, endure patiently.” If someone “believes the best in all” (ISV), then they eagerly give others the benefit of the doubt, and put the most favorable conclusion on them. They give people repeated chances (Matthew 18:22). Charity opens the way for hope. The Lord’s love steadily trusts or endures challenges.

1 Corinthians 13:8–9 “Charity never faileth” While other gifts come and go—such as prophecy and knowledge which can be known temporarily—charity, the pure love of Christ, will abide eternally.

1 Corinthians 13:9–10 “when completeness comes, what is in part disappears” (NIV) Christ’s Second Coming and the end of the earth will fulfill the needs of some gifts (i.e. tongues). Paul wrote with an eschatological emphasis through five verses (1 Corinthians 13:8–13). His point was that developing charity has eternal importance.

1 Corinthians 13:11 “When I was a child, I spake as a child . . . but when I became a man, I put away childish things” The Corinthian saints needed to grow up spiritually and realize what they thought was so important was not as substantial as the highest values of charity that will endure forever.

1 Corinthians 13:12 “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face . . . then shall I know even as also I am known” In Greek the word for “glass/*esoptron*/mirror” was a mirror made of highly polished metal. Their surfaces obscured the view so one had only a rough portrayal of reality. Another translation begins this verse, “now we see a dim reflection in a mirror” (JB).

1 Corinthians 13:13 “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” Paul repeats this triad—faith, hope, and charity—in seven other places, and we also find it written by other early Christians.⁴⁰ Its prevalence gives more substance to the theory that these ideas belonged to a more primitive record of Jesus’ teachings. Certainly the message rings of divine truth.⁴¹

Header Image: Scene of dextrarum junctio, the ritual joining of hands of husband of wife during the wedding ceremony, with the Genius Populi Romani standing behind the man, and Venus Felix crowning the woman. Detail from the front panel of a sarcophagus with togate men and female figures. Sarcophagus circa AD 250 from the Naples National Archaeological Museum. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

1. F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (London, England: Oliphants, 1971), 79.
2. C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters* (NYC, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 62–63.
3. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:475.
4. *Mishnah, Kiddushin*, 29b. Jewish rabbis taught, “a man who does not marry by the age of twenty has sinned.” For the Roman taxes levied on single adults for not marrying, see Ken Campbell, ed. *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 144.
5. John W. Welch and John F. Hall, *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 15–5. Welch listed 25 biblical examples as evidence of Paul’s wealth, including his education in Hebrew and Greek, he had the means to hire a scribe, pay for papyrus or parchment, ink, etc., Felix detained Paul, hoping to get a bribe from him” (Acts 24:26).
6. The KJV word, “dispensation/*oikonomia*” in Greek meant: “management of household affairs, stewardship, administration.” It is found nine times in the New Testament—six in the traditional Pauline epistles and three times in Luke, where it is most often translated “stewardship.”
7. Herman J. Selderhuis, J. Marius J. Lange van Ravenswaay, ed. *Luther and Calvinism: Image and Reception of Martin Luther in the History of Calvinism* (Bristol, CT: Vandenhoeck, 2017), 389 (spelling modernized)..
8. Ephesians 6:10; Philippians 1:30; 2:16; 3:14; Colossians 1:29; 4:12; 1 Thessalonians 2:2; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 2:3; 4:7; Hebrews 12: 1. “There were two-hundred-seventy professional athletic festivals in the Greco-Roman world. Ron Clark, *The Better Way: The Church of Agape in Emerging Corinth* (Eugene, OR: Resource Pub, 2010), 82.
9. *Ibid.*, viii, 90.
10. Leviticus 12:3–4, for a male, and twice that time for a female birth. Their rationale for this came from Eve’s creation as the second human, so the Jews have twice as much “maternity leave” or time of rest, after for delivering a daughter. Even more interesting than the use of the number forty, is the way the Old Testament text highlights the number thirty-three with birth and purification. The tie to the length of Jesus’ life, cannot be lost as the key number, in addition to the circumcision as assign of the covenant. “And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.
11. And she shall then continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days.” In our math this would add up to 41 days, but they counted both the first and last day, so it is our forty.
12. Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews, vol III: Bible Times and Characters from the Exodus to the Death of Moses* (Oxford, MS: Project Gutenberg Literary Archive), 3.88. “Judaism must first submit to the three ceremonies of circumcision, baptism, and sacrifice, so Israel did not receive the Torah until they had performed these three ceremonies. They had already undergone circumcision in Egypt. Baptism was imposed upon them two days before the revelation on Mount Sinai.”
13. G. W. H. Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 1014. Italics original. Strong’s New Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible defines *paradosis* as “from; transmission, a precept; spec. the Jewish traditional law” (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990).
14. The term *paradoseis* is found thirteen times in the New Testament, as a noun, and several more times in different forms

(Matthew 15:2, 3, 6; Mark 7:3, 5, 8, 9, 13; 1 Corinthians 11:2; Galatians 1:14; Colossians 2:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6). Some of these traditions passed on refer to ritual behavior not found in the written law, but in the ten-thousand oral laws. Pharisees and others claimed that these oral laws began with Moses and were passed down for hundreds of years. They came into practice after the Babylonian captivity. Other teachings passed down may be new Christian “ordinances/teachings” as described in 1 Corinthians 11:2–12 and 15:29.

15. 1 Corinthians 11:2; Galatians 1:14; Colossians 2:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6. with the exact same tense is only found in: 2 Thessalonians 2:15; “hold fast to the traditions which you were taught” (INT). In the same verb form Paul, used it in 1 Corinthians 11:2, 23; 15:3, 1 Timothy 1:20. In other forms Strong’s Concordance lists 120 other words that share the same root. https://biblehub.com/greek/paredo_ka_3860.htm (accessed 8/16/19)
16. Looking beyond Paul into other early Christian sources, we find *paradosis* generally referring to unwritten sacred “tradition given by Christ, preached by apostles, guarded by fathers.” These teachings handed down through words or example, and included the sacrament of Jesus’ Last Supper and “the later activities of the Twelve.” Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 1014–1015.
17. Ben Witherington, III, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* (Cambridge, England, NYC: Cambridge Press, 1990), 168.
18. Paul’s orderly line-up did not disrupt the other scriptural admonition for men and women to work side by side as comrades, “suitable partner[s],” “counterpart[s]” (Genesis 2:18, CEV, YLT), or “yokefellow[s]” (Philippians 4:3). By working in the same direction with God, men and women assist in building God’s kingdom on earth. Whether this team effort was described as an alignment, from the order of creation, or as working side-by-side, the end result is the same.
19. John 17:21–23; 1 Peter 3:7; Romans 8:17, and others described Christ, Peter, and Paul teaching husbands and wives to work together toward the same goal to become joint heirs. Paul advocated mutually supportive relationships (1 Corinthians 11:11).
20. For more information on men wearing veils in the first century AD, both the social and liturgical, see, Mark Finney, “Honour, Head-coverings and Headship” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 33, no. 1 (2010).
21. Evidence for this is seen in the murals from the Dura-Europos synagogue in old Damascus. Frescoes dating from the third-century have the men’s heads uncovered, and women’s heads covered. In addition we have statements from the Mishnah prohibiting men covering their heads—except for the priests, and high priest who wore a special priestly turban or miter (Exodus 28:4; Leviticus 8:9).
22. Paul repeatedly states that woman is not inferior to man (1 Corinthians 11:7, 11, etc.). Although Josephus spoke for many when he said: “A woman is inferior to her husband in all things” (Josephus, *Against Apion*, II. 25).
23. Isaiah 50:1; 66:8; Hosea 1; 3:1; Jeremiah 3:8; 33:11; John 3:29; Revelation 21:9; etc.
24. Paul’s words about the order of creation can also be interpreted typologically. Later in this epistle, Paul refers to Jesus as the “last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45). Likewise, Paul teaches that the Church is “subject unto Christ” (Ephesians 5:24) as Eve is subject to Adam (Genesis 3:16; Moses 4:22). Alonzo Gaskill demonstrates how the Edenic Adam and Eve are types of Christ and his Church—the Bridegroom and Bride. Gaskill shows how Adam takes on characteristics of Christ and how Eve takes on characteristics of the Church. He explains that this typology has significant implications as to why Paul depicts women as he does. First, in the Creation accounts of Genesis, Moses, and Abraham, we read the

commandment, “of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat” (see Genesis 2:16–17; Moses 3:16–17; Abraham 5:12–13). Yet God gave this commandment only to Adam before Eve was created. Second, Adam conveyed the command to Eve, who had to walk by faith. Gaskill explains, “Again, according to scriptural accounts, Eve had less information than Adam—she could not see as clearly, as it were—and thus Adam was to be her guide, to whom she was to cling. Similarly, you and I have less information about the things of salvation than do Christ and His prophets—we labor under a veil, as it were—and hence they must be our guides, to whom we must cling. To take matters into our own hands is to bring heartache and trials into our lives (as Eve did metaphorically into hers)” (*Savior and the Serpent*, 119). In this typological scenario, Eve as the Church, works through the mediator Adam as Christ. For the longer version of my argument see Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Interpreter*, May 2018, 148–149. <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/unveiling-womens-veils-of-authority/> (accessed 8/12/19)

25. F. F. Bruce, *1&2 Corinthians*, 106.
26. Brigham Young, et al, *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool, England: F. D. Richards, 1855), 2:31.
27. Hugh Nibley, *Old Testament and Related Studies* (Provo, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1986), 93; describes the covenantal partnership between God, a husband and wife as a system of checks and balances: “There is no patriarchy or matriarchy in the Garden; the two supervise each other. Adam is given no arbitrary power; Eve is to heed him only insofar as he obeys their Father—and who decides that? She must keep check on him as much as he does on her. It is, if you will, a system of checks and balances in which each party is as distinct and independent in its sphere as are the departments of government under the Constitution—and just as dependent on each other.”
28. Perhaps Paul repeated his messages on unity and equality within marriage, to combat the culture where the average middle and upper-class Roman divorced four to five times each. David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 73.
29. Hugh Nibley, *Old Testament and Related Studies*, 93. Hugh Nibley describes the covenantal partnership between a husband and wife as a system of checks and balances. “There is no patriarchy or matriarchy in the Garden; the two supervise each other. Adam is given no arbitrary power; Eve is to heed him only insofar as he obeys their Father—and who decides that? She must keep check on him as much as he does on her. It is, if you will, a system of checks and balances in which each party is as distinct and independent in its sphere as are the departments of government under the Constitution—and just as dependent on each other.”
30. Richard Holzapfel, Eric Huntsman, Thomas Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* (SLC, UT: Deseret, 2006). Wine was usually diluted, 10 parts water to one-part wine was for most use by the average worker or poor. For holy days like Passover, wine was only diluted with three-parts water to one-part wine. A “strong drink” in the Bible was one-part water, one-part wine. And “new wine” was not fermented, thus more like grape juice.
31. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/new-era/1983/09/q-and-a-questions-and-answers/when-should-i-not-take-the-sacrament?lang=eng> (accessed 8/13/19).
32. Different scholars adjust these dates give or take a few years. The range extends from 1790 to 1844.
33. Many first hand source examples of bizarre behaviors attributed to the Spirit come from the early 1800s. For example, the renowned Methodist minister, Peter Cartwright, wrote: “A new exercise broke out among us, called the jerks, which

was overwhelming in its effects upon the bodies and minds of the people. No matter whether they were saints or sinners, they would be taken under a warm song or sermon, and seized with a convulsive jerking all over, which they could not by any possibility avoid, and the more they resisted the more they jerked. If they would not strive against it and pray in good earnest, the jerking would usually abate. I have seen more than five hundred persons jerking at one time in my large congregations. . . . I always looked upon the jerks as a judgment sent from God, first, to bring sinners to repentance; and, secondly, to show professors that God could work with or without means . . . to the glory of his grace and the salvation of the world.” See Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright* (1856; reprint, Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1984), 21. Also see Lynne Hilton Wilson, “New Pneumatology: Comparing Joseph Smith’s Doctrine of the Spirit with His Contemporaries and the Bible,” *BYU Studies*, 2012, 51,1. <https://byustudies.byu.edu/file/1643/download?token=Uwd0LYb7> (accessed 8/13/19).

34. Bruce Bickel, Stan Jantz, *1 & 2 Corinthians: Finding Your Unique Place in God’s Plan* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House , 2004), 98; also see F.F. Bruce, *History of the New Testament*, 303.
35. F.F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 117.
36. *Ibid.*, 124
37. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 117.
38. *Ibid.*, 117.
39. Neal A. Maxwell, *Ensign*, “Repent of [Our] Selfishness” May 1999.
40. Romans 5:1–5; Galatians 5:5f; Ephesians 4:2–5; 1Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8; Hebrews 6:10–12; 10:22–24; 1 Peter 1:3–8, 21; Barnabas 1:4; 11:8; and Polycarp 3:2.
41. Interestingly, Joseph Smith did not feel inspired to include charity among the gifts of the Spirit (D&C 46), but often spoke of its need. I wonder if this is because he felt it stood in a category by itself, or if it should be developed for rather than received. The Book of Mormon account includ



1 CORINTHIANS 14–16

PAUL'S Q&A:

THE CORINTHIANS' QUESTIONS, AND PAUL'S ANSWERS

INTRODUCTION

After sharing a list of some of the gifts that the Spirit and emphasizing the key role of charity, or “the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47), Paul returned to discuss another specific problem that dealt with the early saints’ use of the gift of tongues. Next, he gives the most in-depth study of the at-one-ment of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. In the Book of Mormon, we find several more extensive discussions on Jesus’ at-one-ment by Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, Mosiah, Alma, and Mormon.¹ Comparing the two books of scripture provides a deeper appreciation for the restoration and our Savior’s redemptive gift. When Paul finishes teaching on this most important doctrine, he finishes the Epistle with “matters of Christian business,” such as the financial offerings, his travel plans, and personal greetings to dear friends there.²

1 CORINTHIANS 14

The Gift of Prophecy Preferable to Tongues

1 Corinthians 14:1-19

1 Corinthians 14:1 “Seek after love and strive for spiritual gifts, and especially that you might speak with divine inspiration” (NR) Paul asked the saints to make a loving heart their aim as they sought spiritual gifts. Most importantly, he asked them to seek the higher gifts of charity “and” (not “but” as KJV used) prophesy, not the showier gift of tongues.

The gift of prophecy “*prophéteuó*/to foretell, tell forth,” has a broader meaning in the New Testament. The phrase, “spirit of prophecy,” is used one time in the New Testament in Revelation 19:10, “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” In contrast, the same three-word phrase is found eighteen times in The Book of Mormon. The Prophet Joseph Smith defended that definition on January 1, 1843, to the Illinois State Legislature:

... According to John, the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy; therefore if I profess to be a witness or teacher, and have not the spirit of prophecy, which is the testimony of Jesus, I must be a false witness; but if I be a true teacher and witness, I must possess the spirit of prophecy.³

Paul’s definition of the gift of prophesy is consistent with John’s. It is not a gift just for apostles, prophets, seers, and revelators—but for all disciples who foster and maintained a testimony of Jesus’ divinity. This aspect of the Spirit’s influence was especially important to Paul.

1 Corinthians 14:2 “he that speaketh in *another* tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God” (JST) Six times in this chapter, the JST replaced “unknown” with “another” (and these are the only changes for the first 33 verses). The JST change signified that the language spoken while speaking in tongues was known to God. The same advice was given in our dispensation by the Prophet Joseph Smith.

In an editorial dated June 15, 1842, for the *Times and Seasons*, Joseph Smith printed a similar warning against tongues (glossolalia):

The gift of tongues is the smallest gift, perhaps, of the whole, and yet it is one that is the most sought after. . . . Be not so curious about tongues, do not speak in tongues except there be an interpreter present;

OUTLINE: 1 CORINTHIANS 14-16

14 Spiritual Gifts

15 Resurrection

16 Exhortations and Greetings

the ultimate design of tongues is to speak to foreigners, and if persons are very anxious to display their intelligence, let them speak to such in their own tongues. The gifts of God are all useful in their place, but when they are applied to that which God does not intend, they prove an injury, a snare and a curse instead of a blessing.⁴

The Prophet gave this cautionary counsel over and over because he felt that the gift of tongues was easily counterfeited by the devil.⁵ He believed that God gave the “gift of tongues” mainly to bless foreign missionaries, not those seeking a dramatic display: “the gift of the tongues by the power of the Holy Ghost in the Church, is for the benefit of the servants of God to preach to unbelievers.”⁶

1 Corinthians 14:3 “the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort” (NIV) As the gifts of the Spirit are to edify others, the gift of prophecy or testimony has the potential to edify others. Especially, in the church setting, Paul asked the saints to seek the gift of prophecy over tongues.

1 Corinthians 14:3–11 “one who prophesies edifies the church” (NIV) The Corinthian meetings had a problem with order and reverence. Paul’s description sounds as if everyone spoke whenever they wanted to regardless of whether someone else was already talking or praying. He describes several people speaking in tongues without an interpreter. He complains that such messages were not edifying. Worse still, they were offensive to the Spirit. This may have been a result of some becoming inebriated from drinking too much of the sacrament wine (1 Corinthians 11:20). Rather than a worship service to renew their covenants and edify the saints, the meeting sounds like a free-speech rally in many different languages. Paul taught them to seek gifts that edified and comforted others, not just speaking “gibberish” (NEB, 14:11).



“There appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire.” —Acts ii. 3.

Image via Wikimedia Commons

1 Corinthians 14:12–14 “try to excel in those that build up the church” (NIV) This is good advice for which gifts of the Spirit we seek as well as which education, career development, and hobbies we choose. It is better to glean and grow in areas that can help to build the kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 14:15–17 “I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding. Otherwise . . . how can someone else . . . say **“Amen”** (NIV) Paul asks the saints to dedicate their group prayers, singing, and speaking, so that everyone may understand and be “edified.”

1 Corinthians 14:18–19 “I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church, I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue” (NIV) Paul acknowledges that he often spoke in tongues, but not in church without an interpreter. Joseph Smith and his followers were known by their contemporaries as a people who spoke in tongues and practiced the gifts of the Spirit.⁷

Tongues Sign for Unbelievers

1 Corinthians 14:20–25

1 Corinthians 14:20–21 “Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults” (NIV) Being so far removed from Corinth, and unable to help in person, Paul continues to chide them with language that borders on another verbal spanking. He basically says their behavior was immature. He quoted Isaiah 28:11–12, to back up his point that showing off by speaking an unknown tongue was not helpful to convert people—they need to understand each other.

1 Corinthians 14:22–25 “Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers but for believers” (NIV) Paul describes the gift of tongues as a sign to unbelievers, not for mature Christians (i.e. Pentecost, Acts 2:11).

Edification and Orderliness in Public Worship

1 Corinthians 14:26–33

1 Corinthians 14:26–33 “Brothers and Sisters . . . Everything must be done so that the church may be built up . . . speak, one at a time . . . For God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (NIV) Paul’s rule of thumb in worship services called for order and enlightenment. The Corinthian worship service sounds like a disorganized free-for-all, or several simultaneous “open mikes” (with a different form of electricity). Paul gives specific organizational ideas for an edifying meeting. He wanted everyone to participate and prophesy (1 Corinthians 14:29), but only if it were uplifting (and not simultaneously). Their meetings must have been wild. He reminded his audience that the prophets must use a rational mind in a controlled manner—not an uncontrolled impulse (1 Corinthians 14:32). The situation sounds much like the revivals during the Second Great Awakening in the early United States. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Paul was a favorite of the Prophet Joseph—he could relate to his audience. It also speaks to the devil’s consistent effort to deafen the Spirit.

Ransacked Text on Women's Public Worship

1 Corinthians 14:34–36

1 Corinthians 14:34–35 “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.” These two puzzling verses contradict Paul’s previous support of women—they were “consecrated in Christ” (1:2); women were told to “pray and prophecy” in public settings (11:2, 5a), to exercise the gifts of the Spirit (12:1, 6–7, 11), all were baptized and given the same Spirit to be unified as one body (12:13–14). Just a few verses earlier and after he wrote, “You can all prophesy” (14:31, and more specific to women, 14:39, NIV). In this Epistle, from his first greeting to his last goodbye, Paul’s advice on building the kingdom includes women (as the Greek and NIV show, even though KJV does not specify gender). For example, Sister Chloe became Paul’s source of information—and he mentions her as a trusted witness and fellow worker in the Corinthian church (see prior notes on 1 Corinthians 1:11). Throughout this letter, Paul speaks to the women as equals to the men in the church (1 Corinthians 10:1–2; 11:5, 12:1–12; 14:31; etc.).⁸

OUT OF CONTEXT

These two troublesome verses are out of context. The entire section is about spiritual gifts and the latest about tongues and prophecy (1 Corinthians 12–14). Paul admonishes the use of the gifts of the Spirit for both genders (“brothers and sisters,” NIV). Then, in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 35, we find an abrupt and radical change of the subject—silencing women in public. These two verses stand out like a sore thumb in glaring opposition to Paul’s previous positive chapters of encouragement of women’s participation. I have counted at least twenty Pauline references to woman’s involvement in public worship.⁹ When textual critics note a break in the flow of Paul’s thought, they often theorize that an editor added something to the original text. In fact, just after the two verses, the text continues with the context of spiritual gifts and *again calls women to speak in church!* “My brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy” (1 Corinthians 14:39).

Some ancient manuscripts of the Epistle move these two verses to the end of the chapter so that they do not interrupt the flow. Certain words are different in each Greek text.¹⁰ From the earliest days, these verses did not seem to fit. There is nothing in our Old Testament, or Law of Moses, that claims this gender restriction. This does seem to fit with some of the 10,000 “oral laws” or traditions of the Pharisees.

WHAT WAS THE PROBLEM?

As we do not know the question or specific issue here, we have to wonder if these two verses may have referred to a specific problem. Could they be a tangential thought that fit into the broader section of 1 Corinthians’ discussion on disorderly conduct in meetings? It is feasible that because the Greek and Jewish culture restricted many women in their public worship, perhaps the social freedom newly found in Christianity incited some women to

Statue (detail) of a Roman woman, Archaeological Museum of Istanbul, Turkey. 2nd century AD. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



speak or act beyond propriety (or at least beyond the previous norm). Were Corinthian women interrupting the meetings with questions? A few verses earlier, Paul instructs church members to listen respectfully when someone else was speaking (1 Corinthians 14:30). Or was this a particular type of meeting? Or were these verses added to the text later by an editor? Or were these words a quote from the Corinthians' question (just as Paul quoted their statement earlier in 1 Corinthians 7:1)? Was Paul writing sarcastically? Not knowing the circumstances inhibits our full understanding.

OTHER TRANSLATIONS

We also have other translations that shed light on this passage. In an alternative interpretation by John Welch, we find more sensitive wording: "Women should be reverent and not chatter but be supportive."¹¹ We find other reputable English translations, but they do not resolve the blatant conflict of messages.

JST

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to **rule**; but to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to **rule** in the church

WEB

Let your wives keep silent in the assemblies, for it has not been permitted for them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as the law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home, for it is shameful for a woman to chatter in the assembly.

JB

Women are to remain quiet in the assemblies, since they have no permission to speak: theirs is a subordinate part, as the Law itself says. If there is anything they want to know, they should ask their husbands at home: it is shameful for a woman to speak in the assembly.

The Joseph Smith translation (JST) modified the meaning entirely by changing “speak” (KJV) to “rule” (JST).¹² It transformed the discussion from speaking to ruling. Was the problem that women usurped authority? Were they correcting the presiding elder? 1 Corinthians discusses authority repeatedly. With the perspective of the JST change, it sounds as though Paul has a particular kind of ruling in mind. The JST also took out the word “command.” This is closer to the Greek, “passive voice with the imperative construction . . . these women are not commanded to obedience but requested to willingly yield themselves to the law and church practice.”¹³

POSSIBLY AN EDITORIAL ADDITION

The most convincing explanation to me is that perhaps these two verses were not written by Paul at all, but added by a later editor. The Greek scholar, G.D. Fee, agrees that they were added to the text later.¹⁴ It does not seem plausible that Paul would contradict himself within the same section of the same letter. These two verses also match the Jewish pharisees,¹⁵ and a heretical Christian view of women from the end of the first century, and may have been added by a copyist or compiler a few decades later.¹⁶

RESTORED CHURCH AND WOMEN SPEAKING

The restored church allows women to speak, teach, counsel, testify, exhort, administer, and serve as priestesses in the restored church and temples. Women may prophesy and pray in their church services, public gatherings, homes, and temples. Joseph Smith revealed that women should be “ordained . . . to expound Scriptures, and to exhort the church, according as it shall be given thee by [God’s] Spirit” (D&C 25:7). Unique among Christianity, we also honor Eve and believe in a Heavenly Mother. However, women do not preside or rule over priesthood leaders as pointed out in the JST.



Portrait of a woman, mosaic from Pompeii, ca. AD 1–49. Image via The Naples Archaeological Museum

SUMMARY

The apostolic church battled great diversity that affected the saints' ability to accept and live Jesus' teachings. In the Epistles, we find evidence that the saints struggled with keeping doctrine pure—including accepting women as equal participants in worship. We find passages where the apostles tried to clarify and teach the principles and ordinances that Christ taught. However, in the currently available New Testament translations, we also find statements that contradict the Lord's teachings regarding women's worship. Fortunately, the majority of the Epistles encourage Christian women to join in public worship. Specifically, in 1 Corinthians, women are empowered to pray and prophesy as part of their dev

Closure of Gifts of the Spirit

1 Corinthians 14:37–40

1 Corinthians 14:36 “Did God's word originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?” (BSB) The text returns to the context of 1 Corinthians 14:32, discussing prophesying at church. As an apostle, Paul felt strongly about who could speak for God. He also understood and hoped that the Spirit would witness to many saints.

1 Corinthians 14:37–38 “the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord” Paul suggests that if anyone of the Corinthians saints claimed a prophetic gift, they could practice it by acknowledging that his writing was a divine commandment. Furthermore, if one does not recognize Paul's apostolic decrees, he should not be followed.

1 Corinthians 14:38–39 “my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly” (NIV) Paul heartily encouraged prophesying, while speaking with tongues was permitted with caution. His underlying council is valid not just for the church at Corinth, but is generally good advice: all things should be done in order and help to build up the church.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE RESURRECTION

In keeping with Greek philosophy, some of the Corinthian saints taught that there would be no physical resurrection. To combat this, Paul offers his longest defense of the Savior's physical resurrection.

1 CORINTHIANS 15

The Resurrection of Christ

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

1 Corinthians 15:1-2 “I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you” (BSB) Paul reminded the Corinthians that he preached the message of the gospel—and they received its saving message!

1 Corinthians 15:3-5 “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve” (BSB) This is the earliest “credo” in Christianity. (It was lengthened into the Nicene Creed in AD 325 when Catholicism was formed.) Early Christian fathers indicate that church members recited these verses at baptisms and on Sundays. It was probably a formula passed onto Paul and he was reciting it from memory. The repeated use of the word “that/*hoti*” (repeated six times) identifies a Greek statement of belief or fact. As the earliest account we have in the Bible of Jesus’ passion and resurrection (most scholars find the Gospels as written after the earliest Epistles), Paul expresses his belief that Jesus’ death was planned by God. Paul emphasizes that Jesus had to die for our sins—it was not a tragic death. He stresses four important points:

1. Christ died for our sins (a doctrine also taught in 1 Corinthians 5:7; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 3:24–26; Isaiah 53:12; and many times in the Book of Mormon—see footnote 1),
2. He was buried (fulfilling Isa 53:9),
3. He was raised (written in the Greek perfect tense, this means, “having been raised from death by God, he is alive evermore”),
4. He appeared in a resurrected body to many.

1 Corinthians 15:4 “He was buried” In the early church, the baptismal ordinance symbolized Jesus’ burial: the new Christian stepped down into the water, symbolizing Jesus’ death and burial. He or she was then underwater, representing Jesus’ time in the tomb. The convert then rose up of the water, clean and a new person, symbolizing the Lord’s Resurrection Easter morning.

1 Corinthians 15:5 “He appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve” (BSB) Paul reports that Jesus first appeared to Cephas, the rock (the Aramaic name for Peter) and then to the ten other Apostles. Paul’s record is the oldest we have, closest in time to the Resurrection, and appears consistent with Luke’s list of Christ’s visits after His Resurrection (see Luke 24:34). The other three Gospels do not share these details. Paul’s wording does not negate John’s account, where Jesus appears first to Mary at the garden tomb before meeting Peter and the Apostles (John 20).

1 Corinthians 15:6 “He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once” (BSB) Paul reminds his audience that the resurrected Jesus appeared in His *body* after his 40-day resurrected ministry to over 500 men (only men could stand as legal witnesses in Judaism—hence Paul includes the number of men, not women). Paul may have heard this account from Peter during their 15 days together in Jerusalem (see Galatians 1:18), or from other eyewitnesses, he met during his previous 20 years working with the Apostles. Just as it is today, “fallen asleep” is a euphemism for death.

1 Corinthians 15:7–9 “he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also” Scriptures record additional eye-witnesses of Jesus’ physical Resurrection after his 40-day ministry, including James the half-brother of Jesus (a Bishop or leader in Jerusalem) and “newer” apostles such as Matthias (Acts 1:26), Barnabas, Andronias, Junia (Romans 16:7), and Paul, who was “born out of due time” (or converted after the Resurrection).

1 Corinthians 15:10 “by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain” Grace here also can be translated, “forgiveness/merciful kindness.” Perhaps Paul felt driven or obliged to work harder than anyone else because he had persecuted the church and felt he needed more forgiveness or to give more service?

The Resurrection of Christ by Hendrick van den Broeck, 1571. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



1 Corinthians 15:11 “**this is what we preach, and this is what you believed**” (NIV) From Paul’s perspective, the belief in Christ’s physical resurrection was the foundation of Christianity.

The Resurrection of the Dead

1 Corinthians 15:12–28

1 Corinthians 15:12–19 “**how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?**” Paul addresses the false belief that some Corinthians had passed on denying the physical resurrection. Paul then gives six “if ... then” statements. Each one further proves his thesis that the physical resurrection is part of God’s plan. Paul felt that salvation could not exist without the resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:20 “**now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept**” Jesus’ resurrection becomes our guarantee that we, too, will rise again from the dead.

1 Corinthians 15:21–22 “**since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead**” George Frideric Handel made these verses famous in his oratorio, “The Messiah.” Paul compared Adam and Jesus using parallel construction. The Gospels do the same thing, highlighting Jesus as the second “son of God” with Adam as the first (Luke 3:22, 38). Adam represents the mortal father of the human race and Jesus represents their spiritual Father. Adam led the creation as Michael, and now Jesus leads the new creation (see Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5). In Hebrew, Adam can be plural, meaning humanity (v. 21). In verse 22, however, Paul uses the Greek, singular name to make sure his audience understands exactly what he is teaching.

1 Corinthians 15:23 “**every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming**” The scriptures refer to Jesus’ Second Coming as “His coming”. The phrase appears 38 times in the four-standard works. We do not find the phrase “second coming” until AD 150 when St. Justin the martyr used it. “Second Coming” appears only once in modern scriptures (D&C 34:6).

1 Corinthians 15:24 Jesus “**hands over the kingdom to God the Father after He has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power**” (BSB) This verse does a great job of describing how God the Father and the Son are separate beings but work together. The temporary usurper, Satan, claims to “rule” but ultimately will be “put down” or bound (Revelation 20:6–13).

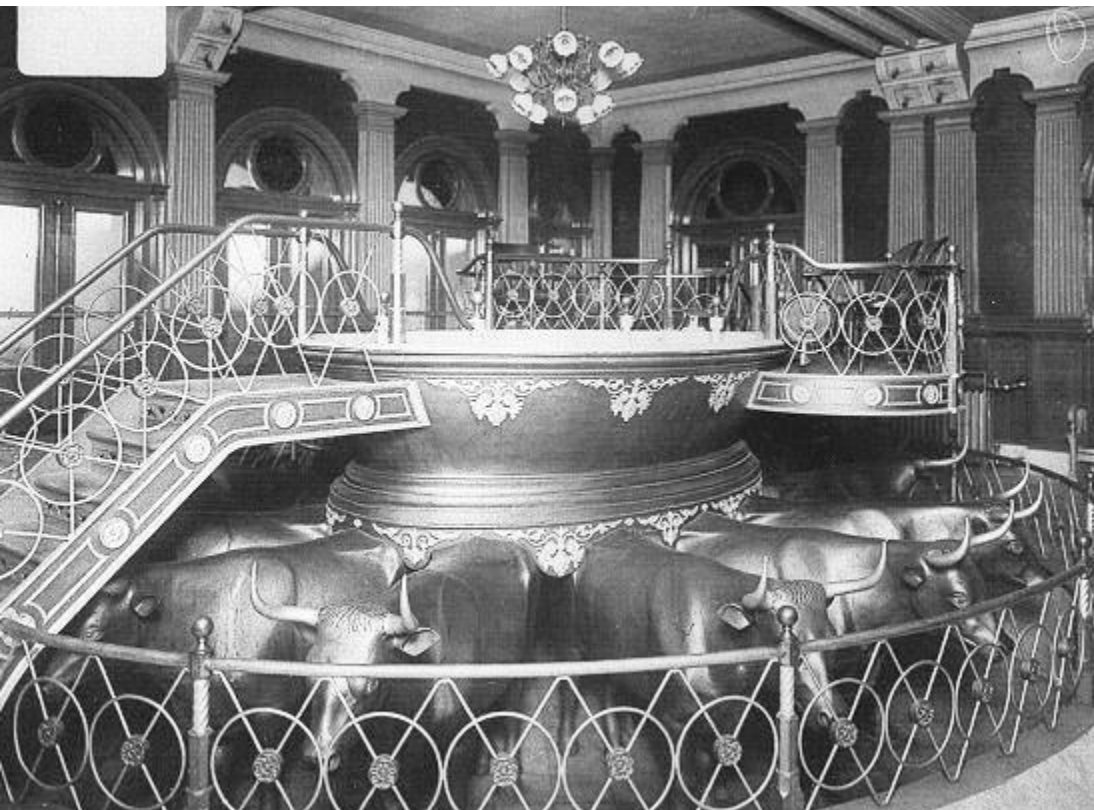
1 Corinthians 15:25–26 “**he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet**” Jesus will reign and have all power in His control after His coming including power over death, as mortals will be “twinkled” during the Millennium.

1 Corinthians 15:27–28 “**he hath put all things under his feet**” Paul quotes Psalm 8:6 with hints of 110:1.

Baptisms For The Dead

1 Corinthians 15:29–34

1 Corinthians 15:29 “Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?” Paul continues to give logical evidence of the physical resurrection by turning to the practice of baptism for the dead. The Resurrection would not be universal unless the dead who passed on without a knowledge of Jesus had the opportunity to accept Him (This is why most Christians believe in a limited atonement; they do not understand proxy work for the dead). The ancient Greek and Romans had cults for their dead. They took food to the cemetery for their dead to eat. Christians who celebrated “All Saints Day” believed that the Saints came to put the dead back in their graves. Egyptian tombs were filled with food and items for the afterlife. Forms of this doctrine were familiar in the ancient world. This verse confused Joseph Smith, so he prayed about it. The Lord’s answer is recorded in D&C 128:16. The restoration of this doctrine fits seamlessly with the plan of salvation and our understanding of the nature of God (as one who is no respecter of persons, see Romans 2:11).



Photograph of the baptismal font in the Salt Lake temple of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1909. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

1 Corinthians 15:31 “**I protest**” Other translations read, “I swear it by my pride in you, my brothers—for in Christ Jesus our Lord I am proud of you” (NEB). “I mean that, brothers—just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord” (NIV). The JST clarifies this verse by adding the context of Jesus’ resurrection, which gives it a whole new meaning:

KJV

I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

JST

I protest unto you the resurrection of the dead; and this is my rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord daily, though I die.

1 Corinthians 15:32 “If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die” Paul uses reverse logic to make his point. Colloquially he is saying, “Hey, I wouldn’t be trying so hard here in Ephesus as a missionary if there were no resurrection. Heck, if there is no resurrection, then I’d say go ahead and just eat, drink and be merry, for on the morrow we are going to die.” He may be using the “beasts” imagery to figuratively describe the spiritual enemies that he fights. As a Roman citizen, Paul would not have literally fought with wild beasts in a Roman arena.

1 Corinthians 15:33 “Bad company corrupts good character” (NIV) Paul quotes Menander’s Greek comedy, *Thais*: “Bad company ruins good morals.” He warns his audience that evil associations and communications corrupt us. The Spirit cannot abide when evil is present. (Recall Martin Harris’ experience as one of the three witnesses.) The JB translates the phrase as “bad friends.”

1 Corinthians 15:34 “Come back to your senses as you ought” (NIV) No names are mentioned, but Paul probably has a specific group in mind (not the whole congregation) when he charges them to “come to their right mind and sin no more” (KJV).

Resurrected Body

1 Corinthians 15:35–39

1 Corinthians 15:35–39 “But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?” (BSB) Paul now turns to a second part of their questions, addressing the timing and nature of the resurrection. He responds with an example from the law of the harvest: a seed will produce the same kind of plant that it came from. Animals likewise reproduce their own kind. In verse 36, “quicken” means to come to life again, or be resurrected.

The Kingdoms In Heaven

1 Corinthians 15:40–55

1 Corinthians 15:40–41 “There are also celestial bodies . . .” Paul explains to the Corinthians that there are different states in the resurrection or heavens. He repeats his thoughts in 2 Corinthians 12. The JST adds the name of each of the three kingdoms of glory and describes three kingdoms, not just two.

KJV

There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial:
but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the
terrestrial is another.

JST

Also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial,
and bodies telectual; but the glory of the celestial, one;
and the terrestrial, another; and the telectual, another.

A Christian scholar described these verses: “By using the imagery of the sun, moon and stars, Paul is emphasizing the infinite variety that reigns in the world which God created: why then should it be supposed that there can be only one kind of human body?” (F.F. Bruce, p. 131). The early Christian Father Irenaeus (Bishop in Lyon, France in AD 170) said, “As the elders say, then also shall they which have been deemed worthy of the abode in heaven go there while others shall enjoy the delight of paradise, and others shall possess the brightness of the city; for in every place shall the Savior be seen, according as they shall be worthy to see him.”¹⁷

Sun Shining Over Earth and Moon by Kevin Gill. Image via Flickr.



1 Corinthians 15:42–43 “the resurrection of the dead...is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power” What a blessing; we sow corruption here on earth, in our weaknesses, but if we have repentant hearts, Jesus will raise us in incorruption and power.

1 Corinthians 15:44 “it is raised a spiritual body” Joseph Smith refers to “spiritual bodies” as “glorified bodies” (D&C 88:27).

1 Corinthians 15:45–49 “The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam *was made* a quickening spirit... The first man *is* of the earth, earthy: the second man *is* the Lord from heaven” Paul continues to point out parallels between Adam and Jesus. “Adam/man” was the first son of God made from the earth; Jesus is the second Son of God from heaven. We all have a “natural” or physical body from Adam, and likewise we can have the glorified image of the “Man from heaven.” The NEB translates the word “*earthy*” (v. 47) as “was made of the dust of the earth” (NEB).

1 Corinthians 15:50 “neither doth corruption inherit incorruption” Paul continues to address the Greek-Christians who are hung up on the physical resurrection, teaching that our bodies will be changed—but not entirely.

1 Corinthians 15:51–52 “we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump” Paul expounds a mystery to them about the “twinkling” that will occur to those who die during the Millennium, “[Those] that liveth in righteousness shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye” (D&C 43:32; 63:51; 101:31). Paul taught the saints in Thessalonica “by the word of the Lord” about the fate of those of their number who died before the Second Coming: they would suffer no disadvantage, since at the Second Coming, the dead would rise with Christ. Now, Paul further teaches that the “dead in Christ” will rise with spiritual bodies, and those who are still alive at the Second Coming will not die, but will be changed—in split-second speed, they will receive spiritual/resurrected bodies.

1 Corinthians 15:53–58 “thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” (BSB) This summarizes our most beautiful doctrine: Jesus Christ saved us eternally. The bigger picture of the eternities is humbling: even the sun and stars are not immortal, but we are! His call to “always excel in the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” encourages us to work with God to accomplish His purposes on earth.

1 Corinthians 15:55 “O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory?” Paul quotes Hosea 13:14 and provides an extra link to Isaiah 25:8.

1 CORINTHIANS 16

Question about Welfare Contribution for Jerusalem

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

The last question Paul addresses in this Epistle deals with a welfare contribution for the saints in Jerusalem. According to Acts, while Paul and Barnabas were in Syrian Antioch, they helped with an earlier welfare-relief collection for the Jerusalem saints struggling with a famine (Acts 11:30). Now again, at the end of Paul's third mission, he gathered a welfare collection for the poorer Jerusalem saints. He does not give much space to his request in this letter, but he returns to the same plea in his next Epistle to them (2 Corinthians 8 and 9).

1 Corinthians 16:1 “Now about the collection for the Lord’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do” (NIV) It sounds as if the Corinthians knew of the welfare donation, or financial collection, from an earlier period through Paul, the Galatian Christians, or elsewhere (Galatians 2:10). Paul had given instructions to the Christians living in Galatia that he asked all to follow. They were all following the example of the Savior and earliest Christians who strove to have “no needy persons among them” (Acts 4:34, NIV). “The result likely strengthened the bond between those at the Church’s center and those of the surrounding areas. . . . [And] from the Old Testament . . . nuanced the moral act at the center of being a covenant people.”¹⁸

He refers to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem as “God’s dedicated people” (AB), or “saints” (KJV). There is something significant in Paul’s use of “Lord’s people.” It acknowledged the “spiritual debt” owned by the gentile churches to the founding saints, as well as unified the Christians as they helped one another across nationalities.¹⁹ The donation may have been seen in a similar light to the Israelite temple tax—in that all helped.

1 Corinthians 16:2 “On the first day of the week, each of you should put aside some money at home in proportion to what you have earned” (NR) Every week, on Sundays, some freewill offering was put aside; a type of tithes/offerings were saved to be collected when Paul arrived. In the KJV, it is difficult to discern that the amount donated was determined individually according to “a proportion of his weekly income” (NIV), but the Greek is clear.²⁰ Donations were a tangible demonstration of their faith, which included the Jewish saints’ awareness of the gentiles’ commitment. The Christian Sabbath was celebrated on the first day of the week church wide, no longer with the Jewish seventh day (Genesis 2:2; Exodus 35:2).

1 Corinthians 16:3-4 “when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem” (NIV) Paul promised that the delegates who collected the donations from Corinth would receive his introductory letters for the powers that were in Jerusalem, or, alternatively, he hoped to travel with them to Jerusalem, which he did (Acts 24:17).

Paul's Travel Plans

1 Corinthians 16:5–9

1 Corinthians 16:5–9 “I will come to you . . . I do not want to just see you in passing, but I hope to spend some time without, if the Lord should permit it . . . for a great and effective door has opened for me” (NR)

Paul knew the adversary worked against the Kingdom of Heaven, but he also saw the Lord's hand open many doors. He expressed his wish to spend the next winter in Corinth (around AD 58). The book of Acts details how that happened (Acts 20:2–4, 16, 22). Paul began this letter from Ephesus and left after Pentecost (Acts 16:8). Paul repeats again that all of his plans depended on the Lord's will (1 Corinthians 4:19). So too, we plan, with the open mind and heart of “God willing.”

Specific News on Timothy and Apollos

1 Corinthians 16:10–12

1 Corinthians 16:10–11 “When Timothy comes . . . he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am” (NIV) Paul planned to send his beloved convert and adopted “son,” Timothy, to help the Corinthian saints (as he did previously in 1 Thessalonians 3:2; and again in Philippians 2:19). Paul tenderly asked the Corinthians to be kind to him so that he would not fear them and be free to join Paul again.²¹ This gives us a hint that Timothy's personality was not forceful, or that he was still young (1 Timothy 4:12).

1 Corinthians 16:12 “As touching *our* brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come . . .” Paul's tone sounds very friendly with Apollos—assuring us that the divisions caused by the Corinthian saints were not initiated by the missionaries. Paul had hoped that Apollos could also visit them, but at that time, he was too busy (or he did not want to). I presume Apollos' reticence was related back to the beginning of the letter regarding the factions within Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:12; 2:4–6; 4:6). We have no evidence (yet), that Apollos visited them.

Conclusion

1 Corinthians 16:13–20

1 Corinthians 16:13–14 “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love” (NIV) Paul summarizes his Epistle by exhorting the saints to be firm in their faith, and to apply charity to everything they do. The KJV, “quit you like men,” mans to “be courageous” (RSV) or “valiant” (NEB), and “brave” (JB).

1 Corinthians 16:15–16 “The household of Stephanas . . . have devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people. I urge you, brothers and sisters, to submit to such people” (NIV) Paul mentions Stephanas and his household as those he had baptized personally (1 Corinthians 1:16). He was probably the first convert in Achaia (southern Greece), and had church meetings at his house. He points the Corinthians to examples who “really worked hard” (JB) and were exemplary to follow.

1 Corinthians 16:17–18 “For they have refreshed my spirit and yours: therefore acknowledge ye them that are such” Paul must have received another letter from the Corinthian saints via Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (Greek names often end in “us”). They must have brought good news.

1 Corinthians 16:19–20 “The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. All the brethren greet you” Paul’s fellow saints in and around Ephesus (modern Turkey) were referred to as “the churches in Asia.” The “churches” referred to groups that gathered in homes. Aquila and Priscilla used to live in Corinth. We read about these two dynamic examples of early Jewish-Christian converts from Rome, first as fellow tent makers (or leather workers) in Acts 18:2, 18–19, 26; Romans 16:13; and again in 2 Timothy 4:19. These early missionaries were joined by other close friends with Paul in sending greetings.

“Greet ye one another with an holy kiss” Paul includes this admonition in the ending of four Epistles (also, 2 Corinthians 13:12; Romans 16:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:26). It was offered as a “concrete manifestation of the unity and fellowship of Christians, no matter what their social status might be. . . . in time it became known as ”the kiss of peace.”²² It became a public sign of their faith.

Post Script

1 Corinthians 16:21–24

1 Corinthians 16:21 “The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand” Paul’s routine practice authenticated three other letters too (Galatians 6:11; Colossians 4:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:17).

1 Corinthians 16:22 “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha” or “be under a divine curse. Come, O Lord!” (BSB) Paul’s ending with a curse is unique to this letter. It represents the Aramaic of Paul’s mother tongue. His last words are either a prayer for the resurrected Lord to make himself known or felt among the Corinthian saints, or an expression of hope that the Second Coming will speedily come to cleanse the earth.

Header Image: Image portraying the glory of the sun and the earth. Image by qimono via Pixabay.

ENDNOTES

1. 2 Nephi 2:3–10; 9:5–2; 11:4–5; Jacob 4:11–13; Mosiah 3:16–18; 4:2–8; Alma 7:11–15; 34:5, 8–16; 36:17–19; 42:11–29; Helaman 5:9–12; 3 Nephi 11:11–14; Moroni 8:19–26.
2. Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, *Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 682.
3. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:215–216. The quote continued, “and that constitutes a prophet; and any man who says he is a teacher or preacher of righteousness, and denies the spirit of prophecy, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; and by this key false teachers and imposters may be detected.”
4. *Ibid.*, 5:31–32.
5. For example in Smith, *History* from December 26, 1841: “Sunday evening Sermon on the purpose of the gift of tongues: The public meeting of the Saints was at my house this evening, and after Patriarch Hyrum Smith and Elder Brigham Young had spoken on the principles of faith, and the gifts of the Spirit, I read the 13th chapter of First Corinthians, also a part of the 14th chapter, and remarked that the gift of tongues was necessary in the Church; but that if Satan could not speak in tongues, he could not tempt a Dutchman, or any other nation . . .” (*Ibid.*, 4:486). Again another warning was given in a sermon to the women of Nauvoo on April 28, 1842: “If you have a matter to reveal, let it be in your own tongue; do not indulge too much in the exercise of the gift of tongues, or the devil will take advantage of the innocent and unwary. You may speak in tongues for your own comfort, but I lay this down for a rule, that if anything is taught by the gift of tongues, it is not to be received for doctrine.” The summary notes recorded by Eliza R. Snow added: “The Spirit of the Lord was poured out in a very powerful manner, never to be forgotten by those present on this interesting occasion” (*Ibid.*, 4:602, 603, 607).
6. *Ibid.*, 4:486; also 2:162; 3:379; 3:392.
7. Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright* (1856 Reprint, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984), 225. In the early 1840s, A Methodist minister, Cartwright, reported a meeting with Joseph Smith once in Springfield, Illinois. According to him, their conversation focused on the gifts of the Spirit: “On a certain occasion I fell in with Joe Smith . . . we soon fell into a free conversation on the subject of religion and Mormonism in particular. I found him to be a very illiterate and impudent desperado in morals, but, at the same time, he had a vast fund of low cunning. . . . He believed that among all the Churches in the world the Methodist was the nearest right, and that, as far as they went, they were right. But they had stopped short by not claiming the gift of tongues, of prophecy, and of miracles, and then quoted a batch of Scripture to prove his positions correct. Upon the whole, he did pretty well for clumsy Joe.” Their “high debate” ended when Joseph invited him to visit Nauvoo: “Now,” said he, “if you will go with me to Nauvoo, I will show you many living witnesses that will testify that they were, by the saints, cured of blindness, lameness, deafness, dumbness, and all the diseases that human flesh is heir to; and I will show you,” said he, “that we have the gift of tongues, and can speak in unknown languages, and that the saints can drink any deadly poison and it will not hurt them.” He closed by saying, “the idle stories you hear about us are nothing but sheer persecution” (*ibid.*, 226). Cartwright’s recollection of their conversation sounds exaggerated, but it unmistakably provides his impressions and perception.

8. Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: GP, 2015), 199–122. Much of my explanation here is adapted and slightly changed from my book, thanks to the recent feedback and edit from Michael Rhodes.
9. In addition to the dozen verses listed in the preceding paragraph, Paul explicitly supported female co-workers, including Chloe, Phebe, Lydia, Priscilla, the sisters in Philippi, and his yokefellow. If we add the positive examples in the book of Acts and the Gospels, the examples multiply. There are 30 named women who were positive disciples in the New Testament, as well as several unnamed.
10. Draper and Rhodes, *Corinthians*, 716.
11. Welch and Hall, *Charting the New Testament*, 2002, 15–15.
12. For more information on the Joseph Smith Translation see, Robert J. Matthews, *A Plainer Translation: Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible—A History and Commentary* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University), 1975
13. Draper and Rhodes, *Corinthians*, 718.
14. Gordon D. Fee, *First Corinthians, 2nd Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), 697–710.
15. *Mishnah, Ketuboth* 6.6; *Gittin* 9.10. Jewish women were not allowed to speak in their worship or synagogue, nor in any public gathering. In fact, a husband could divorce his wife for speaking to another man.
16. Dianne Bergant, Robert J. Karris, ed., *The Collegeville Bible Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989), 1129.1.
17. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 127.
18. Draper and Rhodes, *Corinthians*, 829.
19. F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (London, England: Oliphants, 1971), 158.
20. Bruce, *Corinthians*, 158.
21. Timothy's mother and Grandmother, Unis and Lois, were Jewish, but his father was a Gentile. Paul figuratively adopted him as he helped his conversion. For more on Timothy see commentary on Acts 16:1–6.
22. Joseph Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: 1 Corinthians*, 629.



2 CORINTHIANS 1–6

COMFORT, TRIALS, CHRIST'S ATONEMENT, FAITH

CA. FALL OF A.D. 55

INTRODUCTION

Paul follows the rebuke in his last Epistle to the young Corinthian converts, with this Epistle's outpouring of comfort and love. It must have been healing for both parties. We see Paul's devotion to these saints and how meaningful their relationship was to him. The book of Acts gives the historical background and chronology of the letter (Acts 18–20:3). After three years in Ephesus, Paul ended his mission by traveling farther west across northern Greece. There Titus met up with Paul and shared the news that the Corinthian disciples had humbly and meekly received his chastisement (2 Corinthians 7:5–9). Overjoyed with the news, he immediately wrote to thank them and notify them that he would indeed spend the winter with them in Corinth. Paul sent this letter with Timothy, and Erastus went with Titus back to Corinth to make the needed preparations (Acts 19:21–22).

PURPOSE

Paul wrote to thank most of the saints for meekly receiving his previous rebuke and to encourage others to make the needed correction.

He offers an update on his upcoming visit for the winter months and asks them to co-operate with Titus and the others coming to prepare. The underlying purpose was to encourage them to complete the collection of financial contributions (tithes and offerings) and commend those he has assigned (2 Corinthians 8:16–9:5).

AUDIENCE

Greek and Jewish converts living in the city of Corinth as well as the greater area of Achaia (See introduction to 1 Corinthians 1).

OUTLINE OF 2 CORINTHIANS 1–6

1:1:1–11 OPENING:

1:1–2 Greetings Introduction
1:3–11 Paul offers blessings

1:1:12–9:15 BODY:

1:12–2:4 Paul changed plans but still will visit
2:5–11 Forgive and comfort the offender
2:14–17 Apostles' Service: Knowing Christ
3:1–18 Apostles=Ministers of the New Covenant
4:1–6 Apostles spread Light of Christ
4:7–5:10 Apostles bring life in Christ
5:11–6:2 Apostles' ministry to the world
5:20–9:15 Appeals:
6:3–10 Apostles suffer afflictions, yet rejoice
6:11–7:4 Separate yourself from uncleanness

2 CORINTHIANS 1

Greetings and Comfort

1 Corinthians 1:1–11

2 Corinthians 1:1 “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth and . . . all Achaia” Paul’s standard introduction is found similarly in other Epistles and includes his call from God as an “apostle/*apostolos*/a messenger, envoy, delegate, one commissioned by another to represent him in some way, especially a man sent out by Jesus Christ Himself to preach the Gospel.”¹ Timothy learned the scriptures from his mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois. He became Paul’s “true son in the faith,” and beloved younger companion. Timothy was also included as a co-sender of five other Pauline letters (1 Timothy 1:2, 18; etc.).² They send greetings to all the saints spread across the whole Peloponnesus. (Corinth was the capital city of southern Greece.)

2 Corinthians 1:2 “Grace to you and peace from God” This is Paul’s standard greeting in all the genuine Pauline letters.³ Grace most often refers to a gift or blessing from the Lord, or it can also mean kindness or gratitude.

2 Corinthians 1:3–7 “the Father of mercies . . . who comforteth us in all our tribulation” Paul’s message was that the “comfort/*paraklesis/parakaleo*” that comes from the Spirit. He repeated the same word, either a noun or verb

eight times in these four verses—and nearly thirty more times throughout this Epistle. Yet he also admitted that suffering is part of life. When we suffer for the gospel’s sake, we join Jesus in a sense; “we suffer with him.” Discipleship is not a guarantee of outcomes. The Christian life is not a promise of ease. This makes His comfort all the more needed. The same Greek word is translated as either: consolation, exhortation, and entreaty in the KJV. It can also mean, “to call to or for, to exhort, to encourage.” Exhorting can be a comfort that actively helped the saints endure tribulation. Paul developed this theme of comfort to help the saints, as it had helped him.

2 Corinthians 1:8–11 “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia . . . that we might not rely on ourselves but on God” Paul did not elaborate on the death sentence that he endured in Asia but instead expresses gratitude for God’s comfort through his trial. This may refer to the uproar in Ephesus caused by the silversmith trying to save the worship of Diana and her silver shrines (Acts 19:23–41). Or it may refer to an unrecorded imprisonment in Asia (modern Turkey) where Paul was close to death (also referenced in Philippians 1:19–30). The climax of these verses is Paul’s sincere thanks for the saints’ prayers in his behalf, “you help us by your prayers” (2 Corinthians 1:11, NIV).

Paul’s Change of Plans

2 Corinthians 1:12–2:4

2 Corinthians 1:12–20 “we have conducted ourselves . . . with integrity and godly sincerity. . . I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia” (NIV) Paul had canceled an earlier planned visit to Corinth, which his enemies interpreted as untrustworthy or fickle. He tried to explain that he had to modify his trip under God’s direction. It sounds as if there was some criticism of Paul due to questions of why he had not come as initially hoped. The “yea” and “nay” sections may refer to something in particular, or just a general reaffirming that his intentions have been noble.

2 Corinthians 1:21–22 “Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts” (NIV) God’s anointing is even more meaningful as we think of Jesus as the Messiah or “Anointed One.” His shared anointing can be sealed through the Holy Spirit of Promise. These verses have extra meaning to those familiar with the use of “Holy Spirit of Promise”



Map of Greece with Corinth.

in the restoration.⁴ Joseph Smith learned through revelation that “the Holy Spirit of Promise,” as referenced in Ephesians 1:16, can seal worthy saints through special temple ordinances (D&C 124:124; 132:18–26). Initially, the seal is conditionally received in temples and depends on one’s level of discipleship. After a period of testing, the seal can become permanent through another ordinance performed by a prophet. It is called a second anointing, or one’s calling and election made sure (D&C 132:18–19). Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, “To seal is to *ratify*, to *justify*, or to *approve*. Thus, an act which is sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise is one which is ratified by the Holy Ghost; it is one which is approved by the Lord; and the person who has taken the obligation upon himself is justified by the Spirit.”⁵ Like Christ, who is the Anointed One, God established an opportunity for the saints to also be anointed and sealed through the Holy Spirit of Promise—which in the KJV is called the “earnest of the Spirit” (and again in 2 Corinthians 5:5 and Ephesians 1:13–14).

2 Corinthians 1:23–24 “. . . it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth . . . we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm” (NIV) Paul’s delay gave them time to repent, “to spare you,” and strengthen their faith to stand accountable before the Lord and His apostolic servant.

2 CORINTHIANS 2

2 Corinthians 2:1–4 “I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you . . . For through many tears I wrote you . . . not to grieve you but to let you know how much I love you” (BSB) Paul’s feelings were intertwined with great love for the Corinthian saints. He wrote a harsh rebuke because he “had confidence in all of [them]” to change (BSB).

Forgiveness for Those Who Offend Us

2 Corinthians 2:5–11

2 Corinthians 2:5–8 “if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me but all of you—to some degree . . . you ought to forgive and comfort him . . . reaffirm your love for him” (BSB) Paul acknowledged how miserable it must have felt to receive a scolding or public spanking in his last letter. (This may refer specifically to the man who committed incest addressed in 1 Corinthians 5:1–5.) Once the offenders felt remorse, he asked the saints to freely forgive the prodigals with open arms of comfort and hearts of love. Paul continued to blend encouragement with discipline in this letter.

2 Corinthians 2:9–11 “My purpose in writing you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything . . . I have forgiven it in the presence of Christ for your sake” Following Christ and taking upon His name requires that we try to be obedient in all that He asks. We are tested to see if we can obey even when it is hard. The tests are sometimes just part of the opposition of life, and other times tailor-made. All of them are

to help us grow to become more Christlike. The purpose of life is to progress to become more like our Lord, so obedience is helpful. Paul also hoped to counter Satan’s regular use of despair and feelings of irreconcilable sin. There is another way back to God through repentance (Alma 36:17–20; 3 Nephi 9:22; etc.).

Triumph in Christ

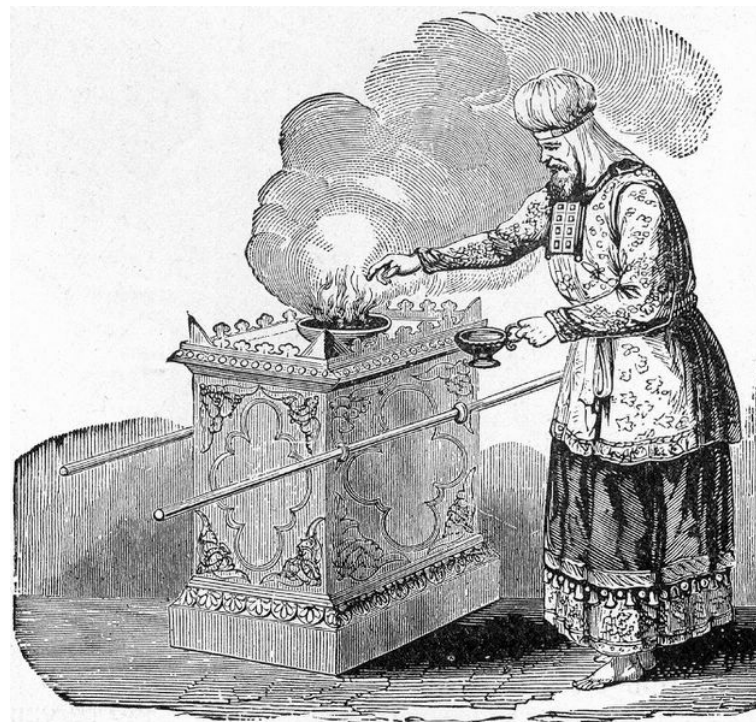
2 Corinthians 2:12–16

2 Corinthians 2:12–13 “when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord” As mentioned previously, Christ’s “gospel,” is the word for “good news” or “message of happiness,” made possible through Jesus’ atonement. The concept is similar to Alma 42:8, “the great plan of happiness.” As Paul presented the Good News, the Lord opened doors to him—just as He does for all who gather His sheep. Troas is mentioned in seven different verses, and meant, “the land of Troy.” It was a major port and center for Christians in the area. (Now it is in northwest Turkey.) Paul hoped to meet Titus in Troas, but as he had not arrived yet, Paul continued farther west and met up with him in Macedonia (2 Corinthians 7:5).

2 Corinthians 2:14–16 “thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place” (NKJV) The traditional procession of a triumphant general who parades at the head of his army after a victorious campaign, evokes an image of the Lord triumphantly leading his saints.⁶ The disciples have the blessing and responsibility of spreading the sweet fragrance of the gospel message to the world.

2 Corinthians 2:15–16 “For we are a sweet savor of Christ unto God” Paul’s imagery of “sweet savour” referred to an honorable sacrifice; in the Old Testament, we find it in forty-seven verses, always referring to the good fragrance of a sincere animal sacrifice. In the New Testament, Paul used it three times—here, in Ephesians 5:2, and Philippians 4:18—referring to the Old Testament (i.e. Gen 8:21; Exodus 29:18; etc.). Jesus and the apostles taught the need for a different type of sacrifice:

- “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice” (Matthew 9:13).
- “I sacrifice my life for the sheep” (John 10:15).



High priest offering fragrant frankincense on the altar. Illustration from Henry Davenport Northrop, “Treasures of the Bible,” 1894. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

- “Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (Romans 12:1).
- “If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all” (Philip 2:17).
- “Ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:20).

The sacrifice of our will—for the Lord’s will—has always been God’s desire. Yet, it was not until we had the example of Jesus that it was entirely understood. In the words of Elder Bruce C. Hafen:

The Savior’s perfect submission to the Eternal Father is the very essence of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Christ’s example teaches us that a broken heart is an eternal attribute of godliness. When our hearts are broken, we are completely open to the Spirit of God and recognize our dependence on Him for all that we have and all that we are. The sacrifice so entailed is a sacrifice of pride in all its forms. Like malleable clay in the hands of a skilled potter, the brokenhearted can be molded and shaped in the hands of the Master.⁷

When humility and obedience combine in doing the Lord’s work, Paul described it as a sacrifice for God having a sweet fragrance.

2 CORINTHIANS 3

Ministers of the New Covenant

2 Corinthians 3:1–6

2 Corinthians 3:1–3a “Do we need . . . letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, inscribed on our hearts” (BSB) Paul’s question sounds as if some Corinthians wanted a “letter of recommendation” from him to prove that he was indeed an apostle, or perhaps to prove his love. This may have stemmed from the harshness of his rebuke, or perhaps the schisms mentioned in 1 Corinthians 3:4. He used an ironic tone that may mean some enemies had come to Corinth and challenged his authority or ethics. Unlike common letters used to introduce himself, Paul felt that the clearest sign of his work and apostleship was the fruits of his labors. Basically, he asks them, “Why do you want a written document when you can look at my fruits? You as converts received a witness of the Spirit, which is a far greater witness than a piece of paper and ink.” Paul testified confidently of the Spirit, because he trusted in God.

2 Corinthians 3:3b–4 “not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart” The stone tablets given to Moses on Sinai were not as meaningful as the witness of the Spirit that can be recorded in one’s heart.

2 Corinthians 3:5 “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God” (NIV) Paul testified that he was not boasting or being prideful. Rather his “sufficiency” (KJV) or “adequacy” (NASB) was a sign of his faith in God.

Paul conquered all challenges as a Christian and throughout his apostolic missions with the courage and strength that grew from his confidence in God. He trusted that the Christ had called him to do the work, and that God would assist in His work.

2 Corinthians 3:6 “Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament . . . for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” As a minister, Paul served the covenant.” The new “testament/*diatheke*” has the meaning, “a covenant between two parties, a will, or testament.” The KJV translates “*diatheke*” to covenant (20 times) and testament (13 times). The Greeks used *diatheke* as a legal term for a compact or covenant. In the Old Testament *diatheke* represented God’s covenant with people like Noah and Israel. Now it is Jesus’ covenant.⁸

The Glory of the New Covenant: Not on Stone, But in Our Heart

2 Corinthians 3:7-18

2 Corinthians 3:7-12 “if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!” (NIV) Paul repeated this idea of comparing the lower law given by Moses that was only the transitory means to an end, to the Savior’s glorious high law that is transmitted by His Spirit three times. The greatness of the higher law gave Paul and fellow Christians a new level of undaunted determination; “since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech” (NKJV).

2 Corinthians 3:13 “We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing” (BSB) Paul made another reference to a story from the Law of Moses. He referred to Exodus 34:30-35, when Moses spent 40 days fasting and received the tablets of stone. Moses’ face shown so brightly that he had to cover it so that the people were not blinded (even though it was already fading when they saw him). In other words, Paul asked of the Christians, “Let the Spirit of God stream from your faces now that you have the new covenant with the Spirit of God.”



Moses Forbids the People to Follow Him by James Tissot, 1904.

2 Corinthians 3:14–16 “the same veil remains at the reading of the old covenant. It has not been lifted, because only in Christ can it be removed” (BSB) Paul continued with the same analogy. He felt that the Jews figuratively covered their hearts and minds, which kept them from a spiritual witness of the new covenant or testament. He assured them that someday when they turned to God, they would see clearly.

2 Corinthians 3:17 –18 “where the Spirit of *the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into His image with intensifying glory*” (BSB) Paul concluded this beautiful thought with his testimony that the Spirit of God provides freedom from sin and death, to growing glory. Different translations of these verses can seem to mix up the Holy Spirit and Jesus. In the restoration we know that all three work together for the same purpose: “this is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). The Spirit is the cleansing agent that transfers the Redeemer’s atoning sacrifice to repentant mortals. Also, in this light, we also can see a reference to different kingdoms of glory, just as Paul did later in the same Epistle (2 Corinthians 12:2).

2 CORINTHIANS 4

Divine Treasure Received in Our Earthly Vessels

2 Corinthians 4:1–7

2 Corinthians 4:1 “Since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart” (NIV) Paul’s source of encouragement is God’s mercy. Specifically, at this time, he was encouraged by the mercy God gave the Corinthian saints to repent. When they listened and acted, Paul’s ministering through chastisement actually worked to bring them up. Paul returned to this same theme again in verse 16 after he digresses to discuss our mortal state.

2 Corinthians 4:2 “by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” (NIV) Paul and the other missionaries or apostles (as “we”), have nothing to do with dishonesty or the craftiness of men. He renounces “secret and shameful ways” (NIV). Specifically, he does not tamper with, falsify, or water down the word of God that Jesus entrusted to His apostles. Paul asked his audience to use their own conscience to honestly judge if Paul taught the truth.

The doctrine that each person has received the ability to judge between truth and error is taught even more clearly in the Book of Mormon in Moroni 7:7–10.

I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge

it is of God. But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil . . . the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ.

Earlier in the Book of Mormon, Lehi taught that Christ's redemption empowered each person to be "free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon" (2 Nephi 2:16, also see 2:26). The text explains that wrong choices are made because evil forces detour and cloud one's judgment (2 Nephi 2:11, 17–18, 27). Nevertheless, God gave each accountable human the innate agency to judge and the ability to act correctly through 1) Christ's atonement overcoming the Fall, and 2) the Spirit of Christ that enlightens judgment.

2 Corinthians 4:3 "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost" The word "*hid*" in Greek is "*veil*." Unlike the Jewish Temple where the mercy seat or throne of God was veiled in the Holy of Holies, Christians do not need to seek God in a veiled room. Christians may worship a living God exemplified by the life and mission of His Son. Paul preached in an open and honest manner, not "veiled" with hidden meanings.

2 Corinthians 4:4 "the god of this world hath blinded the minds" One of the titles for Satan is "the god of this world." This is the only reference in the Bible with this exact title, but the message was taught by John the Beloved over and over as "prince of this world" and other similar phrases (John 12:31; also see John 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 5:19; and Ephesians 6:12). Paul taught that Satan can veil peoples' minds from the truth. The Deceiver blinds minds so they cannot see or feel truth, but Jesus' spirit removes that blindness and frees us from the power of the Destroyer. Satan intervenes if one does not believe. The key to seeing spiritual things is believing (D&C 5:16). Satan has less power over those who believe in Christ, and keep His covenants because the Spirit can become a protection, like spiritual armor, against Satan's counterfeits. Christ's glorious light that blinded Paul on the road to Damascus, has since radiated from his words and countenance to help convert the meek into believers. After converts have experienced that glorious witness, we must strive to receive the Savior's image on our countenances (Alma 5:14, 19).

2 Corinthians 4:5 "we do not preach ourselves, but rather Jesus the Messiah as Lord, and ourselves as merely your servants for Jesus' sake" (ISV) The subject of the missionaries' message, and of the gospel is Jesus the Messiah. Paul did not promote himself. Rather, he tried to act as Jesus' "servant/slave/bondsman/*doulos*." This is also the message of Psalm 115:1.

2 Corinthians 4:6 "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts . . . [and] displayed in the face of Christ" (NIV) Paul returned to the creation theme from Genesis 1:3 when the earth was dark and the Creator brought forth light. Likewise, when we are in spiritual darkness, He can bring light to shine in our hearts. When one feels the Spirit of God, one does not harbor darkness. The light of the



Photo by Daniel Smith.

“*earthen vessels,*” or in our earthly bodies made from clay or soil, we can experience the treasure of God’s light (Genesis 2:7). The KJV, “excellency” is also translated “transcendent, surpassing, overwhelming.”

gospel may be experienced by believing in God. Often in the scriptures, the knowledge of God, or to “know God” is to see His face. Paul received that knowledge (Acts 22:11). This knowledge is promised by God to all who “forsaketh his sins, and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face, and know that I am” (D&C 93:1).

2 Corinthians 4:7 “We are like clay jars in which this treasure is stored. The real power comes from God and not from us” (CEV) We do not have to wait until we are in the presence of God to know of this light. Even in our

Suffering Produces Perseverance

2 Corinthians 4:8-13

2 Corinthians 4:8-9 “we are perplexed, but not in despair” Paul admitted that even with his sure knowledge of the glory of God, his work as an apostle was still hard. His four examples show how the glorious light of the gospel in his life has lifted him up and helped carry his burden. With God’s Spirit helping, his troubles did not overwhelm him, nor lead him to despair. Paul spoke of his persecution, but with the hope of one supported by God through all the trials. He discusses the need for trials in Romans 5:3, “we know that they help us develop endurance” (NLT, also see 1 Peter 1:7; 4:13; James 1:12).

2 Corinthians 4:10-12 “we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body” (NIV) Paul’s service as an “apostle/one sent,” took a heavy toll on his physical body over the years. In order to testify of Jesus, Paul endured repeated physical torture. Later in the letter he lists how many times he was whipped, beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, and in danger (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). Yet, simultaneously, he experienced God’s miraculous gift of healing. In addition to the dangers, Paul wore out his body in the work of the Kingdom in hopes of helping more to receive Eternal Life.

Although, disciples now are rarely stoned and tortured, we will be asked to follow or obey even when it requires a sacrifice. As we manifest Christ in our bodies, we treat others with charity, maintain attitudes full of hope and faith, carefully fulfill responsibilities, accept setbacks, and stand up for truth in spite of physical and emotional challenges.

Sustained by Hope of Heaven

1 Corinthians 4:13-18

2 Corinthians 4:13 “Since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, **“I believed and therefore I spoke”** Paul paraphrases Psalms 116:10. He attributed his belief as his motivation to keep preaching. Even though he does not name it here, elsewhere he attributed the Spirit’s witness and continual promptings as the source of his belief (i.e. Romans 9:1; 1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Timothy 1:14; etc.).

2 Corinthians 4:14 “we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself” (NIV) The theme of the resurrection dominates Paul’s witness. He hopes to share that glorious experience with the Christian disciples.

2 Corinthians 4:15 “So that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow” (NIV) Paul re-emphasizes his point from verse 12. He was motivated to work night and day for their sakes, in hopes that they may join him in glorifying God in the resurrection. When Christians realize their abundant grace from God, they too give thanks and glorify God.

2 Corinthians 4:16 “We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day” (NIV) Missionary work, especially Paul’s style, is taxing physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Even though his body is aching, God rejuvenated his “*inward man,*” day by day.

2 Corinthians 4:17 “For our light and momentary affliction is producing for us an eternal glory that is far beyond comparison” (BSB) Paul kept an eternal perspective which helped him endure his momentary afflictions (i.e. mortality) in hopes of receiving Eternal rewards.

2 Corinthians 4:18 “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen . . . [or] eternal” (NIV) Paul encouraged his audience to follow his example, to seek delayed gratification. He looked beyond the temporal physical challenges and focused on the eternal matters.

2 CORINTHIANS 5

Sure Hope: The Atonement

2 Corinthians 5:1-6

The next several verses have a lot of conflicting commentary by biblical scholars trying to figure out what Paul meant. We are blessed to have many restored truths that shed light on the doctrine of the resurrection.

2 Corinthians 5:1 “We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” Paul used the imagery of the Israelites’ tabernacle (most translations use “tent”), to represent the mortal body. The “*tabernacle*” was temporary, just like our earthly bodies. Yet, God will give us a resurrected eternal body in the resurrection.

2 Corinthians 5:2–3 “Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling” (NIV) Paul “groaned” or longed to receive his resurrected body. Before refrigeration, penicillin, modern medicine,

and dental work, pain was a constant problem. Whether it was from a tooth ache or unclean water, most people lived in regular pain. Latter Paul also referred to his, “thorn in the flesh” (1 Corinthians 12:7).

The “clothing” motif continues through the next several verses. Paul hinted to Aaronic priests who received sacred vestments to wear in the temple after they were washed and anointed, and before they performed the sacred sacrificial work at the altar (Exodus 28–29).⁹ Paul then connected the Christian saints to God clothing his saints in resurrected bodies and a “robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10).

2 Corinthians 5:3–4 “being clothed we shall not be found naked . . . but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life” The implication is that Paul shrank at being deprived of embodiment of any sort (physical or spiritual).

Adam and Eve were clothed by God with physical clothing and the spiritual covering of the at-one-ment. Adding more significance to their clothing, in the Hebrew Old Testament, “atonement/*kaphar*” means “to cover over, pacify, make propitiation.”¹⁰ The Lord’s at-one-ment allows repentant sons and daughters of Adam and Eve to be clothed in the robes of righteousness. The ancient process of describing the at-one-ment is found in Nephi’s psalm, “O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness! O Lord, wilt thou make a way for mine escape before mine enemies!” (2 Nephi 4:33).¹¹ Paul referred to our physical bodies as a burden at times as we “sigh with anxiety” (RSV), but that does not mean we want to be without our bodies (“*unclothed*”), because before the resurrection, the spirits of the dead, long for their bodies. Rather, Paul looked forward to the day when all will be further clothed with heavenly resurrected bodies (“*swallowed up of life*”).

2 Corinthians 5:5 “Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come” (NIV) God planned for the glorious resurrection before



Photo of Israelite high priest clothing by Daniel Smith.

mortality began. Our assurance of this righteous desire is the “pledge” (BSB), or “earnest” of the Spirit. (KJV) (or perhaps the “holy spirit of promise” (D&C 76:53; 88:3; 124:124; D&C 132:7, 18, 19, 26; Ephesians 1:13).

2 Corinthians 5:6 “knowing that while we are at home in the body we are away from our home with the Lord” (AB) The phrase, “in the body” continues to be equivalent to “in the tent.” This illusion to the tabernacle is consistent with Paul’s earlier teaching that our bodies are temples of God where His Spirit can dwell (1 Corinthians 6:19).

The next phrase in Greek is often translated simply, “away from the Lord,” but then it loses its antithetical meaning of: “‘to leave one’s own country,’ or ‘to go on a long journey.’”¹² Although other Christian faiths do not teach a pre-mortal life as we do (D&C 93:23, 29; Abraham 3:22–23), Paul hinted that we have another home with the Lord, and that we are away from that home while on earth. Paul did not lose heart or get discouraged by the challenges of the physical body, but had “good courage” (ESV) or “confident” (KJV) that this is part of God’s plan while we are away from our Heavenly home.

We Walk by Faith

2 Corinthians 5:7–10

2 Corinthians 5:7 “For we walk by faith, not by sight” Paul referred to the importance of faith in all fourteen of the canonized Epistles affiliated with him. The book of Hebrews has perhaps the best section on faith in the New Testament. The subject of faith has a powerful representation in all four standard works, none perhaps as well-known in modern scripture as Alma 32:28–36, where faith is compared to a growing seed. God designed earth life to require faith, or our spiritual sense, not our five physical senses.

2 Corinthians 5:8 “We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (NIV) After the parenthetical of verse seven, Paul returned to his idea of being “*confident*” or of good courage knowing that in a short time, he will lose his physical body to be in the presence of God the Father and His Son again.

2 Corinthians 5:9 “we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him” (NIV) But Paul’s work will not change whether he is with God or working long distance for Him on earth. Paul’s aim is to please God on whatever side of the veil he works.

2 Corinthians 5:10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive his due for the things done in the body, whether good or bad” (BSB) The judgment day will come for all of us as we come before Christ, our judge. (Will we stand, kneel, or fall before Him?) All of our actions and mortal desires will be accounted for.

Joseph Smith included this verse while discussing baptisms for the dead in Nauvoo:

He [Jesus] holds the reins of judgment in his hands; he is a wise Lawgiver, and will judge all men, not according to the narrow, contracted notions of men, but “according to the deeds done in the body whether they be good or evil,” or whether these deeds were done in England, America, Spain, Turkey, or India. He will judge them, “not according to what they have not, but according to what they have,” those who have lived without law, will be judged without law, and those who have a law, will be judged by that law. We need not doubt the wisdom and intelligence of the Great Jehovah.¹³

Message of Reconciliation

2 Corinthians 5:11–21

2 Corinthians 5:11 “We know what it means to respect the Lord, and we encourage everyone to turn to him. God himself knows what we are like . . .” (CEV) Instead of “respect,” the KJV reads, “terror of the Lord” and most other English translations use, “fear of the Lord.” It is not a slavish fear, but rather, by knowing of the judgment day, believers are encouraged to take responsibility; it should motivate believers to live in a way to prepare for it. Paul’s realization of the judgment day motivated him to preach of it boldly. He (and possibly other missionaries included in “we”), act as if they stood before God each day. In a sense, each time disciples partake of the sacrament, it is a judgment day, and requires a transparent, repentant heart.

2 Corinthians 5:12–13 “We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but . . . so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. If we are “out of our mind” as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you” (NIV) Some of Paul’s critics thought he was “beside [himself]” or had gone crazy with zeal for the work, but Paul assures them that his efforts are motivated by God. The critics “glory in appearance” (KJV), and were not living in fear of the judgment. Other translations that try to make sense of the last phrase, “right mind,” also read: “being reasonable” (JB), or “of sound mind” (NAS), or “sober” (KJV). But the JST completely changed verse 13.

“We bear record that we are not beside ourselves; for whether we glory, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your sakes” (JST) Paul explained that he worked with a level head for their welfare.

2 Corinthians 5:14a “Christ’s love compels us” (NIV) Christ’s love may be the controlling factor in Paul’s motivation, but not necessarily as some translations suggest because, “Christ controls us” (ESV). This thought came from theologians like Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and John Calvin (1509–1564), who misunderstood agency, predestination, and foreordination. The prophet Joseph clarified this and spent hours discussing: “Unconditional election of individuals to eternal life was not taught by the Apostles. God did elect or predestinate, that all those who would be saved, should be saved in Christ Jesus, and through obedience to the Gospel; but He passes

over no man's sins, ... and if His children will not repent of their sins He will discard them.”¹⁴ Several new scriptures added in the restoration also clarified the importance of agency (Abraham 3:22–23; 2 Nephi 2:15–16, 27; Alma 13:3; D&C 138:53–36; etc.).

2 Corinthians 5:14b–15 “we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died . . . and was raised again” Paul used the hope of the resurrection as incentive for mortals to live by. As Jesus died and was resurrected, so we as Christians now live—not a worldly self-centered existence—but a Christ-centered life. Christ’s disciples are to “walk in newness of Life” (Romans 6:4), or with the hope of the resurrection.

2 Corinthians 5:16 “thou we once lived after the flesh, yet since we have known Christ now henceforth live we no more after the flesh” (JST) When we live after the flesh, we value materialism and things of the world. It usually is in opposition to the role of the Christ/Messiah. Paul and many others expected a conquering Messiah to come soon. The Jews misunderstood who Jesus of Nazareth really was. Not until disciples understood the Christian viewpoint of the gospel did they understand who Jesus was. That knowledge came not after the flesh, or “from a human point of view” (RSV), or “worldly point of view” but from divine inspiration which we call “the spirit of revelation” (D&C 8:2–3).

2 Corinthians 5:17 “if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” Christ brought an entirely new view and meaning to life. Worldly values have no part of his new creation. Jesus tried to explain this to Nicodemus, “Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

2 Corinthians 5:18–19 “all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation” In these two verses there are four forms of the word “reconcile/*katallagé*/restoration to favor, adjustment of a difference, restore.” This is the same Greek word translated as, “atonement,” in Romans 5:11.

Heavenly Father reconciled His plan through the Savior, Jesus of Nazareth in order to satisfy the demands of justice. Jesus’ atoning sacrifice has “*reconciled us to*” God the Father. Our trespasses need not hold us back any longer (Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:20).

2 Corinthians 5:20 “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God” (NIV) Paul’s use of “*we*” probably refers to the apostles. He defines them as “ambassadors for Christ,” or those who announce their King’s amnesty. An apostle’s message to the saints is from God Himself. He is the one who beseeches them to “reconcile” through repentance and forgiveness.

2 Corinthians 5:21 “He made the *One not having known sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*” (BLB) The second word “*sin*,” may have referred to the “sin offering” from the Hebrew where “*sin/hattat/asam*” referred to in a temple setting (Romans 8:3; Isaiah 53:10).¹⁵ The sacrificial idiom speaks of the at-one-ment of Christ for the sins of men (as the book of Hebrews elaborates). Christ was sinless, but carried our sins.

2 CORINTHIANS 6

Apostolic Entreaty

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

2 Corinthians 6:1 “As God’s co-workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain” (NIV) Paul identified himself as the Lord’s apostle, ambassador (2 Corinthians 1:1; 5:20), servant of Christ (Romans 1:1), and here as one of “God’s fellow workers” (BSB). He repeats his authority to plead with the Corinthian saints to not abandon their faith. The JST footnote clarifies that “him” (KJV) refers to “Christ.” Since 1 Corinthians 3:1, Paul has addressed his authority, and over the next ten verses Paul wraps up his long defense.

2 Corinthians 6:2-3 “At the right time I heard you, and on a day of salvation I helped you.’ Listen, now is really the ‘right time’! Now is the ‘day of salvation!’” (ISV) Paul quotes Isaiah 49:8 followed by his interpretation of the ancient text. Similarly, we live at the “right time” when the gospel is in its fullness and the Lord needs servants to gather Israel. All baptized members have signed up for this service, not only Paul and his fellow apostles.

2 Corinthians 6:4-5 “as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles . . .” (NIV). In God’s service, Paul patiently endured many forms of suffering—nine of which are mentioned—arranged in three sets of three.

1. General suffering: afflictions (or troubles, NIV), necessities (or hardships, NIV), and distresses (or calamities, NCB)
2. Suffering endured at the hands of men: stripes (or beatings, BSB), imprisonment, tumults (or riots, NIV)
3. Suffering by self-discipline: labors (demanding work, NIV), watching (or sleeplessness, NASB), fasting.

2 Corinthians 6:6-7 “By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, By the word of truth, by the power of God” Paul’s second list, includes qualities that he had cultivated to better serve God. The NIV translators communicated the second and third traits as “understanding” and “patience” (NIV). These virtues are also listed as gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:8-10). Interestingly,

Paul includes the Holy Spirit—which is usually thought of as what fosters all the other virtues. Perhaps he meant that he had learned how to seek and hear the Spirit.

“by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left”

The final virtue mentioned at the end of verse seven uses the military imagery. In fighting soldiers used the right hand to attack with a sword or dagger, and the left to hold their shield in defense.

2 Corinthians 6:8–10 “By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report . . . as having nothing, and yet possessing all things”

Life includes lots of irony. Paul lists nine pairs of the antithesis of his apostolic service: honor and dishonor; good and evil report; truth and deceivers; known and unknown; living and dying; chastened though not killed; sorrow and rejoicing; poor and rich; possessing nothing, yet knowing all things. These opposites may refer to the same experience, but are interpreted through either an earthly or eternal lens. For example, the gospel message was interpreted by some as an evil report, but by believers as the opposite. Those who are financially destitute, but have an active testimony of the Savior and serve him, will possess all things eternally. As a missionary, Paul experienced them all.



Greek hoplite soldier by Amédée Forestier, 1927. Image by Mike Bishop via Flickr.

2 Corinthians 6:11–13 “We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians. Our hearts are open wide. It is not our affection, but yours that is restrained. As a fair exchange, I ask you as my children: Open wide your hearts also” (BSB) Paul wrote with a sincere heart and asked the saints to receive and reciprocate his love.

If there was any reticence, it was on their part. This is similar to the Lord’s message to Oliver Cowdery in D&C 6:14, “as often as thou hast inquired thou hast received instruction of my Spirit.” The problem is not the Lord answering, but the receivers hearing and interpreting. Paul asked the saints to “enlarge” their hearts. The KJV referred to their “bowels” as the center of emotion or kindness and pity—like the modern use of, “heart.”

Being an Example

2 Corinthians 6:14–18

2 Corinthians 6:14 “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” Paul briefly interrupts his train of thought with a four-verse tangent to call for separation. Most biblical scholars agree these verses are “disruptive.”¹⁶ They may have been cut and pasted from another Pauline letter, or are not Pauline at all. Eight words are never used elsewhere in the New Testament. And the content contradicts Paul’s earlier advice to the Corinthians

to work out marriage differences if possible and remain together to bless one's unbelieving spouse and keep the children holy (1 Corinthians 7:10–14). However, the advice may refer specifically to the unmarried people who are seeking a spouse. Without more context, it appears to stick out like a sore thumb.

For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? Paul's example of over a decade of service as a missionary to the Gentiles contradicts this statement at its face value. This is another reason why most feel it was added to the text from a different author or different context.

2 Corinthians 6:15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? (NIV) *Belial* in Hebrew is the word for perdition or worthlessness, the enemy of God. It was sometimes used to refer to wickedness. Corinthians must cut ties with idolatrous associations. Yet, the idea of superior elitism that underlies these interruptive four verses is confusing as Paul and Jesus repeatedly denounced such prejudices earlier (John 4; Acts 10:34; 1 Corinthians 9:20; etc.).

2 Corinthians 6:16 “what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?” Earlier Paul discussed the ideal of disciples' bodies housing the Spirit of God as a temple (1 Corinthians 6:19). Jesus also called himself the Temple (John 2:19). The three Old Testament citations, and one lost scripture that follow defend this idea:

2 Corinthians 6:16b

“I will live with them
and walk among them,
and I will be their God,
and they will be My people” (BSB)

This citation echoes the Old Testament covenant relationship found in Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 32:38; Ezekiel 37:27.

2 Corinthians 6:17

“Therefore come out from among them
and be separate, says the Lord.
Touch no unclean thing,
and I will receive you.” (BSB)

We can find similar messages in Isaiah 52:11 and Ezekiel 20:34.

2 Corinthians 6:18

“I will be a Father to you,
and you will be My sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty.” (BSB)

Although not a clear match, the first line of this quotation is found in 2 Samuel 7:14. The list of three Old Testament citations as evidence for this abrupt rational suggests that the author knew the law. Nowhere in Paul’s writings do we find the phrase, “sons and daughters,” although the Fatherhood of God was well established in Christianity by Jesus. Even though this section against joining with pagans is disruptive, it is found in all the early Greek manuscripts of the Epistle. So either it was added very early, or it was a digression dealing with a specific issue that arose.

As always, whenever we find confusing passages of scripture in the Epistles, it is wise to compare them with the Lord’s teachings, restored scripture, and statements from living prophets. The prophet Joseph Smith taught that not everything in the Bible was accurate in its current form (Article of Faith, #8). I wonder if this passage falls into that category.

Header Image: The remaining Corinthian columns of the Temple of Artemis, Gerasa, Jordan. Photo taken by Carole Raddato in 2017. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

1. James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Abingdon Press, 1890). All Greek definitions and words in this commentary are used from Strong.
2. Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; Philemon 1:1.
3. Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; Galatians 1:3; Philippians 1:2; Philemon 1:3; also in Ephesians 1:2; and slight variation in Colossians 1:2 and 2 Thessalonians 1:2. The authentic Pauline Epistles share vocabulary, style, phrases and themes. The other letters that receive his name, still may have originated by him, but there is less evidence of continuity. However, John L. Hilton's stylometry showed all the Pauline corpus sharing statistical validity except the book of Ephesians. Unpublished study in possession of author.
4. Daniel H. Ludlow, *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (NYC, NY: Macmillan Publishing, 1992), 2.651–652. "The Holy Spirit of Promise . . . refers to a specific function of the Holy Ghost. . . [It] is the power by which ordinances and other righteous acts performed on this earth . . . are ratified, validated, and sealed in heaven. . . . The ultimate manifestation of the Holy Spirit of Promise is in connection with having one's Calling and Election made sure—that is, receiving 'the more sure word of prophecy' testifying that an individual is sealed up to Eternal Life (D&C 131:5). The Holy Spirit of Promise validates this blessing or seals it upon the person."
5. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 361.
6. Jose Maria Casciaro, ed., *The Navarre Bible: The Letters of Saint Paul* (NYC, NY: Scepter Publishing, 2000), 295.
7. Bruce C. Hafen, "A Broken Heart and a Contrite Spirit," *General Conference*, October 2007.
8. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 134.
9. Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos* (Provo and SLC, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1992), 91–111.
10. In Greek the word, "atonement/*katallagē*" meant to "reconciliation, restoration to favor."
11. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1989), 558.559. "In Semitic languages, where one root can have many meanings, the first rule is always to look for the basic or literal meaning of the word, which in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic usually takes us back to early days and simple homely affairs of life in the desert or the countryside. . . . It was the custom for one fleeing for his life in the desert to seek protection in the tent of a great sheik, crying out, '*Ana dakhiluka*,' meaning 'I am thy suppliant,' whereupon the Lord would place the hem of his robe over the guest's shoulder and declare him under his protection. . . . This puts him under the Lord's protection from all enemies. They embrace in a close hug, as Arab chiefs still do; the Lord makes a place for him and invites him to sit down beside him—they are at-one (2 Nephi 4:33; Alma 5:24)."
12. Victor Paul Furnish, *The Anchor Bible: II Corinthians* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 272.
13. "Times and Seasons, 15 April 1842," 759, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 28, 2019, <https://www.josephsmith-papers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-15-april-1842/9>.
14. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 2d ed., (SLC, UT: Deseret Book Co., 1949), 4:360. The reformer John Calvin, a French theologian and minister who heavily impacted Protestant thought wrote, "We call predestination God's eternal

decree, by which he determined within himself what he willed to become of each man. . . . Eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death.” Victor I. Ezigbo, *Introducing Christian Theologies: Voices from Global Christian Communities, vol 2* (Cambridge, England: Lutterworth Press, 2016), 68.

15. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 340. Furnish disagrees with this hypothesis as he sees no temple setting in the Epistle. Instead, he sees Paul “thinking in a general way of Christ’s identification with sinful humanity.” However, anytime we refer to Jesus’ atoning sacrifice, I think it speaks of a temple setting.
16. *Ibid*, 368.



2 CORINTHIANS 7–13

REPENTANCE, WELFARE CONTRIBUTIONS, DEFENDING
AUTHORITY. CA. A.D. 55–57.

INTRODUCTION

The second half of this letter treats three main subjects: the need for repentance, the welfare contributions, and his defense of his authority. With only knowing one side of their communication, we assume that Corinth harbored enemies who attacked Paul's position, hence his need to defend his calling. Not until the last third of this letter, does Paul call a few rebellious to repentance. He closes by asking them to prepare an offering for the poor that he will collect and transport to Jerusalem.

Outline

2 Corinthians 7:1–3 Continuation of Paul’s Warning—Saints’ need to Repent

7:4–16 Paul Joys over Titus’ News of the Saints’ Repentance

7:8–16 Godly Sorrow Motivates Positive Change

8:1–9 Offerings for Poor—Be Generous

8:10–15 Guidance on Giving

8:16–9:5 Paul’s Commendation of His Delegates to the Corinthians

9:6–15 Blessings Come from Giving

2 Corinthians 10–12 Repent of Evil Speaking Against the Lord’s Servants

10:1–11 Paul’s Reply to Accusations of Weakness and Overbearing Nature

10:12–18 Paul’s Reply to Complaints Against His Aversion to Ambition

11:1–15 Paul Defends Himself through “A Fool’s Speech”

11:16–33 Paul’s List of Sufferings as an Apostle

12:1–10 Vision of the Third Heaven

12:11–21 Paul’s Concern for the Corinthians Church

2 Corinthians 13:1–10 Concluding Admonition

13:11–14 Final Exhortation, Greeting and Benediction

2 CORINTHIANS 7

Continuation of Paul’s Warning Against Idolatry and the Need to be Cleansed

2 Corinthians 7:1–3

2 Corinthians 7:1 “since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (NIV) This verse actually belongs with the last few verses of chapter six, following three Old Testament citations where the Lord promised if His people stayed away from idols, He would:

1. Receive the saints,
2. Become as a Father to them,
3. Believers will become His sons and daughters.

These promises also extend into our dispensation. We must constantly repent by cleansing our thoughts, words, and actions from everything unholy. As the Spirit cannot dwell in unholy places, we must quickly repent in order to receive the companionship of the Spirit. In the KJV footnote, “filthiness” may relate to “fellowship,” but actu-

ally, the Greek word “*molusmos*” means: “staining, defilement, pollution.” In the last phrase, “perfecting/*epiteleo*” meant “to bring to an end, accomplish, perfect, execute, complete.”

2 Corinthians 7:2–3 “Receive us; we have wronged no man . . . ye are in our hearts to die and live with you”

Paul defends himself against any misrepresentations. Repeatedly he defends his apostolic authority, and continues for the next six chapters. Yet following his correction, he reassured his audience of his love for them. The Lord taught this pattern to the prophet Joseph as well, “reproving betimes with sharpness when one may correct or reproving with sharpness when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy” (D&C 121:43). Paul may have also reworked the famous Odes by Horace from a century earlier, “with thee I’d love to live, with thee I’d gladly die.”

Paul Joys over Titus’ News of the Saints’ Repentance

2 Corinthians 7:4–16

2 Corinthians 7:4 “Great is my confidence in you; great is my pride in you; I am filled with encouragement; in all our troubles my joy overflows” (BSB) Paul now transitions to a new theme of the joy of repentance. Just as in 2 Corinthians 1:14; 5:12; and 6:11; Paul cannot say enough about his joy with the Corinthians’ repentance.

2 Corinthians 7:5–6a “When we were come . . . we were troubled on every side . . . Nevertheless, God, that comforteth those that are cast down” Paul retells them that he was so worried about them (probably how they would receive his scolding letter, wondering if they would repent), in addition to the troubles associated with traveling from Ephesus through Macedonia (northern Greece).

2 Corinthians 7:6b–7 “And not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him . . . your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever” (NIV) The Lord comforted Paul by sending a fellow human. The Spirit often prompts disciples to help each other in answer to prayers. Paul was overjoyed to hear Titus’ news of the Corinthians’ soft hearts and willingness to accept their correction (also see Alma 42:29–30).

Godly Sorrow Motivates Repentance

2 Corinthians 7:8–16

2 Corinthians 7:8–9 “I rejoice, not because you were made sorrowful, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you felt the sorrow that God had intended” (BSB) Paul’s scolding letter to the Corinthians (as there were others written, we can only assume this is what we call, 1 Corinthians) was not written to inflict pain, but to motivate repentance. It caused both Paul and the saints’ a period of grief but only temporarily. The positive outcome was worth the temporary remorse. Spencer W. Kimball explained that “godly sorrow” does not tear one

down, but motivates change to build one up. “Repentance of the godly type means that one comes to recognize the sin, and voluntarily, and without pressure from outside sources begins his transformation. If one is sorry only because someone found out about his sin, his repentance is not complete. Godly sorrow causes one to want to repent.”¹ Repentance is the change of heart and mind and action that brings one closer to God. It transforms sinners into a better people, and good people into better people.

The subject of repentance is discussed nearly four times as often in the Book of Mormon.

SCRIPTURE	TOTAL WORDS	REPENT, REPENTS, REPENTETH, REPENTED, REPENTANCE	WORD RATIO
The Book of Mormon	266,944	359	0.134 %
New Testament (KJV)	180,565	65	0.035 %



Repentance of St. Peter by Gerard Seghers, ca. 1629. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

2 Corinthians 7:10 “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret” (NIV) Christ’s teachings of repentance are not to produce guilt, but teach us how to convert that regret or shame through repentance into hope in Christ and joy in God’s plan of redemption. Russel M. Nelson, spoke on the repentance as a process that we all need. He asked,

‘Does *everyone* need to repent?’ The answer is yes. Too many people consider repentance as punishment—something to be avoided except in the most serious circumstances. But this feeling of being penalized is engendered by Satan. He tries to block us from looking to Jesus Christ, who stands with open arms, hoping and willing to heal, forgive, cleanse, strengthen, purify, and sanctify us.²

He explained that daily repentance allows the Savior to transform us to the best version of ourselves as we battle sin. With this outcome, repentance is the highest form of self-love.

2 Corinthians 7:11 “See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter” (NIV) The Corinthian saints internalized Paul’s apostolic call for repentance to heart and changed. After it produced a spectrum of emotions,

they were cleansed. The KJV word “revenge” is also translated, “punishment” (ESV), or “vindication” (BLB), but as Paul praises them, I do not think an apostle would encourage revenge, but rather to, “see justice done” (NIV).

2 Corinthians 7:12 “I also wrote to you . . . for our diligence in your behalf being manifested unto you before God” (YLT) Paul wrote from the depths of his love for the saints to encourage them to repentance. In other translations, this verse can also communicate that Paul saw their willingness to follow his direction, as an expression of cooperation with him, which God will record (BSB).

2 Corinthians 7:13 “we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you” (NIV) Paul’s comfort was enhanced by their happiness now, and the delight of Titus, too.

2 Corinthians 7:14–15 “I was not embarrassed by anything I had boasted to him about you. But just as everything we said to you was true. And his affection for you is even greater . . . as you welcomed him with fear and trembling” (BSB) All the good things Paul had told Titus about the Corinthians, he saw firsthand. Titus was especially impressed by the Corinthians’ humility and willingness to obey. The phrase: “fear and trembling” is repeated three times in the Old Testament, once in Mark 5:33, and five times in the Pauline Epistles (here, and 1 Corinthians 2:13; Ephesians 6:5; Philippians 2:12; Hebrews 12:2).

2 Corinthians 7:16 “I am glad I can have complete confidence in you” (NIV). Paul opens and closes this section by expressing his confidence (2 Corinthians 7:4). Now that the Corinthians have repented, he is confident that they will continue to choose the right.

2 CORINTHIANS 8

The Collection of Financial Offerings

Several months before, in his previous letter, Paul asked the wealthy Corinthians to gather offerings for the poor (1 Corinthians 16:1–4). He returns to this subject with delicacy and tact. This topic appears to be the major purpose of his letter. He wanted their contributions to be generous, but completely voluntary.

Be Generous in Offerings for the Poor

2 Corinthians 8:1–9

2 Corinthians 8:1 “And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches” (NIV) I chose the NIV here, because it clarifies when both genders are addressed—which was especially important for this new topic. Paul changes subjects with one of his favorite transition

words, “Now/*dē*” (BSB), or “Moreover” (KJV). Their “grace /*charis*” or “a gift” (RSV) came from their altruism. It reflected God’s divine grace that they received. Once he has expressed his appreciation of the Corinthians’ repentance and improved relations between them, he returns to the old matter of business, the collection of offerings for the poor and Jerusalem church. He deliberately refers to their neighboring churches in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea) where he was then serving.



Roman denarius of Nero, ca. A.D. 63–68. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

2 Corinthians 8:2 “In the midst of a very severe trial . . . their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity” (NIV) Paul praises the Macedonian saints for their generosity in spite of their poverty. He mentions their needy situation and contrasts it with the wealth enjoyed by the Corinthians saints in hopes of encouraging more liberal offerings.

2 Corinthians 8:3–4 “I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own” (NIV) The key here is that the offerings must be voluntary, “willing of themselves” (KJV). Even in a time of want, these benevolent saints saw it an honor to give and they sacrificed to help others in need. The principle was restored in Kirtland, Ohio, as the law of consecration (D&C 42). We also saw this in Acts 2:44; 4:32; and after Jesus’ visit to the Nephites “they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift” (4 Nephi 1:3).

The Lord’s law of Zion, or the celestial law, was to share their means so that there “was no poor among them” (Moses 7:18). The best place to find it described is in the Doctrine and Covenants (42:30–36, 39, 53–55; 51:1–6;

55:4; 59:5; 70:4; 78:22; 82:19; 104:11–15, 17–18). The law was based on three points—voluntary agency, a sense of stewardship, and accountability to God—the first of which is included in this verse. When saints are “empowered with correct knowledge of the law, we are free agents—accountable stewards of the Lord’s possessions, including ourselves. . . . Consecration is more than the act of giving. It is the sanctification that comes of giving willingly, for the right reasons.”³

2 Corinthians 8:5 “they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us” (NIV) Their generosity stemmed from their theology. First the poor saints gave their hearts to the Lord, and then they opened their coin pouches and donated their money.

2 Corinthians 8:6 “So we urged Titus to help complete your act of grace, just as he had started it” (BSB) Previously Paul had called Titus to collect a financial donation from Corinthian saints for the poor of the Jerusalem church (as Paul did in Macedonia). Paul emphasizes the liberality of the northern saints as an example for the Corinthians to follow (who were not in the same state). The word “*grace/charis*” most often referred to the “gift or blessing brought to man by Jesus Christ,” and also is translated as “a favor, gratitude, thanks, kindness.”⁴

2 Corinthians 8:7–8 “I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others” (NIV) Just as the Corinthian saints were known for their gifts of faith, speech, knowledge – and even their love for Paul—he now asks them to live up to their reputation by donating substantial offerings.

2 Corinthians 8:9 “Jesus Christ . . . became poor, so that you through *His* poverty might be enriched” (BSB) The doctrine of sacrifice underlined the Lord’s law of giving voluntary offerings. Paul reminded his audience of Jesus’ premortal example when He left His divine position to become a lowly builder in order to build the Kingdom of God on earth. Jesus gave of “His spiritual riches to raise mankind of his spiritual poverty.”⁵

Guidelines on Giving

2 Corinthians 8:10–15

2 Corinthians 8:10–11 “Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work . . . according to your means” (NIV) Six to nine months ago, Paul first asked them to gather monies for a generous offering for the poor (1 Corinthians 16:1–4).

2 Corinthians 8:12 “if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has” (BSB) This is the same principle that Jesus highlighted in the example of the widow’s mite. We must first give willingly, not necessarily according to our funds at the time or how rich we feel. The principle of sharing with the poor was repeated in the Old Testament regularly (Psalms 41:1–3; Proverbs 11:24–25; 19:17; 22:9; etc.).

2 Corinthians 8:13 “Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality” (NIV) It sounds as though Paul heard them criticizing the law of consecration, “why are we burdened so that someone else can have it easy?” The plan of the Lord’s Law of Consecration in its various levels of implementation is in part to learn to sacrifice, to help take care of the financial inequality that exists in the world, and to value things of God above things of the world.

2 Corinthians 8:14–15 “your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality” (NIV) The Corinthians may have questioned if the Jerusalem saints would repay the other churches. Repayment was not Paul’s focus, but the blessings from giving a real sacrifice. As an example, Paul quotes Exodus 16:18 and relates the current church gathering to the ancient children of Israel gathering manna, “each according to his need.”



Image by Photos_Marta via Pixabay.

Paul’s Commendation of His Delegates to the Corinthians

2 Corinthians 8:16–9:5

2 Corinthians 8:16–18 “Thanks *be* to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus. For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord” Titus, and an unnamed brother from Macedonia, volunteered to go back to Corinth to collect the donations for the poor in Jerusalem, before Paul would arrive.

2 Corinthians 8:20–21 “We hope to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this generous gift. For we are taking great care to do what is right . . .” (BSB) Paul wanted nothing suspicious about this collection. Honesty was practiced in the Lord’s sight, and in the sight of men.

2 Corinthians 8:22 “In addition, we are sending with them our brother who has often proved to us in many ways that he is zealous . . . they are representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ” (NIV) Another unnamed “brother” must be known by the Corinthians, as Paul had great trust in him, and assumed the Corinthians did, too. The trio of men were in charge of collecting the offerings for the poor before Paul would arrive.

2 Corinthians 8:24 “So show them your love, and prove to all the churches that our boasting about you is justified” (NIV) Paul asks the Corinthians one more time to donate their money generously as proof that they are true saints and are filled with the Love of Christ, especially to prove to these Macedonians that they are as generous as Paul had boasted.

2 CORINTHIANS 9

2 Corinthians 9:1–5 “I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness” Paul returns to the principles of the Law of Consecration. He asks the saints to give an accounting of their commitment to voluntarily share from their stewardship of early goods. Paying one’s tithes and offerings is not about money, but about our faith. It is a principle of obedience not finance.

Blessings Come from Giving

2 Corinthians 9:6–15

2 Corinthians 9:6 “He who sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (KJV 2000) Paul uses agricultural images and the Law of the Harvest to encourage a bountiful harvest of offerings. He hopes they learn that the law of the harvest works for more than just agriculture. When we give away all that we have to build the Lord’s kingdom, then God will bless us with more.

2 Corinthians 9:7 “for God loveth a cheerful giver” Paul coins a unique phrase, yet the idea stemmed from several Old Testament passages (i.e. Deuteronomy 15:10; Psalms 100:2; Proverbs 11:25; etc.). God’s request for voluntary offerings goes beyond money and includes one’s attitude and love. It is better not to give than have a bad attitude. The Lord built on these ideas in D&C 58:26, “It is not meet that I should command in all things; or he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward.” God will reward those who have pure desires as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7).



The Deeds of Christian Charity by Pieter Aertsen, 1575. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

2 Corinthians 9:8–10 “God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (NIV) We can trust that God will provide for his servants’ needs. As further evidence, Paul cites Psalm 112:9.

We read a similar message by King Benjamin who taught, “If ye do keep his commandments he doth bless you and prosper you” (Mosiah 2:22).

2 Corinthians 9:10–12 “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your store of seed and will increase the harvest of your righteousness” (BSB) Just as the monetary collection was to supply those in need, our Divine Gardener will bless those who generously give. Those gifts may be spiritual fruits—which are of greater value than monetary gifts. As Christians, we must see to the needs of our fellowmen physically and spiritually. Paul looks forward to the abundance of spiritual gifts that will be poured out on the saints who donate generously to the poor.

2 Corinthians 9:13–15 “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (NIV) All the gifts mortals can give pale in comparison with our Savior’s great gift of immortality and Eternal Life., and pondering on this motivate more generosity.

2 CORINTHIANS 10

Repent of Evil Speaking Against the Lord’s Servants

Chapter ten changes tone drastically (some scholars even speculate that it was a different letter).⁶ Paul calls on the saints for obedience and scolds some of them for speaking evil of their leaders (particularly him). By reading in between the lines, it appears that in this chapter Paul replies to accusations made against him. In the first half against his weakness and overbearing, and later against his supposed aversion to ambition. To address these problems, he returns to defending his apostolic authority.

Paul’s Reply to Accusations of Weakness and Overbearing

2 Corinthians 10:1–11

2 Corinthians 10:1–2 “By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am ‘timid when face to face with you, but ‘bold’ toward you when away!” (NIV) He opens by asserting that he follows the “humble and gentle” example of Jesus (CEV). This is used as evidence to support his authority as an apostle, and to speak for, and witness of the Lord. It is also a good example for all disciples to begin each precarious discussion with “the meekness and gentleness of Christ” (KJV). As an aside, in Jewish Wisdom literature, “the truly wise man is always ‘gentle.’”⁷ The NIV translation added quotation marks, to suggest that Paul cites the negative feedback he received from some church members in Corinth against him. In verse 2, Paul also threatens to become bold in person if they do not make the necessary changes.

2 Corinthians 10:3–5 “though we live in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh . . . Instead, they have divine power to demolish strongholds . . . and every presumption set up against the knowledge of God” (BSB) In verses 3 through 5, Paul detours to make an apologetic defense on the subject of the worldliness. Paul alludes to the “flesh” or “world” in vs. 2 that “some people . . . think that we live by the standards of this world” (NIV). He has before stated that Saints who live in the world do not live by the world’s standards (Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 7:31; etc.). The battle Christians fight against Satan—sin and the ways of the world—is empowered by divine gifts. Paul presents himself as fighting for Christ’s battle against darkness.

2 Corinthians 10:6 “we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, as soon as your obedience is complete” (BSB) Paul repeats his call for obedience. Carrying through with himself as a military commander, he wants to cut down those disobedient saints. This may have been addressed to a particular person or group of

offenders that he addressed earlier. Titus passed on the news that many saints repented, but it appears there was still room for others to align themselves with the apostle's corrections (1 Corinthians 12:21; 13:2; etc.).

2 Corinthians 10:7–11 “**You are looking at outward appearances . . . even if I boast somewhat excessively about the authority the Lord gave us . . . I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you by my letters . . .**” (BSB) Paul backs up his call for obedience with another appeal to his apostolic authority (also in 1 Corinthians 9:1–2; 2 Corinthians 3:1–13; etc.). He wrote boldly and threatened to use the same tactic when he came in person if they did not repent.

Paul's Reply to Complaints Against his Aversion to Ambition

2 Corinthians 10:12–18

2 Corinthians 10:12–13 “**We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves**” Paul uses irony to contrast himself with those acting pridefully, “they measure themselves by themselves.” We can guess that some members denounced him and felt they were more qualified for the position. The Greco-Roman world was a competitive network. Teachers and statesmen vied for status. Paul refuses to play that game and denounces his rivals who do.

2 Corinthians 10:14–16 “**we are not overstepping our bounds . . . Neither do we boast beyond our limits in the labors of others**” (BSB) Related to apostolic authority, Paul moves onto a problem with “apostolic jurisdiction.”⁸ Only having one side of the conversation, we must assume that Paul passionately addresses his love and responsibility over the Corinthian saints because some were contentious about who should be their leader. Paul opened the area as a missionary four or five years ago and claims fatherhood of that area.

2 Corinthians 10:17–19 Rather, “**Let him who boasts boast in the Lord. For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends**” (BSB) Rather than arguing with his opponents about who was the rightful heir of the region of Achaia, Paul cites Jeremiah 9:24. The Lord chooses mere mortals—but when He combines their weaknesses and strengths with His divine mantle, the Lord's leaders can accomplish His work. This great missionary knows that the work is run by the Lord.

Paul sounds like another great missionary in the Book of Mormon, Ammon:

I do not boast in my own strength, nor in my own wisdom . . . my joy is carried away, even unto boasting in my God; for he has all power, all wisdom, and . . . he is a merciful Being, even unto salvation, to those who will repent and believe on his name. Now if this is boasting, even so will I boast (Alma 25:35–36).

2 CORINTHIANS 11

Paul Defends Himself through “A Fool’s Speech”

For the first half of this chapter, Paul introduced his foolish argument—a very long prologue. Shortly after he denounced the boasting of his enemies, he adopted his critics’ tactic and called his defense “a fool’s speech” (2 Corinthians 11:1; 12:13). He listed his credentials and then explained his rationale behind not accepting financial support as a church leader (2 Corinthians 11:5–15). He continued to defend himself by enumerating the sacrifices he has endured as a missionary (2 Corinthians 11:16–33). Although he is self-conscious about “boasting,” he answers his enemies’ concerns in the same way they attacked. The Prologue is divided into three sections from 2 Corinthians 11:1–21.

Paul Identifies the Saints as Betrothed to Christ

2 Corinthians 11:1–4

2 Corinthians 11:1 “I hope you will put up with me in a little foolishness” (NIV) Paul asks his readers to indulge him in a little “foolishness” or “folly” (KJV), because he is going to brag. He calls it foolishness, because he has just denounced it and it is the same tactic his enemies used against him. They undermined Paul by parading their credentials and by faultfinding. Now Paul admits that he, by necessity, must do the same and parade his credentials as an apostle in order to silence them. This lasts for 21 verses.

2 Corinthians 11:2 “I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” Throughout the Bible, marriage is often used to symbolize God’s covenant with his people (Isaiah 50:1; 54:5–7; 62:5; Ezekiel 16:8; Hosea 2:19–20; etc.). A betrothal was the first step of a Jewish marriage. It was far more binding than a modern engagement, and occurred far younger.⁹ The young couple were married in a legal sense, but were not to share bed and board until after the final ceremony a year or so later. At the time of the New Testament, marriages were arranged by the father or guardian. Paul portrays himself as the matchmaker. In the New Testament, the bride represents the church and the groom, the Lord (Ephesians 5:27; Revelation 19:7; 22:17; etc.).

2 Corinthians 11:3 “Just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (NIV) Paul does not want his young converts to be deceived as Eve was by the cunning of Satan or his pawns.



Fragment from the front of a sarcophagus; relief showing a Roman marriage ceremony. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

2 Corinthians 11:4 “if someone comes and proclaims a Jesus other than the One we proclaimed . . . you put up with it way too easily” (BSB). It sounds as if an unnamed false teacher came to the region and taught a different gospel. The usurper or counterfeit had a different “spirit” that was not from God. Paul refers to the Apostolic dispensation as the “dispensation of the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:8; AMPC, NCB). The Holy Spirit is a major theme of Paul’s. Paul ironically asks, “If you can put up with a fake teacher, why can’t you put up with the apostle who taught you in the first place where you felt the Spirit of God witness of its truth?”

Paul asks Readers to Indulge His Foolish Boasting

2 Corinthians 11:5-15

2 Corinthians 11:5 “I do not think I am in the least inferior to those ‘super-apostles’”(NIV) He asks the saints to bear with him as he is as much an apostle as the others who knew Jesus personally, or perhaps he is referring specifically to Peter and John as “the very chiefest apostles” (KJV). In his Epistle to the Galatians, Paul refers to Peter, James II (the brother of the Lord), and John as the “pillars” (Gal 1:12) or “chiefest.” In turn, he calls himself the “least” of the apostles (12:11). Least or greatest, all apostles were special witnesses. Paul received his commission from Christ just as the other apostles had.

2 Corinthians 11:6 “Although I am not a polished speaker, I am certainly not lacking in knowledge. We have made this clear to you in every way possible” (BSB) By knowing the prominence of his hometown, Tarsus, as an intellectual center (Acts 21:39), by reading his letters (especially the chiasmic poetry of Philemon), by understanding his education (under Gamaliel, Acts 22:3), and by hearing of his speaking circuit (Mars Hill, Acts 17:19–22), I do not think Paul was an uneducated mediocre speaker. The Greek word does not mean “rude,” but translates as “an amateur” (AB, GNT), “unpolished” (BLB), or “unskilled” (NCB, NET)—in contrast to elegant orators of philosophy from the day. The Socratic and Sophist traditions raised up the greatest speakers in the history of the world. Paul never pretended to be on par with them in his second or third tongue.¹⁰ Yet, from the evidence in the New Testament, we see that he was a powerful public speaker. Although, Paul admits that in “knowledge,” he was skilled and taught them truth.

2 Corinthians 11:7–8 “Was it a sin for me . . . by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge?” (NIV) Paul returns to the fact that he did not receive any wages from the Corinthians for preaching. Yet, some of the other churches in Macedonia (vs. 9) contributed to his living expenses or “support” (NCB)—which made some of the Corinthians upset (jealous).

2 Corinthians 11:9–10 “I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so” (NIV) In addition to the funds from the Macedonians, this verse also seems to refer to Paul’s profession as a leather worker, or tent maker. The Book of Acts mentioned that he supported himself financially this way while in Corinth (Acts 18:3). Paul established a protocol for church leaders to support themselves the best they could,

and at times to receive voluntary aid. Paul was proud of the fact that he was not paid for preaching and even boasts of the fact.

2 Corinthians 11:11 “Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!” (NIV) The underlying motivation for Paul’s missionary work was his love for them. Even though he has been misunderstood by his enemies, he knew that God knew his heart.

2 Corinthians 11:12–15 “I will keep on doing what I am doing, in order to undercut . . . false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And . . . Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light” (BSB) These wicked teachers have “disguised” (RSV, JB) themselves to appear as good, just as Satan can appear as an angel of light. These false apostles were following Satan’s example. We assume this idea was well known as the pseudepigraphic book from the first century, *Life of Adam and Eve*, has Satan appearing to Eve “wearing the form of brightness of an angel.”¹¹

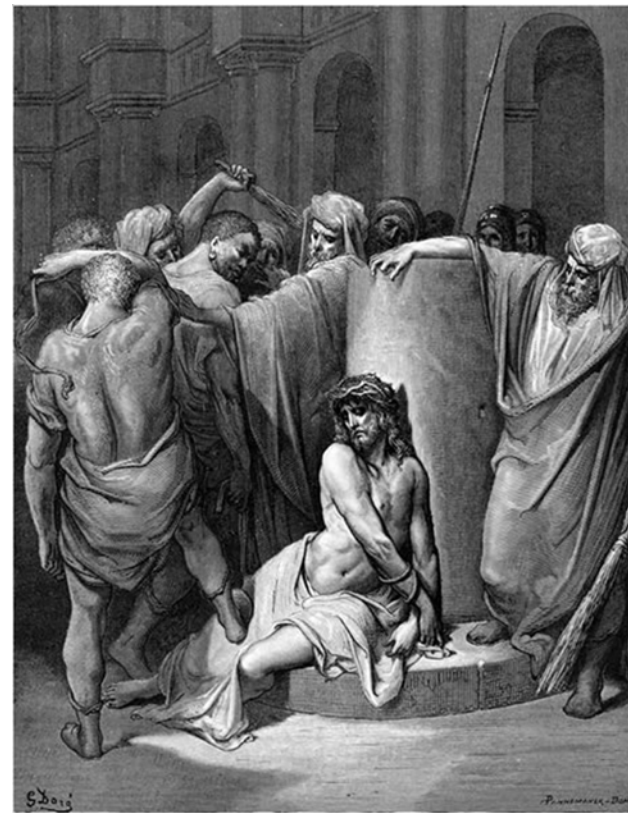
Paul’s List of Sufferings as an Apostle

2 Corinthians 11:16–33

2 Corinthians 11:16–17 “I repeat: Let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then tolerate me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting” (NIV) Paul summarizes the purpose of his prologue in this section. He only boasts “as a fool” to confront his critics. He’s trying to say that boasting is never a godly habit, but always foolishness.

2 Corinthians 11:18–20 “In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or exalts himself” It sounds as if the Corinthian saints received intruding men as their leaders who put on airs, bad mouthed Paul, and lived off the saints’ donations. Paul asked this group of murderers if they want him to glory in his accomplishment, too, in order to be believed?

2 Corinthians 11:21–23 “I can match what anyone else dares to boast about . . . Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I . . . are they servants of Christ? I am speaking like I am out of my mind, but I am so much more: in harder labor, in more imprisonments” (BSB) Paul addresses the attacks made



Jesus is Scourged by Gustave Dore, ca. 1870. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

against him, one at a time, with his own version of boasting. It seems likely that Paul's rival made a claim about his enduring hardships. This type of a record was known at the time from Cynic and Stoic authors as well.

2 Corinthians 11:24 “Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one” Paul enumerates the abuse he had recently endured while serving as a witness of the Christ. He mentions being whipped five times. In Deuteronomy 25:1–3, Moses set a limit on how many whippings a guilty man could receive: “no more than forty lashes.” Jewish rabbis reduced that number to 39, just in case there was a miscount. They flogged or whipped an offender thirteen times on the chest, thirteen times on the right shoulder and the same on the left shoulder. During a Jewish scourging, it was common for someone to read Deuteronomy 28:58, 59; 24:9 and Psalms 78:38–39.¹² As a Roman citizen, could Paul could have refused to undergo this whipping? He was protected from Roman torture without being proven guilty, but in the Jewish setting, had he refused, he may have been excommunicated and not been allowed into the synagogue where he often taught.



Ships Wrecked on a Rocky Shore by Hendrick Staets. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

2 Corinthians 11:25–28 “Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep” It was common to describe a 24-hour period as “a night and a day.” Paul’s autobiographical list of horrors has been repeated elsewhere, but is the most inclusive here. Many, but not all, were discussed in Luke’s account of Paul’s journeys in the Acts. The amount of his physical suffering is overwhelming. The Lord did not shield this apostle from trials. The omniscient Lord prophesied at the time of Paul’s conversion: “I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (Acts 9:16).

Other apostles also suffered, and their attitude was equally willing and humble: “they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name” (Acts 5:41), and “rejoice in the degree that you have shared in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice and be glad” (1 Peter 4:13). Sacrifice and suffering can produce sanctification if they are approached meekly and endured. We can all learn what the Lord taught the Prophet Joseph Smith, “All these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D&C 122:7). If our Savior was made “perfect through sufferings,” then I assume we, His servants are, too (Hebrews 2:10).

1 CORINTHIANS 4:9–13

God hath set forth us the apostles last
God hath set forth us the apostles last
a spectacle unto the world . . .
We *are* fools for Christ’s sake . . .
we *are* weak . . .
we *are* despised . . .
we both hunger, and thirst,
and are naked, and are buffeted,
and have no certain dwellingplace;
labour, working with our own hands:
being reviled . . .
being persecuted, we suffer it
Being defamed, we intreat:
we are made as the filth of the world,
and are the offscouring of all things.

2 CORINTHIANS 6:4C–5

in afflictions
in necessities
in distresses
in stripes
in imprisonments
in tumults
in labours
in watchings
in fastings [hunger]

2 CORINTHIANS 11:23–28

in labours more abundant
in stripes above measure
in prisons more frequent
in deaths oft
five times received I forty *stripes* save one
thrice was I beaten with rods
once was I stoned
thrice I suffered shipwreck
a night and a day I have been in the deep
in journeyings often
in perils of waters
in perils of robbers
in perils by mine own countrymen
in perils by the heathen
in perils in the city
in perils in the wilderness
in perils in the sea
in perils among false brethren
in weariness and painfulness
in watchings often
in hunger and thirst
in fastings often
in fastings often

2 Corinthians 11:28–29 “Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?” (NIV) Paul’s outward struggles pale to his inward concerns about the saints. We saw his sympathy in Romans 14:1, “Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling,” as he or she was most vulnerable to falling away.

2 Corinthians 11:30–31 “If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities” Paul claims his list of persecutions is accurate, with God as his witness. Even though enumerating his perils and privations as part of his apostolic service sounds boastful, Paul feels he must enumerate these things to convince them of his commitment to the work.

A Humiliating Memory

2 Corinthians 11:30–33

2 Corinthians 11:32 In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas secured the city of the Damascenes in order to arrest me” (BSB) Luke recorded the same story in Acts 9. There is some debate, but it appears that Aretas IV was the governor the Nabataean Arabs from 9 BC to AD 40 (which included Petra). His daughter was married to (and divorced from), Herod Antipas. Other sources question whether Paul meant the Nabataen King himself, or an official in control of Damascus.¹³ Luke recorded that the Jews laid wait to kill Paul, but Paul claims the King’s forces were involved as well. Both parties were probably against Paul.

2 Corinthians 11:33 “I was lowered in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his grasp” (BSB) In Acts 9:25, Luke described the disciples lowering Paul in basket (probably a large woven flexible woven container used for bales of hay or wool). The window in the house was presumably built onto the wall away from the city gates.

2 CORINTHIANS 12

Visions and Revelations

From reciting the hardships he had endured for the cause; Paul moves onto sharing one very special vision of the degrees of glory. Although he continues to apologize for this type of boasting, he goes ahead in order to provide evidence to silence his critics in a way they could understand. Even though he repeatedly denounces bragging and claims it was unprofitable, he felt compelled to continue to answer his critics in a way they understood. He uses “visions and revelations” as either witnesses of his apostolic calling, or possibly his critics also had boasted of the same.

Vision of the Third Heaven

2 Corinthians 12:1–6

2 Corinthians 12:1 “Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord” (NASB) Although Paul only refers to one here, we know there were others as recorded in the rest of the New Testament (Acts 9:1–8; 16:9; 18:9; 22:17–21; 27:23; 1 Corinthians 15:8; Galatians 1:12). As he recaptures this vision, he approaches it indirectly, “I knew a man” (12:2).

2 Corinthians 12:2–4 “I know a man in Christ above fourteen years ago . . . caught up to the third heaven” Although the text of these few verses does not identify Paul as the visionary, when the Prophet Joseph Smith wrote on these verses, he identified the “man” as Paul:

Paul ascended into the third heavens, and he could understand the three principal rounds of Jacob's ladder—the telestial, the terrestrial, and the celestial glories or kingdoms, where Paul saw and heard things which were not lawful for him to utter. I could explain a hundred-fold more than I ever have of the glories of the kingdoms manifested to me in the vision, were I permitted, and were the people prepared to receive them.¹⁴

Joseph also taught that “Paul . . . knew . . . all the ordinances, and blessings were in the Church” and wrote from that perspective.¹⁵ This vision sounds as if it were received in conjunction with things taught in the temple, “and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Corinthians 12:4).

Paul may have referenced this vision earlier in this letter when he wrote, “we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (1 Corinthians 3:18, NET). Those who enter into the presence of the Lord will do it with their faces unveiled.

2 Corinthians 12:5–6 “if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say” (NIV) Paul refuses to boast or elaborate any more on this sacred vision—only to mention it. His goal was not to brag about himself—as a fool would—but to speak the truth in order to set his story straight.

Paul's Thorn and God's Grace

2 Corinthians 12:7–10

2 Corinthians 12:7 “in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh” (NIV) Paul felt that in order for the Lord to keep him humble, He gave him a “thorn in the flesh” or “splinter.” We do not know what Paul's thorn was, but he says it was Satan's way of buffeting him. Some suggest a physical ailment, others emotional or spiritual.



Rosa Celeste: The Highest Heaven of Dante's Divine Comedy by Gustave Dore. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

2 Corinthians 12:8–9 “Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness’” (BSB) Whatever the challenge Paul endured, after fervently praying, he understood that he needed to learn meekness and a reliance on God in this area. Rather than a divine healing, the Lord strengthened Paul to carry out his calling with his weakness. The Lord uses our weaknesses to perfect us. Our weaknesses take us to God, where He can strength us. This answer comforted Paul and helped him understand that his problem allowed him to feel God’s power resting upon him. The Lord did not answer Paul’s prayer, nor all of our prayers in the way we first ask, because He has a much larger vision of what is best for us. We are assured that He acts in love for our good (Romans 8:33–38; Moses 1:39; etc.), which fortunately means, He does not answer every prayer as we wish in our myopic perspective.

We learn more about the value of weaknesses in the Book of Mormon:

- “. . . the Lord God showeth us our weakness that we may know that it is by his grace . . . that we have power to do these things” (Jacob 4:7)
- “. . . out of weaknesses he [we] shall be made strong” (2 Nephi 3:13)
- “If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27; also see 2 Nephi 33:4; Alma 58:37; D&C 35:17; 62:1; etc.).

Similarly, the scriptures also tell of people’s weaknesses taking them further from God through pride. If we bring our weaknesses to the Lord, He can use them as a tool to draw us closer to Him (unlike Satan who uses them to separate us further from God). If we approach our weaknesses with meekness by asking the Lord, “What do I need to learn?” He can teach us through the Spirit how to use them as doorways, not barriers to the Spirit.¹⁶ Weaknesses can become our strengths in at least two ways: 1) they bring us closer to God as we humbly ask for help, and 2) we have to work hard to tenaciously overcome them, which becomes strength.

2 Corinthians 12:10 “I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (NIV) Paul grew to appreciate his challenges as they drew him closer to the Lord. The Prophet John Taylor similarly taught,

It is necessary that we pass through certain ordeals in order that we may be purified . . . We have learned many things through suffering. We call it suffering. I call it a school of experience. I never did bother my head much about these things. I do not today. What are these things for? Why is it that good men should be tried? Why is it, in fact, that we should have a devil? Why did not the Lord kill him long ago? Because he could not do without him. He needed the devil and a great many of those who do his bidding

just to keep men straight, that we may learn to place our dependence upon God, and trust in him, and to observe his laws, and keep his commandments.¹⁷

Unlike his natural abilities that tended to breed self-reliance or boasting, both Pres. Taylor and Paul learned to appreciate weaknesses as the means to draw closer to God.

Paul's Concern for the Corinthian Church and Signs of an Apostle

2 Corinthians 12:11-21

2 Corinthians 12:11 “I have become a fool, but you drove me to it. In fact, you should have commended me, since I am in no way inferior to those ‘super-apostles,’ even though I am nothing” (BSB) With a sarcastic joke, and probably a smile on his face, Paul finishes recording his “foolish” boasting (that he felt forced to do to prove the falseness of his critics, see 2 Corinthians 5:12).

2 Corinthians 12:12 “Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds” Paul appeals to the Corinthians’ own experience of his apostolic authority. They saw him perform “signs and wonders” through the gifts of the Spirit as a true disciple. The account in Acts 18:1–18, touched on Paul’s eighteen months in Corinth including his powerful testimony, a vision, faith, hope, leadership, and endurance. Paul’s Epistles speak of his love or charity for the saints there.



St. Paul by Jan Lievens, ca. 1629. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

2 Corinthians 12:13 “in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!” (ESV) The Corinthian saints may have felt “inferior” (NIV, NAS) to the other congregations—or at least the critics may have claimed that. Paul’s sarcasm returned with a joke about covering his own cost of living, and begged their pardon (see Acts 18:3).

Paul's Motivation for Another Visit

2 Corinthians 12:14–19

2 Corinthians 12:14–15 “for this third time I am ready to come to you” (NASB) Paul first opened the mission in Corinth on his second Apostolic mission (Acts 18:1; 1 Corinthians 2:1). But, no other trip is mentioned. This raises the question, did Paul make an extra trip to Corinth other than what is mentioned in the book of Acts? That is not very likely, nor is the third visit only Paul's presence via his Epistle. More likely, Paul had prepared to go three times. The Greek grammar connects the “three” with “to come.” So, it can read, “I am ready to come to you for the third time.”¹⁸

“and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you . . . I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?” (NASB) He planned on coming without accepting of their financial support for his needs. What he wanted was their hearts to turn toward God. The Corinthian saints had been his spiritual children and he hoped to spend his spiritual resources to win them back.

2 Corinthians 12:16 “I have not been a burden to you. Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I caught you” (NIV) Underlying Paul's defensive approach, we can guess that the real issue was that Paul had been accused of craftily exploiting the saints. Piecing these points together, we surmise that his critics claimed that his missionary efforts were motivated by money. He has tried to express that he “caught” them, only to bless them; he certainly gained none of their money.

2 Corinthians 12:17–18 “Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent to you? . . . Titus did not exploit you, did he?” (NIV) Paul's companion, Titus, traveled with at least two others (2 Corinthians 8:17–18). He asks them to find evidence of their unity in the continuity of the Spirit of the Lord, “walked we not in the same spirit?”

2 Corinthians 12:19 “we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying” Without any jesting, Paul reiterates that he worked for the Corinthian saints' edification alone—unlike other “false apostles” who deceived them for their own gains.

2 Corinthians 12:20–21 “I am afraid that when I come . . . there may be quarreling, jealousy, rage, rivalry, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder . . . many . . . have not repented” (BSB). Paul worried about finding the saints still plagued with contention, divisions, selfishness, arrogance (NEB), unrepentant hearts, and indulging in sexual sins that plagued the city of Corinth (see introduction 1 Corinthians 1:1).

2 CORINTHIANS 13

Concluding Admonition

2 Corinthians 13:1-10

2 Corinthians 13:1 “**I am on my way to visit you for the third time**” (CEV). Similar to 2 Corinthians 12:14, we assume Paul had tried to begin his journey three times, but we do not know for sure. Paul seems to suggest that this visit will be one application of the Law of Witnesses. They will have two or three opportunities to hear his testimony. Jews and Christians should be familiar with the Old Testament legal ruling that warned when God sends two or three testimonies through His witnesses, the truth will be establish and punishment administered (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15, Numbers 35:30; and reconfirmed by Jesus in Matthew 18:16; John 8:17).

2 Corinthians 13:2 “**I have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time . . . I will not spare**” Paul forewarns (RSV) those who need to repent of their sins, that when he comes he will require a church cleansing.

2 Corinthians 13:3 “**This should prove to you that I am speaking for Christ. When he corrects you, he won’t be weak. He will be powerful!**” (CEV) Paul again addresses those who doubted if he were a “full apostle.” In response, Paul warns those who had not repented that he would offer proof that Christ worked and spoke through him. I like this interpretation of this verse, “You shall have the proof you desire. I may be weak in my dealings with you, compared to my critics, but Christ is not weak in dealing with you, and when I come I shall be the vehicle of his power among you.”

2 Corinthians 13:4 “**He was indeed crucified in weakness, yet He lives by God’s power. And though we are weak in Him, yet by God’s power we will live with Him to serve you**” (BSB) Jesus came to earth as a baby and was crucified like a common robber. By worldly standards, His mortal experience appeared weak, though in reality His birth, life, and death worked through “the power of God.” Although Paul is also a weak human, he hoped to manifest God’s power as his special witness.

2 Corinthians 13:5-6 “**Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves**” (NIV) Paul challenged his audience to examine themselves—just as he had before they partook of the sacrament (1 Corinthians 11:28)—and asked if their faith were genuine.

2 Corinthians 13:7-9 “**Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong . . . our prayer is for your perfection**” (BSB) This is a powerful idea. We cannot fight against truth; it will always conquer. We can only fight for the truth!

2 Corinthians 13:10 “This is why I write these things while absent, so that when I am present I will . . . build you up” (BSB) Paul calls them to repentance one last time: “Mend your ways” (NCB). Paul does not want to use his authority to tear down the opposition.

Final Exhortation, Greeting and Benediction

2 Corinthians 13:11-14

2 Corinthians 13:11 “Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you” Paul pled with the saints to comfort one another and exhort one another (or it could be read, comfort *by exhorting*—knowing the truth is comforting!), so that the love and peace of God will be with them.

2 Corinthians 13:13 “Greet one another with a holy kiss” The saints who “greeted” the Corinthians were probably from Macedonia, though we don’t know for sure.

2 Corinthians 13:14 “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” This is Paul’s characteristic benediction at the end of each letter. The grace of our Lord is amplified here by the love of God and fellowship of the Spirit.

Header Image: Roman Coins by Helen in Wales. Image via Flickr.

ENDNOTES

1. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, 153.
2. Russell M. Nelson, “We can Do Better Be Better,” *General Conference* April 2019.
3. Andrew H. Hedges, J. Spencer Fluhman, and Alonzo L. Gaskill *The Doctrine and Covenants: Revelations in Context*, ed. (Provo and SLC, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and Deseret Book, 2008), 212–228. In Steve Harper’s article, “All Things Are the Lord’s”: The Law of Consecration in the Doctrine and Covenants,” he described: “The law of consecration found in the Doctrine and Covenants can be envisioned as a three-legged stool, where the legs are agency, stewardship, and accountability. Agency is the power we have to act independently on the law, regardless of what anyone else thinks, says, or does. . . . A steward is a free agent empowered to act independently but accountable to the actual owner for all actions. For this reason, the law is often and accurately referred to as both consecration and stewardship. . . . The Lord is adamant about the connections between agency, stewardship, and accountability. Because He has empowered us to act independently with His property, we will be held accountable.”
4. Strong’s Concordance of the Bible, <https://biblehub.com/greek/5485.htm> (accessed 9-3-19)
5. Richard Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 140. Anderson called 2 Corinthians, “an intense letter of relationships, a letter standing above all others in revealing Paul’s feelings about the gospel and his converts” (ibid, 132).
6. Victor Paul Furnish, *The Anchor Bible: II Corinthians* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 35–48; 459.
7. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 460.
8. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 480.
9. Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ’s Emancipation of Women in the New Testament* (Palo Alto, CA: GP, 2015), chapter 5. “The ideal healthy Jewish young man married at eighteen (*Mishnah, Avoth*, 5:21; *Kiddushin*, 29b. Glover, *Jewish Laws and Customs*, 231; Campbell, *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, 186, footnote 20. Neusner, ed, *Judaism in the Biblical Period*, 224). . . . The ideal Jewish girl married a little younger—usually between the ages of twelve to fifteen. The day after a girl’s twelfth birthday, she was no longer a minor “young girl/*na’rah*,” and the day after she turned twelve and a half she could legally be married (*Mishnah, Kiddushin*, 2.1). Given the young ages of their marriages, their culture of gender segregation, and their inexperience socially, it is not surprising that arranged marriages seemed the best cultural option (Ben Sira, *Ecclesiasticus*, 26:10–11; 22:3).”
10. Paul probably spoke Aramaic at home, Hebrew in the synagogue and religious education, and was also educated in Greek.
11. R.H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1913); <https://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/apo/slanev.htm> (accessed 9-4-19).
12. Deuteronomy 28:58–59, “If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; Then the LORD will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance.” Deuteronomy 24:9, “Remember what the LORD thy God did unto Miriam by the way, after that ye were come forth out

of Egypt.” Psalms 78:38–39, “But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.”

13. Justin Taylor, “The Ethnarch of King Aretas at Damascus: A Note On 2 Corinthians 11, 32–33” *Revue Biblique*, Vol. 99, No. 4 (OCTOBRE 1992), 719–728. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44089131?sid=jstor%3Ajstor&genre=article&title=Revue+Biblique+%281946%29&atitle=THE+ETHNARCH+OF+KING+ARETAS+AT+DAMASCUS%3A+A+NOTE+ON+2+COR+11%2C+32-33&issn=00350907&eissn=24668583&volume=99&issue=4&spage=719&epage=728&pages=719-728&date=1992-10-01&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents (accessed 9-5-19).
14. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:402, or Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 304.
15. Andrew Ehat and Lindon Cook: *Words of Joseph Smith*, 10; also 9, 42, 110, 210, 327–331.
16. Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Learning the Language of the Lord* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2018), chapter 6.
17. John Taylor, *Journal of Discourses*, 23:334.
18. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 557.



GALATIANS

PAUL DEFENDS HIS APOSTOLIC CALL
AND THE SPIRIT'S REVELATION. CA. A.D. 54–58.

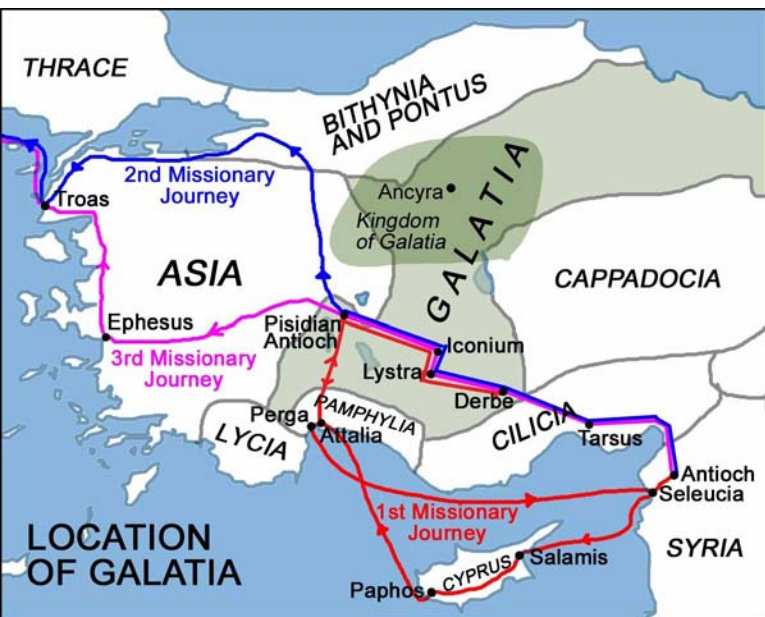
Galatia and Judaism-Christianity

The Roman province of Galatia is now in central Turkey. Galatia had a strong Jewish population (Acts 15:1; 16:3). Perhaps this is why some Galatians wanted all Christian converts to adopt circumcision and live all the Mosaic laws (613 written and 10,000 oral laws). Biblical scholars' opinions range in their estimates of how many Jews in Galatia converted to Christianity—from as high as 1/5 to as low as 1/100.

Paul in Galatia

Paul and Barnabas preach and baptized in at least four cities in southern Galatia—Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia—on his first apostolic mission.¹ This was the hometown of Timothy and Gaius, where Paul healed a man and the locals called him Mercury and Barnabas Jupiter, and where Paul was stoned and raised from the dead. Paul returned with Silas to visit the early saints on his second and third missions when

he “ordained elders in every church and prayed with fasting” (Acts 14:23; 16:6; 18:23; Galatians 3:1–4; 4:13–14; 5:7a). By the time Paul wrote this letter, he and his companions had established about six to eight churches in Galatia.²



Paul's Aim in Writing Galatians

The Epistle reflects Paul's passionate opinion that the Law of Moses was fulfilled in Christ and should not burden Christians. Paul defended himself against those who wanted Christians to live the full Law of Moses. Up to a decade earlier, in Acts 15, Paul addressed the same issue at the Jerusalem Council, “How many Laws of Moses should Christians live? Should Gentile converts be circumcised?” These controversial questions continued to plague the church and were answered in his Epistle to the Romans and Galatians. Yet adopting such a change was difficult for some known as “Judaizers.” We see Paul's impatience at those who undermined his teachings in this Epistle.

Outline³

- Galatians 1:1–10** Introduction of Paul and the issue: One Gospel—Received Only Through Christ
- 1:11–16** God called and trained Paul as an authoritative apostle—including his thesis in 1:11–12
- 1:17–2:14** Paul's Autobiographical History
- 2:1–10** Recounting the Jerusalem Council: The apostles received Paul in Jerusalem
- 2:11–14** Paul rebuked Peter in Antioch over the Jewish-Convert Dilemma
- 2:15–21** Justified by faith in Christ
- 3:1–14** **Does Revelation come by Faith or works of the Law?** (drawn from Abraham's experiences)
- 3:19–29** The law was given as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ and unity
- 4:1–11** We are God's sons and heirs, no more servants
- 4:12–20** Therefore we should remain zealous in righteousness
- 4:21–31** Hagar and Sarah form an allegory of Jews and Gentiles
- 5:1–15** Christ's liberty comes through faith, hope, and love
- 5:16–26** Fruits of the Spirit and works of the flesh
- 6:1–10** Exhortation to walk by the Spirit of revelation, and bear others' burdens
- 6:11–18** Conclusion from Paul's own hand reconfirming his stance and a benediction

INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLE

Paul wrote this Epistle to correct false doctrine that salvation comes through Jesus, not living the Law of Moses. He defends his teachings with the assurance that they came through personal revelation (Galatians 1:11). It includes important biographical and historical information. However, it opens in high drama. It feels as though we have walked into the last act of a play or opera—without being told why everyone is mad. By gathering each shred of evidence, we can assume that “Judaizers” came to Galatia after Paul left and poisoned the faith of his new converts. They upheld the need for the Laws of Moses (or the Law of Circumcision), which undermined what Paul had taught about Jesus’ atoning grace as the source of salvation.

It appears that when Paul received this upsetting news, he reacted immediately and wrote to denounce the Judaizers’ false teachings. The dating is surmised by calculating when Paul’s companions traveled to Galatia to collect the welfare contributions either at the end of his third mission or at another time.

GALATIANS 1

TEXT: Introduction of the Issue

Galatians 1:1-5

Galatians 1:1 “Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father” Paul begins his letter with a clear defense of his Apostolic authority. This theme grows throughout his letter.

Galatians 1:2 “all the brothers and sisters are with me, To the churches in Galatia” (NIV) We don’t know which companions were with Paul at the time. He writes to the plural, “churches,” meaning the letter was to be circulated from church to church and read as a “circular letter.” A footnote for this verse in the NIV reads: “The Greek word for “brothers and sisters/*adelphoi*” refers here to believers, both men and women, as part of God’s family; also in verse 11; and in 3:15; 4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18. I mention this again as a dramatic inclusive change that Apostolic Christianity brought to the ancient world.

Galatians 1:3-5 “Grace *be* to you and peace from God the Father, and *from* our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins . . . whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen” Paul uses his standard opening again, with a beautiful testimony of Jesus’ role and His relationship to His Heavenly Father.

One Gospel—Received Only Through Christ

Galatians 1:6–10

Galatians 1:6 “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel” As part of Paul’s brief introduction, he skips the Greek traditional “thanksgiving” portion of a standard letter and jumps right into condemning his audience for changing the doctrines of Christ. The second word, “marvel,” is also translated as “astonished” (RSV, NEB, JB, NIV) or “amazed” (NAS). And “removed from him” is translated with the stronger words: “deserting” (in RSV, NAS, NIV), or “turned away from” (NEB, JB). Paul fears that the Galatians are changing Christ’s message.

Galatians 1:7 “Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ” (NIV) Paul reminds the saints that Christ leads a unified gospel message—even if some charlatans have tried to convince the saints otherwise. This speaks of the problem that Paul attacked: others had perverted the gospel of Christ.

Galatians 1:8–9 “If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” This important message calls for unity under Jesus’ leadership. It is not Paul’s church or Peter’s church—it’s Christ’s church. False teachers had come and stirred up the saints, so Paul reminds them that the only source of truth is revelation. Paul does not attack other church leaders here, but emphasizes having unity under Christ or being accursed by Satan. The last word “accursed” means “damned to hell.”

Galatians 1:10 “Am I trying to win the approval of men or God? . . . If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (NIV) Paul emphatically insists that he has not taught them man’s doctrine, but Christ’s! For the following several verses Paul defends his authority.

Paul Called by God through Revelation

Galatians 1:1–5

Galatians 1:11–12 “I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin . . . I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ” (NIV) or “I make it clear to you” (NEB) This is the thesis statement of Paul’s Epistle. He wants to be completely transparent with his saints that his messages were learned through divine revelation. His teachings came from heaven to earth, not from human innovation. Paul’s reference to revelation refers to both his visions of the resurrected Christ Jesus, as well as regular inspiration from the Spirit that guided his missionary work (Acts 9:3–6; Romans 8:16; 2 Corinthians 3:6; 12:2; etc.)

Revelation was the source of the restoration as well. One of the first things the Lord taught Joseph Smith was how to recognize the Spirit as revelation. Usually it comes after belief, when the Holy Spirit enlightens one’s mind and heart, fills one with peace, speaks in a still small voice, or offers either a burning in the bosom or physical energy

in answer to faith-filled petitions (D&C 5:16, 6:14–15, 22–23; 8:1–3, 9:7–9; etc.). Today, everyone who earnestly reads and prays for revelation about the Book of Mormon, and every seeking faithful human has the hope and potential of receiving revelation or personal inspiration as the basis of their belief or testimony.

Galatians 1:13–14 “I persecuted the church of God . . . being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers”

In Paul’s “previous way of life” (NIV) he intentionally tried to destroy Christianity, thinking it was a devilish apostasy from Judaism (Acts 9:10–22). He excelled in academic Judaism because of his great zeal to live the Law of Moses (Acts 22:3⁴). He also excelled in Greek, as his letters attest. He was uniquely qualified, being born in a capital Greek city, as a Roman citizen, into a zealous pharisaic family. Even more importantly, once the Lord intervened and corrected his understanding of the Gospel, he learned through personal revelation (Acts 22:6–10; etc.).



Jeremiah by Michelangelo, 1511. Imga via Wikimedia Commons.

Galatians 1:15 “God, who separated me from my mother’s

womb and called me through His grace” (NKJV) Paul may have paraphrased Jeremiah 1:5, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations,” or Isaiah 49:1, “Before I was born the LORD called me; from my mother’s womb he has spoken my name.” These two Old Testament prophets and Paul referenced a premortal relationship to God and their foreordained call (also see Alma 13:3; D&C 49:17; 93:29; Abraham 3:19–25). “Separated/*aphorizō*” also means, “set apart,” and “from my mother’s womb” means, before I was born. Paul was called by God’s precious gift of love. Forgiveness is known as “His grace.” The same can be said for all disciples of Christ. Our restored understanding of a premortal life is unique among Christians. Much of the restored Plan of Salvation hangs on this clarifying understanding of premortal lives and calls that Paul hints at here.

Galatians 1:16a “to reveal His Son in me that I might preach Him among the Gentiles” (NIV, BSB) The use of “in me” focuses on Paul becoming a mouthpiece of God’s Spirit. Heathen (KJV) and Gentile were synonymous.

Paul’s Autobiographical History

Galatians 1:16b–2:14

Galatians 1:16b–17 “I consulted not immediately with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to the apostles before me, but . . . to Damascus” (BLB) This begins a discussion that we surmise was Paul’s answer to some who attacked him about when and how he had learned the gospel. The phrase, “flesh and blood” means Paul was not taught by anyone mortal, nor did he get permission to preach from another man or apostle, but

Saint Peter and Saint Paul by El Greco, ca. 1592. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



from God. He returns to his thesis on personal revelation. His first missionary efforts came years before he ever visited the apostles in Jerusalem. It is as if he is saying, “I didn’t need human permission because I was called by Jesus.” After Paul’s transformative vision, he immediately began teaching that Jesus was the Messiah/Christ, in the city of his conversion, Damascus, and two other local Greek cities near modern day Jordan (Acts 9:19–22).

Galatians 1:18 “Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days”

What an amazing opportunity as a young convert, to stay with the chief apostle and his family for fifteen days! What did they talk about? Three years after his conversion fits chronologically into Luke’s retelling of the same visit to Jerusalem in Acts 9:26–27, but the story differs slightly in Luke, which is evidence that the authors retell the story for different purposes. This example of the leader of the church ministering to a new young leader is a great example of correlation within the church. Many Christian historians claim that Peter and Paul worked in separate directions—but this verse gives evidence to the contrary.

Galatians 1:19–20 “But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother” (BSB) Paul claims that during those two weeks in Jerusalem, he did not meet any other apostles except for James, the brother of our Lord, the second son of Mary (Jesus had four half-brothers and at least two sisters who are listed in Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). There are three different James in the New Testament. James was a popular name among the Jews because in Hebrew it is, “Jacob.” This James was not either of the Jameses mentioned as original members of Jesus’ Twelve apostles/disciples,⁵ James the son of Zebedee and brother of John the Beloved—as he was martyred in ca. AD 44 (Acts 12:2), nor James the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3). This James was probably the author of the Epistle of James. We also learn from this verse that James was an apostle too, but we do not know if he were ever a member of the Quorum of the Twelve (just as Paul is never included with them).

By reading through the lines, trying to patch together Paul’s concerns, it sounds as though the Galatians have accepted a false story about Paul’s conversion or early missionary efforts and apostolic call.

Galatians 1:21–24 “I . . . was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ: But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed”

We are missing half of the story, and must assume that someone in Jerusalem had suggested they knew Paul shortly after his conversion, but Paul objects saying they had only heard of him, as no Jerusalem saints—beside Peter and James—had seen Paul face to face at that time.



James the Just, Lord's brother. Artist Unknown, ca. 1809. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

GALATIANS 2

Recounting the Jerusalem Council from ca. AD 49 or 50

Galatians 2:1-3

Galatians 2:1 “fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with *me* also”

Paul now turns the next ten verses in his historical memories to the time he had next gone to Jerusalem. There was a pressing need for a general church policy stating which of the Laws of Moses the Gentile-converts needed to live. Thanks to Peter’s vision to accept Gentile converts into a predominately Jewish-Christian church, the missionaries sent to the Gentiles felt an urgency about implementing a church-wide practice for their converts. We now call this meeting the “Jerusalem Council.” A parallel account of the Jerusalem Council is found in Acts 15:2–23. By comparing the two accounts we see the continuity within the story:

ACTS 15:2–5, 23

“They determined that Paul and Barnabas . . . should go up to Jerusalem” (v. 2)

“They were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them” (v. 4)

Certain believing Pharisees insisted “that it was needful to circumcise them” (v. 5)

The Twelve sent Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch with their decision and a letter to “the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia” (v. 23)

GALATIANS 2:1–5, 9, 11–13

“I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus” (v. 1)

“I went up by revelation and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles but privately to them which were of reputation” (v. 2)

Certain “false brethren” sought to compel Titus “to be circumcised,” but Paul absolutely refused (v. 3–5)

Peter, James and John “gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles” (v. 9 NKJV)

Paul and Barnabas went to Antioch (v. 11–13)

Galatians 2:2 “I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I spoke privately to those recognized as leaders, for fear that I was running or had already run in vain” (BSB) Paul’s returns to his thesis, that since Jesus called him through revelation, he continued to learn through personal revelation. Another point he communicates is his desire for unity across Christianity and with the Twelve. His education and experience far surpassed that of Peter, James and John, yet he still honored them as his leaders in the church and counseled with them. There are three key points in this verse that show Paul’s wisdom in communicating his side of the story.

1. “*I went up by revelation.*” He felt inspired by God to gather a council among the apostles in Jerusalem to come to a global consensus (In Acts 15:28, Luke also emphasized the Spirit’s guidance during that council, “it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us . . .”).
2. Paul first met “*privately,*” with Peter and “those of reputation” (KJV), or “those esteemed” (NIV), or other leaders, to make sure he was on the right track.
3. He “*communicated unto them that gospel which I preach,*” so everyone understood Paul’s testimony and approach on his mission to the Gentiles. This way, the leaders could trust his concerns about the worthlessness of requiring circumcision for Gentile Christians.

Galatians 2:3 “Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek” (NIV) The leadership agreed together in the Jerusalem Council that Titus (as an example of all new Gentile converts) could be a full standing Christian without circumcision. Since the time of Abraham, circumcision was a required sign of the covenant—for those males who joined him by birth or proselytizing—to obey God (Genesis 17:11). It became common among ancient Semitic people, but was despised by the Greeks.⁶



Illustration of the Council of Constance, ca. 1465. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Judaizes

Galatians 2:4–6

Galatians 2:4 “. . . false brothers had come in under false pretenses to spy on our freedom in Christ Jesus, in order to enslave us” (BSB) The “false brethren” mentioned here appear to be ultra conservative Jewish converts to Christianity who wanted to keep the Judaic laws as part of Christianity. Josephus and the early church used the nick-name, “Judaizers” (Greek for “live according to Jewish customs”) to describe them.⁷ The “liberty” (KJV) or “freedom” he refers to comes from Jesus’ salvation freeing us from sin and death. Christians are also freed from the “bondage” (KJV) or “enslavement” of the Jewish regulations. Jesus taught that He had fulfill the Law of Moses

(Luke 24:44). Jesus repeatedly denounced the “traditions of the Jews” referring to the ten thousand oral laws that the rabbis added to Moses’ 613 laws from the Torah (Mark 7:3–11).

Galatians 2:5 “We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you” (BSB) It appears that some people opposed Paul’s position of not requiring circumcision for Christians. Paul did not give any attention to the Judaizers in order to maintain Jesus’ cleansing and Gospel.

Galatians 2:6 “But as for the highly esteemed—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism—those leaders added nothing to my message” (BSB) Paul seems to be defending himself from an attack that he had changed for popularity among the leaders or something like that. But Paul protested that he and God do “not judge by external appearance” (NIV). The problem was leaving the thousands of laws that had become barnacles to the Law of was a major brake with Judaism.

Pillars of the Church

Galatians 2:7–10

Galatians 2:7–9 “They recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised . . . James, Cephas, and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship” (NIV) Paul gives evidence that the church leaders, or pillars, supported his assignment as a missionary to the gentiles. The same Spirit directed both Peter and Paul, which made them great missionaries (v. 8). Paul describes himself and Peter as working on the same team, but with different assignments. He tells his audience that he worked in harmony with the church authorities at the time. By calling James (the brother of the Lord), Cephas (Peter), and John “pillars,” Paul shows honor to them. I see this verse as an example of leadership under the first presidency.

Galatians 2:10 “All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along” At the conclusion of the Jerusalem Council, Paul remembered that they clarified the need for Christian converts to continue to take care of the poor. As they lived a form of the Law of Consecration this was very important. When we read the account of the Conference in Acts, Luke also included to not eat foods offered to idols, strangled, blood, or to break the law of chastity (Acts 15:29).

Paul and Peter on a Bad Day

Galatians 2:11–15

Galatians 2:11 “But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed” We do not know what the full argument against Paul by some of the Galatians, but to set the story straight, he tells of one of his and Peter’s bad days. Evidently, Paul retold his view of the story because earlier the Judaizers used it to give the impression that Peter agreed with them. The story intentionally comes after Paul has

listed several examples where he honored Peter as a pillar and apostle, when they worked in harmony on difficult issues, and when he even spent over two weeks as Peter's house guest. With that as background, Paul shares the story of a dinner party in Antioch, when he got frustrated with Peter. Paul was upset because Peter's behavior seemed inconsistent with the harmony they had curated at the Jerusalem Council.

However, the dinner incident described in this verse "is instructive in showing two strong leaders agreeing on a principle that came by revelation, but applying it with different timing."⁸ We do not get to hear Peter's side of the story, but it sounds as if Peter felt at home with the Antioch saints, because Antioch history claims that he settled there after his Jerusalem imprisonment.⁹

Galatians 2:12 "For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party" (ESV) It sounds as though Peter ate with Gentile converts in Antioch until some "Judaizers" or Jewish converts who were friends of James arrived. At that point Peter stopped eating with the Gentiles so as not to offend them. This stems from the Law of Moses (Leviticus 7:21). I can appreciate Peter's challenge because he had the responsibility to preach to the Jews and wanted to meet their needs. Also, Paul knew this lesson because as he expressed: "unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, ... for the gospel's sake" (1 Corinthians 9:21–23).

Galatians 2:13 "The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray" (NIV) This sounds like a major concern for Paul—his first companion and fellow apostle, Barnabas, was among those intimidated by Peter's example of not eating with Greek converts. It escalated the cultural differences and it put Paul in an embarrassing position too, as he now opposed at least two apostles.

Galatians 2:14 "But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all . . ." Paul, forgetting about the need for private conversations, stood up at the dinner to confront the false message that was sent by leaving the Greek table. This is a good example of the challenges of human nature when trying to work together, especially when people with strong personalities—who are both trying their best to fulfill their divine calling—collide on an issue they feel strongly about. Disagreements arise among all of us. In this scriptural account, we see the reality of daily challenges. We also see no sign of "infallibility" of Peter and other apostles (as is claimed by Catholics and Reformed Christian traditions).¹⁰ The restoration corrected this in the early chapters of the Book of Mormon:

O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me. And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know

Moses Receiving the Law by William Blake, ca. 1780. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



in whom I have trusted. My God hath been my support . . . why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh? Yea, why should I give way to temptations, that the evil one have place in my heart to destroy my peace and afflict my soul? Why am I angry because of mine enemy? Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul (2 Nephi 4:17–21, 27–28).

This perspective not only gives us more patience with our leaders and fellow mortals, but also with ourselves who are equally apt to succumb to the habits of the natural man and adversarial temptations.

Justified through Faith in Christ

Galatians 2:15–21

Galatians 2:15–16 “a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith” (NIV) The Greek verb, “*dikaioó*/justify/to show to be righteous, declare righteous” was used to mean, “defend the cause of, plead for the righteousness (innocence) of, acquit, justify.”¹¹ Judges used the word “justify/*dikaioo*” to declare innocence. The free gift of immortality from God is not justified by obedience to the Law of Moses, rather God justifies mortals only through our faith in Jesus as the means to salvation. When God justifies us, He forgives us through Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

One is justified when one repents: “I, God, have suffered these things for all that they might not suffer if they would repent” (D&C 19:16–18).

Many Jews at that time felt that it was the “Law” that saved them, so Paul clarifies that misunderstanding. The Law of Moses and Jewish temple sacrificial rites did not justify humanity or provide forgiveness for mortals from God. Rather they were like signs that pointed the way to their Messiah’s atoning sacrifice. The symbols portrayed the salvation that was possible through God’s Son, Jesus the Messiah.

Galatians 2:17–18 “**But if, while we seek to be justified in Christ, we ourselves are found to be sinners, does that make Christ a minister of sin? Certainly not!**” (BSB) Paul clarifies what he means by abandoning the “works of the Law” (Galatians 2:16) He does not say that sinners can claim justification; rather he emphasizes that *Jesus saves not the Mosaic Law*. All must obey Jesus to receive Grace.

Galatians 2:19–20 “**The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me**” (NIV) Through baptism, we symbolically die with Christ; our old life is buried under the water, and we rise again to live a new life with God and His Spirit. The whole plan centered on God’s love by means of the At-one-ment.

Galatians 2:21 “**if righteousness comes through the law, Christ died for nothing**” (BSB) Paul continues to address the problem with relying on the Law of Moses as the redeeming factor of the world. God’s plan was never meant to say that justification came by the Law of Moses—it was always a means to the end in Jesus’ at-one-ment.

GALATIANS 3

Does Revelation come by Faith or works of the Law—via Six Questions

Galatians 3:1–5

Galatians 3:1 “**O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?**” (ESV) For the second time in this Epistle, Paul rebukes his audience (the first was Galatians 1:6). He arranges the rebuke with six questions. Unfortunately, we only have his rebuke, so we can only guess at the problem—but clearly Paul is exasperated by the Galatians’ change of allegiance. Perhaps the Lord’s death was part of it as Paul protests: “Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified.” To many of that day, the fact that Jesus was killed, and worse still, was crucified, was evidence the Jesus was just a mortal. To them, it was crazy to think of a God being put to death, especially in such a torturous fashion. Paul claimed that they were taught this and were able to accept it earlier, but now, with winds of new ideas and contentious ideas floating around, they have lost their grounding.

Galatians 3:2 “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?” (BSB) Paul continues to focus on revelation, specifically, the personal witness of the Spirit. He asks whether the converts had had enough faith to receive a witness from the Spirit when they had first heard the Christian message. As mentioned previously, when the New Testament, and Paul specifically here, uses the word “law,” he refers to the Mosaic Law. Perhaps Paul feels more emphatic about leaving the Mosaic Law behind because as a Pharisee, he had been bound by all 10,000 oral laws in addition to the 613 commandments in the Torah.

I do not think Paul argued that one could not feel the Holy Spirit while doing good works or obeying the Law of Moses. Rather, he saw belief and faith as prerequisites to feeling a witness of the Spirit. His question asks about how to receive or hear personal revelation.

Galatians 3:3 Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? . . . He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” Paul’s sixth and final question, asks whether they are going to follow the Spirit or the natural man? Paul reminds them that when he initially taught them, the power behind his words and miracles was from the Holy Spirit. The source of revelation was paramount to him.

Abraham as our Christian Example

Galatians 3:6–14

Galatians 3:6 “as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” Paul’s second attack against the false poachers begins by quoting Genesis 15:6, which referred to Abraham as a great example (As an aside, Paul claimed to have studied under one of the greatest Jewish teachers of the time, Gamaliel, which probably means that he had much of the Torah memorized.¹² He will quote seven verses in this section, which opens the possibility that Paul knew the Law of Moses as well if not better than any other Christian).

Galatians 3:7–9 “those who have faith are children of Abraham. . . . “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham” (NIV) Paul next recites Genesis 12:3 from the Septuagint (or LXX, the Greek version of the Old Testament). According to Genesis, Abraham lived over four-hundred years before Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai. So, Paul argues that God’s blessings came by faith well before the Law was even given.

Galatians 3:10–13 “For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written . . .” Paul hammers away against the law with four more Old Testament verses that all refer to some part of the law as a curse. Here he recites Deuteronomy 27:26, Habakkuk 2:4; Leviticus 18:5, and Deuteronomy 21:23. In his last example, “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree,” Paul uses the Jewish scripture to claim that Jesus’ crucifixion on a tree carried the curse in order that we might be redeemed.

Galatians 3:14 “That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” Some scholars say Paul’s debate about the relationship to Abraham and gentile converts was probably begun by the false itinerate preacher(s) that led his young converts astray.¹³ Paul’s response claims that Christians can also share Abraham’s blessings if they exert the same faith as the Spirit of the Lord promises.

The Law and the Promise

Galatians 3:15–25

Galatians 3:15–16 “**Brothers and sisters . . . The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed .**

.. meaning one person, who is Christ” (BSB) Paul uses a Jewish pedagogical technique here called, “midrash.” The Rabbis looked for all Old Testament scriptures that foreshadowed their promised Messiah.¹⁴ Paul uses Genesis 12:7; 13:15; and 24:7 to show Jesus as the mediator as foreshadowed as the only offspring of Abraham.

Galatians 3:17–18 “**The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God**” (NIV) As Abraham lived 430 years before Moses received the lower Law, the blessings or inheritance given to Abraham has nothing to do with the Mosaic Law. Furthermore, the promises to Abraham are still valid, and they apply to a much larger group than just the Jews.

Galatians 3:19a “**Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come**” (NIV) Not only does Paul denounce the redemptive nature of the Law, but he also degrades it to only an entr’acte.

Galatians 3:19b–20 “**the law given to Moses, who was ordained by the hand of angels to be a mediator of this first covenant, (the law) . . . but there is one mediator of the new convent, which is Christ, as it was written in the law concerning the promises made to Abraham and his seed. Now Christ is the mediator of life**” (JST) This version adds significantly to the text. It clarifies that Moses was a mediator of the old covenant, and Jesus in the new covenant (The full text is in the Appendix of the LDS Bible).

Galatians 3:21–23 “**Is the law, then, opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! . . . The Scripture pronounces all things confined by sin . . . Before this faith came, we were held in custody under the law**” (BSB)



Abraham and the Three Angels by Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, 1656. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Paul offers a practical approach, he saw the Law as only temporary. We also believe that the divine Law giver and Creator who brought mortal and immortal life was Jesus. He designed it to prepare the Israelites for Him. The Law was more like an elementary level text book until the Israelites learned enough to move onto Jesus' higher laws.

Children of God

Galatians 3:26-4:11

Galatians 3:24 “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” The Mosaic Law was to act as one who had direct responsibility for a child's upbringing—like a “tutor” (NASB), “guardian” (NIV) “trainer” (BLB), or “guide” (ABPE). The Mosaic Law was supposed to lead the Israelites to their promised Messiah/Christ, not the other way around. It was set up this way from the time of Adam (Moses 5:7). We see this especially clear in the words of the Book of Mormon prophet Jacob.

My soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him.

Sadly, many Jews from Paul's generation were not looking for a suffering servant but a conquering Messiah and thus did not recognize the Son of God.

Galatians 3:25–26 “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” Christians are no longer under the custodian of the schoolmaster but should move onto taking their own responsibility through faith in Jesus Christ. John taught the same thing in his Gospel's prologue (John 1:12).

Galatians 3:27 “all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (BSB) those who covenant with Christ are “clothed/*enduo*” or put on, “in the sense of sinking into a garment.” That clothing shares roots with the original meaning of atone.¹⁵

Galatians 3:28–29 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” All sons and daughters of Adam and Eve were originally equal; all were born in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27). Our different human stations do not change this natural equality. This was reaffirmed in the restoration when the Lord revealed this equality of literal sons and daughters, when Moses claimed, “I am a son of God, in the similitude of his Only Begotten” (Moses 1:13; also see Moses 3:5; Abraham 3:21; D&C 76:24; etc.).¹⁶ Our gender, ethnicity, and age differences are meaningless in Christ's love. The promises given to Abraham are for all of us, not just the Jews or Jewish Christians. All the peoples of the earth will be blessed through their Savior.

GALATIANS 4

We are God's Sons and Daughter—Heirs, no more Servants

Galatians 4:1-11

In chapter four, Paul sets up an analogy between heirs in a family and heirs of God. He starts with the common practice that both servants and children do the same work even though some are heirs, but then when they mature, the heir moves onto more rewarding life. Paul uses this as an analogy to the Mosaic traditions that can be outgrown when it is time to receive one's inheritance in the Kingdom of God. This analogy develops out of his earlier motif that the Law of Moses acts as a schoolmaster to bring those tutored unto Jesus as the Promised Messiah/Christ/Anointed one (Galatians 3:24).

Galatians 4:1 “the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave” (NKJV) One of the Greek words for child, also meant “servant or slave/*pais*” (Lk 2:43, 7:7; 8:51; 12:45; 15:26; etc.).¹⁷ At this time in many Judaic-Greco-Roman families, children and servants did similar work. Each had to stand up in the presence of their master or father “to greet him, and perhaps even to bow down before him. He [the child or slave] could not stand or sit in his place, speak in his presence, contradict him, or respond sharply to him. This was the way of the Torah.”¹⁸ Children were to “give [their fathers] food and drink, to clothe and cover him, to help him in and out when he grew old, and to wash his face, hands and feet.”¹⁹ As ninety percent of Jews living in Palestine at the time lived and worked in farming or fishing villages, children and slaves were needed to help.²⁰

Galatians 4:2 “The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father” (NIV) Up to the age of 12, a Jewish father had full control over his children, acting as both their master and father.²¹ Not until Jewish children reached 12.5 years could they receive their succession and rights as his heir (although usually an inheritance was not received until the death of the parents). Roman Laws also had a time frame when sons could become heirs.²² Paul speaks figuratively in this verse about “guardians,” possibly to reflect himself as one who had helped with their conversion, or covenant making with the Lord. He continues to build an analogy based on the servitude of the Mosaic Law versus the inheritance of everlasting life through Christ.

Galatians 4:3 “So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world” (NIV) Continuing with the analogy of heirs and servants, Paul explains that converts have the opportunity to leave their youthful servitude (to falsehoods, sin, old traditions), and become heirs through Christ. Whether converts were Jewish or Gentile, Paul describes them living figuratively as servants under bondage to the worldly law. They lived under partially correct teachings on the fallen man. And all inhabitants of the world suffer under the bondage of Satan.

Galatians 4:4–5 “When the time had fully come, God sent His Son . . . to redeem those under the Law, that we might receive the divine adoption as sons” (BSB) The KJV translated the first phrase, “fullness of time” (KJV), to mean when Christ came to earth carrying over to his time. But this is not the way we use it in our dispensation. We refer to Jesus’ time as the “meridian to time” and the “fullness of time,” from our dispensation as we prepare for Jesus’ Great Second Coming.²³ Then comes the wonderful redemption through God’s Son.



The Return of the Prodigal Son by Francesco Bassano the Younger, ca. 1580. Image via Wikimedia Commons. Through repentance, we become heirs with Christ.

Jesus taught how to take advantage of His redemption. All have the opportunity to leave bondage and receive an inheritance. Once one covenants to follow Jesus as the Son of God and as their Redeemer, they can leave their cultural baggage and bondage behind, and find freedom in the truths of Christianity. Many converts to Christianity were not sons of Abraham by birth (Galatians 6:29), but importantly, through their covenants they became heirs of God, his sons and daughters.

Galatians 4:6 “And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” (BSB)

With Christ adopting His disciples spiritually, He becomes their father. The Spirit is the one who sends out the pleading cry, “Abba.” Paul emphasizes the Spirit’s influence again as evidence to support his thesis on revelation (Galatians 1:11–12). Paul’s use of the Aramaic “Abba/father” was probably his mother tongue. The proper noun was “also used as the term of *tender endearment* by a beloved child—i.e. in an *affectionate, dependent* relationship with their father; ‘daddy’ ‘papa.’”²⁴

Christians can feel a sense of their adoption as the Spirit communicates God’s love and care. Especially when one has felt God’s forgiveness of a sin, the Spirit seems to envelope one’s inner being with love, acceptance, and unity. The Spirit becomes the sign that they have been adopted into God’s family.

Galatians 4:7 “thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” Paul uses the analogy to show the importance of accepting Jesus as our Redeemer. As disciples accept Him as a father, the Spirit facilitates our rebirth. It is a spiritual birth through His atonement. Yet, purely theologically, as heirs of Christ, we still serve, obey, and honor Him as our Master and God.

Galatians 4:8–9 “now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces?” (NIV) Paul asks his readers about their pre-Christian life when they had served polytheistic Greek gods. “So why—now that you have adult faith—in the true God—why do you seek to follow the old ideas that kept you in bondage?” I presume from the context he refers back to the Jewish ritual and customs of purification. Yet he is not denouncing Christian ordinances, because we know, “in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest” (D&C 84:20). Living the covenants keep us attached to God. His point is that after we receive the truth, and covenant with God to follow Him through baptism, obedience to that covenant provides freedom and heir-ship.

Galatians 4:10–11 “You are observing special days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, lest perhaps I have toiled for you in vain” (BSB) The days and months refer to Jewish traditions and ritual cleanings, fasting, major feasts, etc. Paul continues to denounce the false teachers or Judaizers who preached to the young converts about the need to return to Jewish rites.

Christians should Remain Zealous in Righteousness

Galatians 4:12–20

Galatians 4:12 “I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become like me” Paul changes his approach and creates a personal bond appealing to their emotions. In the ancient Mediterranean world of apprentice and tutors following master teachers, they took role modeling very seriously.²⁵ Their philosophies were tested by how they played out in the lives of their disciples. Paul remembers that he set a good example for them, so he asks why they are not following. He stopped living the Law of Moses when he became a missionary to the Gentiles (or at least after the Jerusalem Council).

Galatians 4:13 “Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And . . . ye . . . received me as an angel of God” Paul’s infirmity of the flesh is a “bodily illness” (NAS). But he does not repeat what he dealt with. In the ancient world, pain and sickness plagued people constantly. If it were not a tooth ache or broken toe, it was food poisoning or diphtheria. Whatever plagued him, the Lord did not see fit to heal him. Like many of our challenges, God sees the value in our enduring and developing patience, sympathy, dependence on God and others, all for the long-term good.

Galatians 4:14 “although my illness was a trial to you, you did not despise me or reject me. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God” (BSB) The KJV, refers to the illness as a “temptation/*peirasmos*,” which can also translate, “probation, testing, calamity, affliction.” In the ancient world, sicknesses and disease were often thought to be connected to specific sins, but Jesus and the apostolic church denounced that (John 2–3).

Galatians 4:15–16 “if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me. Am I therefore become your enemy” The attentive love they once felt toward Paul, is now gone. The reference to plucking out an eye, or any mutilation to the body, was probably not literal as that was highly offensive to the Jews who saw the body as a sacred creation in God’s image (Genesis 1:26–27; 1 Corinthians 11:7?). Besides, blindness was the worst thing that could happen to someone (and they often killed blind children rather than have them suffer through life).²⁶ Perhaps instead, it is a reference to the affectionate Psalm 17:8, “Keep me as the apple of your eye” (also see Deuteronomy 32:10; Proverbs 7:2). He asks for a return of their initial gratitude for a messenger from God.

Galatians 4:17 “Those people are zealous for you, but not in a good way . . . it is good to be zealous if it serves a noble purpose” (NIV) Paul refers to the Judaizers who have tried to make the Gentile converts look inferior and who sought to adopt Jewish traditional superiority. “They zealously affect you” (KJV) is also translated, “are zealous to win you over” (NIV), or “are envious of” (NEB), and “eagerly seek” (NAS), to live the thousands of laws or traditions attached to the Law of Moses. So, Paul asks, “why waste our energies on causes that are not right?”

Galatians 4:19 “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you” (NKJV) Paul reminds them that he gave them a new birth in Christianity, but they have aborted too early. The use of “anguish of childbirth” (ESV) suggests that more than a ruptured friendship was at stake—the new birth of the early church in Galatians was part of the new creation that Jesus brought as the second Adam. By returning to the old Law of Moses, Jesus’ new creation was being rejected.

Galatians 4:20 “how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!” (NIV) Paul tenderly wishes that they could have a face to face conversation and clear up this misunderstanding.

Heirs of Abraham

Galatians 4:21–30

Galatians 4:21 “Tell me . . . are you not aware of what the law says?” When one leaves truth for something else, one problem may be that one does not know what one is running to (nor appreciate what one is running away from). In the KJV, Paul’s asks them to: “hear the Law.” This sounds as if he were quoting one of the most oft repeated Old Testament scriptures by memory, the Shema, “Hear O, Israel . . .” (Deuteronomy 6:4).²⁷ Could Paul be asking his audience to see his application as God’s new law?

Galatians 4:22–23 “Abraham had two sons . . . His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born because of the promise” (BSB) Paul develops a Jewish “midrashic interpretations” of the scriptures. They believed the scriptures had innumerable interpretations, hence could be



Hagar and Ishmael Banished by Abraham by Pieter Jozaf Verhaghen, 1781. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

applied anywhere else. (We take a similar approach when we “apply the scriptures to ourselves.”) Paul talks about Abraham’s wives, Sarah (the “freewoman”) and Hagar (the “bondmaid”), and their two sons, Isaac and Ishmael respectively. He refers to the converts who want to return to the old Law of Moses as Hagar, and those accepting Jesus’ the new law as Sarah (Genesis 16–21). Sarah’s son Isaac became the heir, just as Christ can provide an eternal reward for all His posterity. Paul continues to expand on this analogy through the end of the chapter.

Galatians 4:24–25 “These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants” (NIV) Paul compares the Law of Moses as slavery and bondage through the image of the bondwoman Hagar.

“Hagar . . . bearing children who are to be slaves” represents slavery to the thousands of Jewish traditions around the Law (NAS).

Galatians 4:26 “But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother” (BSB) Jerusalem, the holy city of the temple, takes on the role of the heavenly Jerusalem “which is above” (KJV). At this point in Christianity, Jerusalem also represents the mother church of the Lord’s passion and resurrection. Paul then quotes Isaiah 54:1, rejoicing in the blessed fruit of a barren woman.

Galatians 4:28–29 “Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time, the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit” (NIV) The Genesis account reads that Ishmael, who was 14 years older, “mocked” (Gen 21:9) or teased Isaac, just as the Judaizers are fighting with the Gentile converts.

Galatians 4:30 “what does Scripture say? “Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son” (NIV) Paul changes Genesis 21:10 a little as he portrays Sarah as the symbol of heavenly Jerusalem or reward here. This analogy leaves a sour taste to the modern reader, as it can be interpreted as a racial slur. Yet, this follows Paul’s witness that God is no respecter persons “There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for ye are all one in Christ” (Galatians 3:28–29). In that context, Paul is not belittling the Egyptian Hagar or her son Ishmael’s Arab descendants. It is just an allegory for his of argument against the Judaizers.

GALATIANS 5

The Liberty of Christ

Galatians 5:1–15

Galatians 5:1 “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not be encumbered once more by a yoke of slavery” (BSB) While Paul preaches the advantages of “liberty” (KJV) or freedom through faith in Jesus Christ as compared to the “yoke” or burdens of the Law of Moses, he does not preach liberty without laws. In nature there are laws—gravity, osmosis, cell regeneration, etc.—that make life free to live at its optimal. Alma 42:14–15 explains that certain laws hold even God eternally bound, “all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice.” So God followed other eternal laws to redeem humanity because “the plan of mercy could not be brought about except an atonement should be made.” Richard Anderson explained it, “The God who controls the physical world through law would not ignore laws savings his children. . . . God respects *law* enough to require his Son to meet the penalties of law in order to save mankind. Then does he ignore law in their personal lives after that?... Is God careless of the acts of his children who accept Christ?”²⁸ God’s laws enable and ennoble His children to become heirs. These are the laws that provide the “liberty” that Paul references. He does not denounce all laws, as he refers to the “law of Christ,” in Galatians 6:2, the law of chastity in 1 Corinthians 7, the law of consecration in 2 Corinthians 8:10–15, and to “walk in the Spirit” in Galatians 5:25.

Galatians 5:2–3 “I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing” Paul uses “circumcision” to represent the Law of Moses. It sounds as though he is exaggerating, or just using the word differently. As Paul himself was circumcised and is also a full disciple of Christ, I think he means something else. His logic does not work for the outward action, but only if it is the inward belief that one was saved from relying on the law of circumcision (as another name for all 613 commandments in the Law of Moses, and possibly the ten-thousand oral laws too) or the law. The Jews believed their salvation came through living the law, not through the Savior. Without the full context we cannot understand Paul completely. Rather than figuratively, throw rocks at the apostle, we must assume that we are missing the perspective to understand it.



Image via Wikimedia Commons.

This is an example of not knowing the whole story especially in light of Paul having his companion, Timothy, circumcised. As a baby, Timothy had not been circumcised even though his mother and grandmother were Jewish, because his father was Greek. But, to appease the Jews, before Timothy joined Paul on his second mission, “he circumcised him because of the Jews” (Acts 16:3, NIV). This probably ensured that the Jews would welcome him into their synagogues.

Galatians 5:4 “You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace” (NIV) Paul basically says, “If you think that you are being saved by the Law of Moses, not that precious undeserved gift of God’s Grace, you’re wrong.” Some Christians, including those of our faith, fall into a related problem. Some feel that it is by their efforts that they will be saved. And, others feel they are beyond Christ’s forgiveness. All of these ideas are a misunderstanding of Jesus’ gifts of grace, repentance, forgiveness, immortality, and exaltation.

Galatians 5:5–6 “We through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith” (NIV) The Spirit of God sustains our faith through the motivation of feeling His love, which brings us to Eternal Life. By exerting faith, we can feel God’s love, and by following the Spirit’s promptings we can feel God’s love even more.

Galatians 5:6 “. . . neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any power, but only faith working through love” (BLB) Power comes through our faith in Christ and loving Him enough to keep our covenants with Him. The NIV reads: “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” This combination of faith,

hope, and love is consistent with Paul's list of greatest gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12–13). In Galatians 5:22, Paul lists both faith and love as fruits of the Spirit, but their connection in vs. 5 sounds contributory. Alma 13:29 also connects them, "Having faith on the Lord; having a hope that ye shall receive eternal life; having the love of God always in your hearts." We both feel God's love and share it with others through faith. Faith allows us to feel God's love.

Galatians 5:8–10 "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? . . . The one who is throwing you into confusion . . . will have to pay the penalty" (NIV) The Judaizers opposed the teachings of Paul and his missionary companions. Paul uses the image of interfering in a race and leaven in bread to represent the corrupting influences and pride of the Judaizers. He reiterates that whoever taught these falsehoods, would be held responsible at the judgment. He wants to make sure everyone knows that the false voices are not speaking for Paul.

Galatians 5:11 "Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?" (NIV) Someone must have charged Paul for changing his message on circumcision. Many of the Jewish converts did not want to see their Mosaic traditions cast out in order to accept Jesus. It sounds as if these "Judaizers" bad-mouthed Paul's authority and teaching to the degree that the new Christian converts began to follow their bad example. He asks, if he had ever taught that the Law of Moses were sufficient, why would he also preach the need for the Savior who died for our sins?

"In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished" (NIV) or "the offense of the cross ceased" (KJV), or "the stumbling-block of the cross is no more" (NAB). These different translations all mention the difficulty of accepting a god who had died—especially Jesus' death on a cross like a common criminal. This idea seemed absurd to them. It was a confusing and foreign concept because the Greeks saw no need for a god to have a body, nor die, nor want a resurrection of that body.

Galatians 5:12 "I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!" (NKJV) We see Paul's frustration turning to verbal anger at whoever had lied about him and had poisoned the faith of so many saints. His letter has several examples of his growing irritation. He even attacks his enemies through a jest that perhaps the surgery from circumcision should continue to cut more for a complete castration of the culprits. A few modern translations are quite graphic about the process of circumcision, "would go the whole way and emasculate themselves" (NIV) or, "had better go the whole way and make eunuchs of themselves." (NEB). I think Paul is having a bad day as his anger takes over the quill.

Galatians 5:13–14 "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free . . . For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (NIV) With all the freedom offered through

Christ, Paul does not want his audience to lose sight of the fundamental law—in both the Old Testament and the New Testament—to love and serve others. This is stated in the chiasmic center of the Law of Moses (Leviticus 19:18) and repeated by Jesus’ summary of the most important focus of the law (Mark 12:31).

Live by the Spirit

Galatians 5:16–18 “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” Paul instructs disciples to deny the instincts of the “natural man,” or “lusts of the flesh” in order to feel the Spirit (repeated from 2 Corinthians 2:14). He uses the “flesh” for the “natural man” who is the antithesis of the “spiritual man” who obeys the enticings of the Spirit (Mosiah 3:19). The Spirit is the vehicle to receive faith and salvation through Christ, so Paul encourages his audience to “be led of the Spirit” as a means of following Jesus, not relying on the Law of Moses.

Works of the Flesh vs. Works of the Spirit

Galatians 5:19–26

Galatians 5: 19–20 “that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God . . .” (NIV) To make sure he is clearly understood; Paul systematizes the two opposing groups of works of the flesh and Spirit. In his list he includes at least five of the Ten Commandments, which reiterates the need to live these commandments.

WORKS OF THE FLESH

The acts of the flesh are . . . sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, . . . desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another

WORKS OF THE SPIRIT

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions

Galatians 5:22–24 In contrast to works of the flesh, Paul lists the fruits of the Spirit. Interestingly, his list of “the fruits” is different than his list of “the gifts” of the Spirit as listed in 1 Corinthians 12 (also see Moroni 10 and D&C 46). He includes different traits that disciples strive to emulate from Christ. Fruits are born from the tree after it is nourished, pruned, and watered, while the “gifts of the Spirit” seem to be a gift beyond the law of the harvest—charity, healing, visions, and interpretation of tongues.

Galatians 5:25–26 “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” Paul’s theme of seeking the Spirit or personal revelation builds to a new height as he describes the blessings that come from walking as the Spirit directs. In the KJV, Paul uses “walk,” thirty times. He communicates a sense of careful control in our daily lives by spiritual focus in order to receive the added strength of the Holy Spirit (also a theme in 1 Thessalonians 2:12). His sense of doing speaks to his consistent support of the need to obey Jesus’ laws. Paul’s “liberty” or “freedom” from the law of circumcision does not mean that Christians do not have other laws to live by. Positive commandments, such as Christ’s new commandment—that goes beyond the Old Testament call to love our neighbors—to love as He loves (John 14:15–17), and his list of negative commandments just mentioned, are examples of the Christian need to live by the higher laws. Paul carefully mentions these to differentiate all of God’s law from the law of circumcision—which he sees as a “vain glory.”

GALATIANS 6

Bear One Another’s Burdens

Galatians 6:1–15

Galatians 6:1–2 “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently . . . Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (NIV) Most often, the best way to encourage change and repentance is through gentleness and love. This is how Jesus usually acted. Yet, we also saw Him work in a powerful way as He denounced those who had desecrated the temple or distorted the truth (Matthew 11:21; 18:7; 23:25; etc.). Paul had mentioned the “law of Christ” earlier in 1 Corinthians 9:21, but here he defines it as bearing one another’s burdens.

Galatians 6:3–4 “But let each one examine his own work” (NKJV) If we “prove” (KJV) something we are testing it, or examining it. If we examine our work, we can find the satisfaction of a job well done.

Galatians 6:6 “Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches” Paul may be asking his converts to report to him. Or perhaps he also wants disciples to share their good deeds in prayer with God as the great teacher. This may also be a call for missionary work as Christians should share their knowledge of the Lord with others.

Galatians 6:7–8 “whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life” (NIV) Humans have the agency and power to nurture base or spiritual ideas. Wickedness will grow in our hearts and minds as we allow it. The law of the harvest works in that way as we can harvest the fruits of the Spirit, too. To receive the Spirit, disciples must nourish the Spirit through: prayer (Acts 4:31; Ephesians 5:18; Ro 15:30; Luke 22:44), faith (John 7:39; Galatians 3:2); serving (Philippians 3:3), listening to the words of God (Ephesians 6:17); and repen-

tance (Acts 2:38). The restored scriptures teach even more clearly how to foster and retain the Spirit of the Lord.²⁹

The Lord revealed a similar spiritual “law of the harvest” to the Prophet Joseph Smith: “There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated” (D&C 130:21). The produce that grows from obedience is the sanctification of the Spirit that allows for the gift of exaltation.



Galatians 6:9–10 “**And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap . . . As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people**” Of all people who worked themselves to weariness Paul could have claimed weariness. But he asks his readers to avoid the temptation to feel weariness in God’s work. President Spencer W. Kimball taught a similar principle by encouraging the saints to “lengthen your stride.”³⁰ Honestly, it is often a matter of where our heart and mind can strengthen the body. Usually the other cares of life that drag us down, and most of God’s work builds us up. Paul reminds his readers of the judgment day when we may reap. “If we faint not” is also translated, “do not slacken our efforts” (NEB) or “don’t give up the struggle.” (JB). Paul asks the Galatians to be especially loving to other Christians (and family members, I might add).

Galatians 6:11 “**See what large letters I am using to write to you with my own hand!**” (BSB). The KJV of this verse, sounds as if Paul acted as his own scribe and penned the whole letter. However, the Greek text may equally suggest that Paul added this traditional greeting at the end in his own hand using large letters (plural). It does not clearly communicate whether Paul wrote via a scribe.³¹ The word “letter/*gramma*” means “that which is drawn or written, a letter” as was used for “a letter of the alphabet; collectively: written (revelation); (a) a written document, a letter, an epistle, (b) writings, literature, learning.”³²

Galatians 6:12–13 “**Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. They only do this to avoid persecution . . . they want you to be circumcised that they may boast**” (BSB) Paul comes up with three more final attacks against the Judaizers who tried to compel the Greek-Christians to live the Law of Moses: 1. To avoid persecution, 2. They don’t keep the whole law themselves, 3. They want to boast

Galatians 6:14 “**May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus**” (NIV) Paul reminded his audience that he finds glory in Jesus’ at-one-ment and sacrifice on the cross.

Galatians 6:15 “**What counts is a new creation**” (BSB) In most modern translations, “creature,” is translated, “creation,” as in born again. Paul said it doesn’t matter if you are circumcised or uncircumcised. It matters if you have been born of the Spirit.

Benediction

Galatians 6:17

Galatians 6:17 “**I bear on my body the marks of Jesus**” Paul refers to “marks” or in Greek *stigmata*, which originally meant *scar* and came from the branding irons of slavery. A person was identified as a slave if they had scars on his or her back. Paul reported in 2 Corinthians 11:24, “Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.” So he and the Lord shared welts on their back for a period of time. The marks may also have come from being stoned; the broken bones may have been from his beating with a rod—all of which came because of his valiant missionary service. The negative connotations have led to our word, “*stigma*.” Paul uses this to show faithfulness in the face of persecution. He received a lot of persecution in Galatia (stoning, Acts 14:5,19; 13:50; etc.).

Header Image: Moses with the Tables of the Law by Pieter Gaal, 1803. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

4. There are two cities named Antioch in the New Testament, one north and one west of Jerusalem. Antioch in Pasidia or western Galatia where Paul is now (not to be confused with the eastern city of Antioch in Syria where Paul spent most of his early Christian life).
5. J. Louis Martyn, *The Anchor Bible: Galatians* (NY, London: Doubleday, 1997), 15–17.
6. Adapted from John W. Welch, *Charting the New Testament*, section 14, and Raymond Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 468.
7. Gamaliel was not only a well-respected member of the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:33–40), but also the grandson of Hillel, one of the greatest Jewish teachers in the Mishnah and the father of rabbinism.
8. The Gospels of Matthew and John usually refer to the Twelve as Jesus’ “disciples,” Mark and Luke call the Twelve apostles more often.
9. William Pinar, *Race, Religion, and A Curriculum of Reparation* (NYC, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 44. To the Greeks, one was not naked unless the male foreskin was removed. “As a mutilation of the natural male form, **circumcision** violated **Greek** aesthetics. Moreover, **Greeks** held athletic contests in which the young male participants appeared **nude**. The **Greeks’** sense of modesty dictated that the foreskin should cover the glans.”
10. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, II.xviii.2. “When the Syrians thought they had ruined the Jews, they had the **Judaizer’s** in suspicion also”
11. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 258.
12. Glanville Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Press, 1961, reprint 2012), 583–586.
13. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology in three volumes* (NYC, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1871), 1.152, 163, 182. Speaking as a mouthpiece of the *Westminster Confession*, and Reformed Protestant theology in America, Hodge insisted that the entire Bible was divinely inspired: “All the books of scripture are equally inspired. All alike are infallible in what they teach. And secondly, that inspiration extends to all the contents of these several books . . . the Spirit of God pervades the whole Scripture” (also 1.138–140).
14. All Greek definitions are taken from Strong’s *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, for the KJV. Available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/1344.htm> (accessed 9-10-19)
15. Tom Thatcher, Chris Keith, Raymond F. Person, Jr., *The Dictionary of the Bible and Ancient Media* (London, Oxford: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2017), 113.
16. Michael Edward Stone, Esther Glickler Chazon, David Satran, Ruth A. Clements, *Supplements to the Journal of the study of Judaism: Things Revealed: Studies In Early Jewish And Christian Literature* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2004), 210. “Paul steps onto an exegetical platform, first erected probably by the itinerant teachers, to debate the relevance of Abraham . . . Paul’s midrashic argument of [Galatians] 3:10–13 is notoriously complicated.
17. *Psalms of Solomon*, available online at <http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/psalmssolomon.html> (accessed 9-12-19).
18. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1989), 558.559.

19. A premortal descendant of Heavenly Parents was also mentioned in the Bible, but not interpreted that way: “Ye are gods, children of the most High” (Psalm 82:6); “We are the offspring of God” (Acts 17:29), and “Be in subjection unto the Father of spirits” (Hebrews 12:9).
20. Matthew 2:16; 8:6, 8, 13; 12:18; 17:18; 21:15; John 4:51; Acts 3:26; etc. Also in Greek, “servant” is the same word as “*doulos*/slave, bondman, man of servile condition,” and similarly a female servant or handmaid, was a “*doule*/female slave, bondmaid” (see John 15:15; Lk1:38). Section shared in Wilson, *Emancipation of Women in the New Testament*, chapter 7.
21. Shaye J. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1987), 122.
22. J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem at the Time of Jesus*, 363
23. Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament* (NYC, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1998), 15–16. Unfortunately, we do not have many historical records from this class of people as they were too poor.
24. *Mishnah, Kiddushin*, 2.1. The day after the twelfth birthday, the child was no longer a minor, and the day after she turned twelve and a half the boy or girl could legally be married. “A man may give his daughter in betrothal while she is still in her girlhood either by his own act or by that of his agent.”
25. Martyn, *Galatians*, 386.
26. Moses 5:57; 6:57, 62; 7:46; also 2 Nephi 2:3, 26; D&C 20:26; 39:3; 76:106; 112:30.
27. See Bible Hub, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/5.htm> (accessed 9-11-19)
28. Martyn, *Galatians*, 419.
29. Avraham Steinberg, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics* (Jerusalem, Israel: Feldheim, 2003), 106. “Blindness was a very common condition in antiquity. Throughout the bible where human blemishes are cited, blindness is always mentioned first. A blind person in ancient cultures was considered very lowly and was the subject of scorn, ridicule and even death. A newborn determined to be blind was not allowed to survive. If the blindness was not recognized until he grew up, he became a beggar.”
30. The Shema included three Old Testament passages: Deuteronomy 6:4–9; 11:13–21; and Numbers 15:37–41. As mentioned earlier, it was written on phylacteries, door posts, and recited daily at the temple
31. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 164.
32. “Whosoever believeth on my words, them will I visit with the manifestation of my Spirit” (D&C 5:16). “As often as thou hast inquired thou hast received instruction of my Spirit. . . . thou hast been enlightened by the Spirit of truth” (D&C 6:14–15). “If you desire a further witness, cast your mind upon the night that you cried unto me in your heart” (D&C 6:22). “Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter? What greater witness can you have than from God?” (D&C 6:23). “Whatsoever things you shall ask in faith, with an honest heart, believing that you shall receive” (D&C 8:1). “I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost . . . this is the spirit of revelation” (D&C 8:2–3; also see D&C 12:5; 14:8). “You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right . . . But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong” (D&C 9:7–9).
33. Spencer W. Kimball, “Becoming the Pure in Heart,” General Conference April 1978.
34. A professional **scribe** was called an *amanuensis*, **Paul probably asked a fellow saint to help him in his Epistles. We**

have the names of a few of them: Tertius (R0 16:22), and possibly Epaphras (Colossians 1:7; 4:12; Philemon 1:23).

35. See Bible Hub, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/1121.htm> (accessed 9-12-19).



EPHESIANS

WORSHIP AND HOUSEHOLD CODE OF CONDUCT

CA. A.D. 61–63. ROMAN IMPRISONMENT

Theme: Worship

Who, how, when, where, and why we worship? This Epistle is filled with hymns and prayers as well as the vocabulary of worship that ties the chapters together.

Title and Audience: *Ephesians*

Unlike all of Paul's other epistles, only the Epistle known as "Ephesians" fails to name or send greetings to any of the saints. This is odd because Paul knew the Ephesians well. He served in the region for three years as a missionary while "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul" (NIV, Acts 19:11; 1–41). In the oldest three Greek manuscripts, the word "Ephesians" is missing. Only in later versions is it added on the side, or as a postscript.¹

The letter suggests that his audience did not know Paul personally either (see 1:15; 3:2–3; 4:21), so this was probably a circular or general letter that was to be distributed across Asia (as was 1 Peter).²

Outline

- 1:1–4 Greetings in Christ
- 1:5–14 Spiritual Blessings in Christ
- 1:15–23 Who we Worship: Know Christ
- 2:1–10 Personal Worship: Made Alive in Christ
- 2:11–18 Worship as One in Christ
- 2:19–22 Worship of Christ in the Household
- 3:1–13 Worship for Gentiles: Mystery of Salvation
- 3:14–21 Worship through Prayer and the Spirit
- 4:1–16 Worship in Unity of the Spirit
- 4:17–5:7 Worship through Christlike Living
- 5:8–14 The Spirit's Presence in Worship
- 5:15–20 Worshipful Living with the Spirit's Power
- 5:21–33 Household Code: Wives and Husbands
- 6:1–9 Household Code: Parents and Children
- 6:10–18 Worship Clothed with the Armor of God 6:19–24 Closing Remarks

Problems

The Epistle claims it was written by Paul (Ephesians 1:1), but textual scholars note that it is different from his other letters in style, vocabulary, and themes.³ We assume that either Paul did not directly write or dictate it. However, he could have offered an outline, given general directions, approved someone else's work, or a myriad of other scenarios that would still allow his name on it without it being solely his creation. Furthermore, Ephesians is the only Epistle attributed to Paul that did not fit into the preliminary Pauline statistical vocabulary analysis known as stylometry.⁴



Background

This Epistle claims to come from Paul while he was imprisoned (Ephesians 1:1; 3:1; 4:1). It fits most likely into his Roman imprisonment letters, while he was on “house arrest.”⁵ This allowed the prisoner freedom to receive visitors, write letters, and live in a home of sorts. We have four “prison letters” that share many similarities: Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians and Philippians:

	BONDS	CARRIER	GREETINGS
Ephesians	6:20	Tychicus	
Philippians	1:7, 13–16	Epaphroditus	The brethren. . . with me
Colossians	4:18	Tychicus Onesimus	Mark, Luke, Aristarchus, Epaphras, Demas
Philemon	1:10, 13	Onesimus	Mark, Luke, Aristarchus, Epaphras, Demas

EPHESIANS 1

Greetings in Christ

Ephesians 1:1–4

Ephesians 1:1 “Paul, an apostle of Jesus . . . to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus” Paul introduces himself as the author and as an apostle writing to the faithful members. The letter lets us know that these saints had maturity and a spiritual understanding of the gospel. The name Jesus Christ is written as a title in Greek from the Hebrew or Aramaic, “*the Messiah, Jesus.*”

The couplet, “*in Christ*” is repeated five times in the next few verses. It is also referred to six more times as “in Him” (Ephesians 1:1–14). The phrase “*in Christ*” is unique to Paul. He is cited once as using it in Acts 24:24, and then uses it 99 other times in the Pauline Epistles (and 22 in Ephesians). In Greek, the word “*in/ἐν*,” is also translated as “on,” or “among.” Different translations may reverse the order of Jesus and Christ, or use a different word for variety. It can refer to a unity with Jesus as our Promised Messiah. However, in Greek, “*in Christ*” means “in the anointed” or “on the anointed” or “among the anointed.” This leads us back to temple imagery as priests and sacred structures were anointed to become holy (Exodus 30:30; Leviticus 16:32; etc.). Christ was anointed by God to become His holy heir. The promise of the Messiah was the promise of the Anointed One. Paul’s frequent use of this evokes the highest blessings of Jesus to the saints.

Ephesians 1:2 “Grace *be* to you, and peace, from God . . .” The letter begins with Paul’s standard greeting that is found at the beginning or ending of every letter attributed to him (including Hebrews). His audience included Hebrews/Aramaic, who understood, “peace/*shalom*/wholeness,” and Greeks “grace/*charis*,” meaning “(a) a gift or blessing brought to man by Jesus Christ, (b) favor, (c) gratitude, thanks, (d) a favor, kindness.”⁶ This verse also clearly separates Jesus and His Father within the Godhead.

Spiritual Blessings in Christ

Ephesians 1:3-14

These verses are all one long very in-depth sentence (supposedly the longest ever written in Greek). It is a full blessing. This blessing is a digest of the whole letter. It is an exclamation of prayers and praise or psalms similar to what the Jews were reciting in their synagogues and homes at the time.⁷ God is the subject of most phrases. It all resounds of God’s glory.

Ephesians 1:3 “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” In most translation this is how it begins, but the NIV translated it as, “Praise be to the God.” Both identify our need for a worshipful, dependent, meek relationship with our God. Unlike the use of “blessed” in the beatitudes, (i.e. “blessed are the peacemakers,” Matthew 5:9), or for Mary (“Blessed art thou among women,” Luke 1:42, here in Ephesians, this word in Greek, “blessed/*eulogétos*” is exclusively for God, as “entitled to receive blessing from man, worthy of praise.”⁸ It stands at the opening of this hymn like sentence and thesis of the Epistle.

Ephesians 1:4 “just as He chose us in Him before *the* foundation of *the* world for us to be holy and blameless before Him, in love” (BLB) Even though the restoration is alone in interpreting this verse as teaching a pre-mortal life, this powerful doctrine is also referenced in the New Testament in John 1:1–5; 17:24; and 1 Peter 1:20. We read this from the perspective of D&C 93:29 that humanity “was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.” The Book of Mormon first taught the Prophet Joseph Smith that God chooses all to be saved, and we must choose to be chosen.⁹ However, these verses, and the next one, are understood in most Christian dogma to speak of God’s power to choose whomever He will to be the elect without human action or agency involved. Joseph Smith taught that God’s powers are actually limited within the bounds of human agency. But most Christian creeds defended God’s predestination to election or damnation as the “secret purpose of God.”¹⁰

Ephesians 1:5 “having predestined us” Only once in Romans 8:29–30, and twice in this chapter (Ephesians 1:5, 11) the KJV translated “*proorizo*” into “*predestinated*.” Only a handful of modern English translations deviate from this traditional word choice, one of which is the Jubilee Bible 2000, “having marked out beforehand the way.” The Greek word, “*proorizo*” is made up of “*pro*/ beforehand” and the verb “*horizo*/ marking off or deter-

mining.” God planned the earth in advance and set bounds. We do not believe in a salvation superimposed on passive persons, though. Prophet Joseph restored the truth that God foreordained His spirit children (see D&C 93:7, 29). We can find writings from the earliest Christians through the second century, such as Justin Martyr, “who taught that at death the ‘soul ... goes back to the place from whence it was taken.” And, the oldest complete Christian sermon, 2 Clement (ca. A.D. 150) quoted Ephesians 6 and included: “the first church, the spiritual one which was created before the sun and moon.”¹¹

“unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” Paul uses the image of Christ adopting or begetting the saints as his children. This is how we can spiritually speak of Christ as our Father. Connecting Paul’s emphasis on “in Christ,” we see the adoption “with Christ” through His at-one-ment, which knits disciples to Him through the oil crushed and shared in Gethsemane, or “olive press.” Paul also references the conversion of the gentiles through the Spirit’s adoption in Romans 8:15; 9:4; and Galatians 4:5. Similarly, the Nauvoo newspaper, *“Times and Seasons”* published, “For Abraham is heir of the promises, and the Gentiles through adoption can become heirs with him of the same blessings.”¹² In the Book of Mormon the principle of the Lord’s spiritual adoption is described in Jacob 5, as grafting into an olive tree. Nephi also describes salvation as a joint venture between the Savior and the sinner, “we labor diligently . . . for we know that it is by grace that we are saved after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23).

Ephesians 1:7 “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” The author outlines Jesus’ grace as coming from our Creator, Redeemer, and Savior. He understood that Jesus’ blood was required for the forgiveness of our sins. In the Roman world, a citizen received exemption from tribute or taxes. A citizen in the Kingdom of God is also “absolved from payment for sins.”¹³

Ephesians 1:8–9 “Making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ” (ESV) God, in His wisdom and prudence, knows the best time to share His mysteries. The timing is part of the unknown with God that enables us to walk by faith. The Greek word for “mystery/*mustérion*” means: “a secret, of which initiation is necessary; in the New Testament: the counsels of God, once hidden but now revealed in the Gospel or some fact thereof; the Christian revelation generally; particular truths or details of the Christian revelation.” Mysteries refer to things that are hidden such as the details of the plan of salvation, the temple ordinances, and vicarious work for the dead (1 Corinthians 15:29). Christ has revealed them again in our dispensation. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit other mysteries are revealed. The Christian Orthodox Church refers to ordinances, or things that require initiation as mysteries. Paul will talk about three mysteries.

Ephesians 1:9b–10 “which he hath purposed in himself: in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him” Only the KJV uses the word “dispensation,” rather than “a plan for the fullness of time,” (ESV) or “with a view

The oikonomia of a Greek household. Image in the Public Domain, courtesy of Patrick Gray, Flickr.



to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times.” This is the first of three mysteries that Paul address: The Dispensation of the Fullness of Time.¹⁴ The word “dispensation/*oikonomia*” means: “management of household affairs, stewardship, administration.” It is used nine times in the New Testament, but most often as “stewardship.” In the Restoration, each time God orders His affairs with prophets, keys, and saving ordinances, we refer to it as a dispensation. Ephesians 3:2 refers to that “dispensation of the grace of God.” The Lord revealed that we now live in the dispensation of the fullness of time:

- D&C 27:13 “I have committed the keys of my kingdom, and a dispensation of the gospel for the last times; and for the fulness of times, in the which I will gather together in one all.
- D&C 128:9 “in all ages of the world, whenever the Lord has given a dispensation of the priesthood to any man by actual revelation.”
- D&C 128:18 “. . . it is necessary in the ushering in of the dispensation of the fulness of times, which dispensation is now beginning to usher in, that a whole and complete and perfect union, and welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers, and glories should take place, and be revealed from the days of Adam even to the present time.
- D&C 121:31–32 “All the times of their revolutions, all the appointed days, months, and years . . . shall be revealed in the days of the dispensation of the fulness of times. According to that which was ordained in the midst of the Council of the Eternal God” (also see D&C 112: 30; 124:41).

Ephesians 1:11–12 “**In Him we were also chosen as God’s own, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything by the counsel of His will**” This verse links chosen with predestinate, but the Lord taught Joseph Smith that “there are many called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men.” As described in verse 5, human agency has always been part of God’s plan and boundaries.

Ephesians 1:13–14 “after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise” The promise (or “*errest*” KJV) of our inheritance is sealed with the “Holy Spirit of Promise.” This is the only place in the Bible to use this four-word phrase. All other Christian denominations who wrote on the “Holy Spirit of Promise,” that I have found, understand it to mean the promise of the Spirit, or the hope of the Spirit.¹⁵ It was often intertwined with the process of regeneration, sanctification, adoption, or redemption. We find the same phrase in modern scripture, but it has a special definition.

In our dispensation, the Lord restored a theological breakthrough with His definition of the Holy Spirit of Promise as a special tittle and role of the Spirit. By studying each of the seven verses of scripture, and six of Joseph Smith’s sermons in Nauvoo that include the phrase, we learn that the Holy Spirit of Promise has a special function to seal ordinances and other righteous acts (Ephesians 1:13; D&C 88:3; 124:124; 132:7, 18, 19, 26).¹⁶ The Holy Spirit of Promise has the power to validate and seal covenants and ordinances, both conditionally and permanently, on earth and in heaven.

One of the seven verses that cites the Holy Spirit or Promise refers specifically to the conditional ratifying of ordinances that is determined by the recipient’s personal commitment and worthiness (D&C 132:7). God will not accept the vow of an unrepentant hypocrite, nor an ordinance, without proper authority. This is how the Holy Spirit of Promise is essential. With perfect knowledge, the Spirit cannot be deceived, and therefore acts as the judge and sealer of ordinances.¹⁷ When disciples live their covenants valiantly, they were (and are) sealed with that Holy Spirit of Promise, which was the surety of their “inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession” (Ephesians 1:14). The redemption and inheritance are both offered by Jesus.

Six of the seven verses in scripture refer to the ultimate sealing of the Holy Spirit of Promise—a permanent assurance of Eternal Life—also known as one’s “calling and election made sure,” and the “more sure word of prophecy,” or “entering into the rest of the Lord” (2 Peter, 1:19; D&C 88:3–4; 131:5; 132:7). In our day, it is received as a sacred ordinance, performed only by God’s prophets to couples in the Holy of Holies in dedicated temples.¹⁸

Emil Frei stained glass window of the Holy Spirit as a dove taken at St. Pius V Church, St. Louis, MO. Photo by Hickory Hardscrabble via Flickr

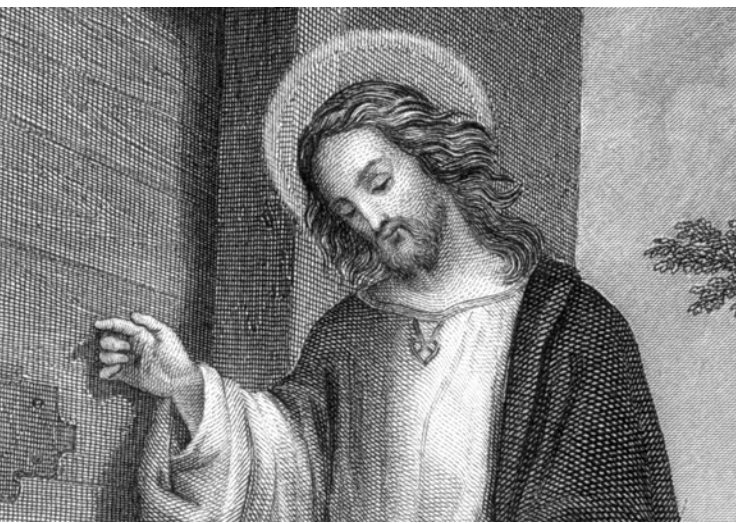


Who we Worship: Know Christ through Personal Revelation

Ephesians 1:15–23

Ephesians 1:15–17 “Ever since I heard about your faith . . . I keep asking that the God . . . may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation” (NIV) The prayer of the apostle was that the faithful saints would have a great outpouring of the Spirit’s revelation. This was the same message that the post-mortal Joseph Smith came to share with Brigham Young at Winter Quarters in a dream.¹⁹ This verse gives the impression that the author doesn’t know his audience personally... “I heard of your faith...” nevertheless, Paul prays for them so that they may receive wisdom and revelation.

Ephesians 1:18 “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance” (NIV), If we understand the potential and feel the Savior’s hope for us, it can draw us to Him. The hope enlightens the whole person through the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. “The calling” is our eternal call to be holy and to receive an inheritance—even to become joint heirs (Romans 8:17).



19th century steel engraving of Jesus Christ, by Peter Carl Geissler via Wikimedia Commons.

Ephesians 1:19–21 “His incomparably great power for us who believe . . . far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name . . .” (NIV) The name of Jesus as the Christ is the most powerful species and element in the universe. His name causes mountains to move, prisons to tumble, and the earth to shake (Moroni 8:24). Even more so, it can free us from sin eternally. Nephi’s final words include a similar message: “this is the way; and there is none other way nor given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 31:21).

Ephesians 1:23 “God . . . appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body”

(NIV) This emblematic image of the church as Christ’s body, stems from the fact that it is His church. It is not Peter’s or Paul’s church (and in our day and age, it’s not Joseph Smith’s or Pres. Nelson’s church). Jesus, our Lord, directs the workings of the church from the other side of the veil. He governs His Kingdom through the operations of the membership. Willing saints serve as His hands and feet—which still carry the signs of His atoning sacrifice for all earthlings.

EPHESIANS 2

Personal Worship: Alive in Christ

Ephesians 2:1–10

Ephesians 2:1–3 “you were dead in your transgressions and sins, . . . you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is . . . disobedient” (NIV) Before coming to Christ in conversion, those who were disobedient to God’s commandments had served the devil. The Greek word “air/*aér*” is usually just the air, but can be haze, and here references the ruler of spirits or power in the air, “i.e. the devil, the prince of the demons that according to Jewish opinion fill the realm of air.”²⁰ The text suggests that mortal nature was wicked and gratified sinful and selfish cravings. The full text can be interpreted as saying that humanity is naturally wicked. Yet the Book of Mormon corrects this misunderstanding: “the natural man is an enemy to God,” yet “the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil” in order to choose the right (Mosiah 3:19; Moroni 7:16). The Book of Mormon is a great resource in interpreting confusing biblical passages.

Ephesians 2:4–7 “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ . . . raised us up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly places in Christ” Even in our fallen state, God’s extended mercy and love offer the best gift of life: His Son as our Savior. It is the Lord’s grace that allows us to sit together with Him in heaven. This is the second mystery addressed in this chapter. “Quickened” is also translated as “made us alive” (ESV). All—Jews and Gentiles—will receive God’s grace and be restored to life or “quickened” through the gift of salvation.²¹

Ephesians 2:8–10 “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves” These verses are completely true—we are saved by grace. Nothing we can do will redeem our fallen nature without this gift from God. We need to exert faith to realize His saving power, but it will happen with or without our faith. The next verse adds God’s plan and the need for good works.

“having been created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (BLB) The rest of the Epistle includes several examples of how humans should avoid sin and do good (see Ephesians 4:25–32; 5:1–5, 25; 6:22–32). The Epistle of James has even more (i.e. James 2:17–18; etc.).

Worship as One in Christ

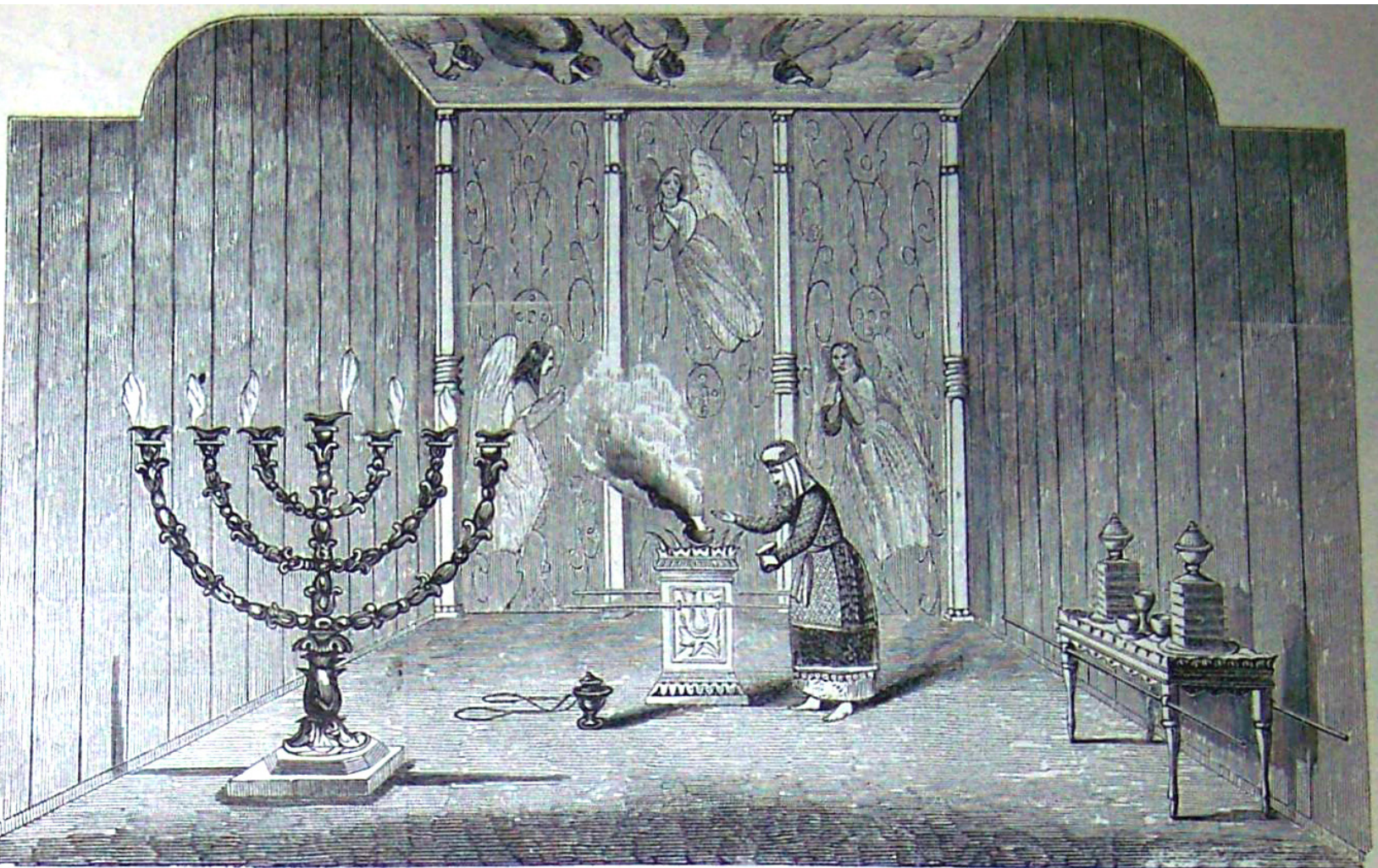
Ephesians 2:11–22

Ephesians 2:11–13 “Formerly you who are Gentiles in the flesh and called uncircumcised . . . But now in Christ Jesus you . . . have been brought near” (BSB) The Gentile converts to Christianity had entered the same

covenant of Abraham (but without the need for circumcision), because of Jesus' sacrifice for us in Gethsemane. We have the potential to come "nigh" unto God, our Heavenly Father, through His Son's mediation (KJV). With their eternal perspective, both know us better than we know ourselves in our second estate. This closeness is fostered through our faith in Him. Almost like a magnetic pull, God's Spirit sends love, companionship, and peace. Yet, the Spirit likes to be entreated gently.

Ephesians 2:14 "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (NIV) Jesus fulfills Isaiah 9:5–6 as the "Prince of Peace."²² As Jesus' successor, the Spirit becomes the messenger of peace (D&C 6:23). The "wall" may refer to any barrier between God and humanity, or heaven and earth. Or perhaps it referred to the high stone wall that separated the court of the Gentiles from the clean House of God. Around this temple barrier, gentiles were commanded in three languages (Latin, Greek, and Hebrew) not to pass into the sacred space on penalty of death (see Acts 21:28).²³ As the discussion is about Gentiles receiving the blessings of Abraham, it seems appropriate that the barrier separating the court of the Gentiles from Israelites would be taken down. The barrier is also translated: "partition inside a house." In this light, it may mean the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies in the temple (Exodus 26:33). Whatever the symbolism, it referred to a barrier between God and humanity.

The Holy Place of the Biblical Tabernacle; illustration from the 1890 Holman Bible. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Ephesians 2:15–16 “He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity” Jesus reconciled both the old, “the law with its commands and regulations” (NIV) that was to point Israel to Him, and the separation between man and God, by His atoning sacrifice and death. By so doing, Jesus accomplished His mission to destroy Satan’s hold on mankind. The enmity placed between Satan and humanity in the Garden of Eden, was used by the devil to fight humanity. Yet, Jesus’ conquering over sin and death broke Satan’s grasp and enmity on humanity. Jesus rose as a “new man” (Ephesians 2:15) allowing Him to bring peace to the world.

Ephesians 2:17–18 “For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” Now that Jesus is a resurrected man, His Spirit, the Holy Ghost, continues to testify within us of all truth. It is the Spirit that offers peace and sanctification to our souls so that we may return to our Eternal Parents someday.

Worship of Christ in the Household

Ephesians 2:19–22

Ephesians 2:19 “ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God” In the Roman world, citizenship included the right to: wear a toga, marry a citizen, and pass on citizenship to one’s children.²⁴ Politically, the civil rights of citizens included receiving an exemption from taxes, “rule by law,” having the right to a legal appeal, and enjoying a vested interest in their government.²⁵ Citizenship in Roman law paled to the great benefits and opportunities in God’s Kingdom. The Gentile-Christians are no longer foreigners to Israel, but are full citizens in the household or Kingdom of God.

Ephesians 2:20 “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” Christ’s church was initiated by Himself. Christianity was not started by Paul or any other apostle as is commonly debated by biblical scholars.²⁶ Those in the New Testament called prophets were not the same as we hold them today. In the early church, a prophet was one who testified of Jesus Christ (Revelation 19:10), while the apostles held the keys (Matthew 16:19; see also Ephesians 4:11). The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles held the keys and directed the work, not as “one” prophet. Many people were referred to as prophets who spoke with the Spirit for God (Acts 21:9). Nevertheless, without the superstructure of



Cornerstone of a Latter-day Saint Church building in Provo, Utah. Photo by Ben P L via Wikimedia Commons.

apostolic authority, the lesser leaders could not stand. When the apostasy reigned across the early churches, the Lord withdrew His apostles. The foundation of Christ's church collapsed and the debris was gathered by scavengers to build another church.

Ephesians 2:21–22 “In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord” This is a fascinating image of the Temple. In the ancient world, the Greek and Romans temples, and even Herod's addition to the second temple, had fallen to corruption. This is why Christ's church and Jesus' body are used in the New Testament as new temples. It is through Jesus that we may enter into God's presence. He will show us the way to be washed, clothed, and anointed as priests and priestesses. Then the saint's bodies can be cleansed by the Spirit and they become temples wherein the Holy Ghost can dwell.

EPHESIANS 3

Worship for Gentiles: The Mystery of Salvation

Ephesians 3:1–13

Ephesians 3:1–2 “Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward” Paul's self-identification as a prisoner helps us date the letter to possibly his imprisonments in Rome or Caesarea. However, the next phrase suggests that the audience may not know him, which means that either it was not to the Ephesians, or not during those latter two imprisonments (“if ye have heard...”), which both happened after Paul served in Ephesus for three years. On Paul's second mission he was also imprisoned for less than a day in Philippi (Acts 16:16–35), but that does not seem long enough to write this letter. And the message and style seem to be written at the same time as Colossians. As mentioned at the beginning of this Epistle's explanation, there are many uncertainties entangled with the details of who and when. This is the only time we find the title, “dispensation of the grace,” in the New Testament.

Ephesians 3:3–4 “this secret was made known to me through a revelation, just as I wrote about briefly in the past” (ISV) Revelation is the key to new information from God. Here it references one specific revelation. Yet, in Galatians 2:2, and Romans 16:25, Paul describes “revelation as a continuous and unceasing flow of information and power.”²⁷ The secret or “mystery” (KJV) was explained in a previous letter to them. Here is more evidence that we are missing other scripture, or that the Bible has only canonized some of the correspondence from the apostles. Through revelation Paul received knowledge of the Messiah/Christ. This may refer to his first vision, or another sacred experience.²⁸

Ephesians 3:5–6 “It has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets [that] this mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are fellow heirs” (BSB) This is the third mystery shared in this

Epistle: Gentiles may become joint-heirs. Peter's revelation in Acts 10:9–48, came from the Spirit and opened the door for this specific mystery. The Lord taught Peter (and was later verified by the Quorum of the Twelve and the whole church), that the Gentiles had been cleansed through Christ's atonement, and were no longer unclean. They could be adopted into the covenant, too. There were converts to Judaism before that time, but not without complying with the Law of Moses. Peter's vision taught that Jesus' grace, was completely extended to the Gentiles. Now the chosen people are those who choose to follow Jesus' way.



Mosaic depicting Roman slaves. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Ephesians 3:7–8 “I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace, given me through the working of His power. Though I am less than the least . . . to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (BSB) The choice of the word “servant” is always significant in their hierarchical culture where slaves and servants made up so much of the population. I doubt the word was used lightly. Everyone knew the work of a servant/slave. Yet that is the relationship that disciples have to the Lord—except for one major difference:

agency. We serve our master out of love and by choice. And, becoming a servant to God increases one's freedom. Paul was made a "servant" (NIV), or "minister" (ESV), or messenger, thanks to God's forgiveness and grace, to work under the power of God. We often describe "God's power" as priesthood.²⁹

Ephesians 3:9–11 "This mystery . . . was kept hidden in God . . . now, through the church. . . should be made known . . . according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ" (NIV) God's eternal purposes were planned, "before the foundation of the earth," and were then revealed to the chief apostle. (Ephesians 1:4). Evidence of a premortal life and plan are sprinkled throughout the Bible, even though it is not taught outside of the Restoration. These verses also speak of the Spirit as the source of revelation.

Ephesians 3:12–13 "In Him and through faith in Him we may enter God's presence with boldness and confidence" (BSB) Our spiritual confidence and trust comes from faith in Christ. With that we have "access" (KJV) to enter the presence of God (D&C 93:1). This is not self-confidence, but confidence in and with our Redeemer.

Ephesians 3:13 "I ask you not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you" (BSB) Paul's use of sufferings or "tribulation" (KJV) in Greek means, "internal temptation and internal persecution." This verse sounds as if the audience at least knew of Paul and his challenges, even if they did not know him personally.

Worship through Prayer for Strength through The Spirit

Ephesians 3:14–21

Ephesians 3:14 "I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" Before the prayer itself (verse 16–21), we learn how and to whom the author prays. In the Old Testament, Psalms 95:6 reads, "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker," and Daniel knelt to pray three times a day (Daniel 6:10). In the New Testament, Satan asks Jesus to kneel before him (Matthew 4:9), but He would not. Instead, the scriptures include Him kneeling in Gethsemane (Luke 22:41). Note that the prayer is before and to the Father.

Ephesians 3:15 "from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name" (NIV) This is a unique verse in all scripture that describes families in heaven. The eternal sealing of a husband and wife is mentioned in D&C 132:19, but this verse alone mentions families. The doctrine of the Restoration alone speaks of families being sealed eternally, but many Christians believe they will see their family members again in heaven. The eternal family of God is gathered together in all things thanks to Christ as explained in Ephesians 1:10.

In the Roman world, citizens alone had the right to receive a special third name. The name given from God will be a new name written on a stone (Revelation 2:17). Each disciple covenants at baptism to take Christ's name upon them. This is the key name to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Ephesians 3:16–17 “I pray that . . . he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit . . . through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love” The prayer begins with a request for the Spirit to strengthen the saints through faith. We often find a link between the workings of the Spirit and faith in Acts and the Epistles (especially the Pauline letters: 1 Corinthians 12:9; 2 Corinthians 4:13; Galatians 3:2; 5:5, 22; Ephesians 1:13, etc.). The prayer for inner strength extends to the need for being rooted in love.

Ephesians 3:18–19 “. . . to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (BSB) Of all the things to pray for, an understanding of God’s love is paramount. The letter includes an extraordinary request—to comprehend the depth of Jesus’ love and God’s fullness!

Ephesians 3:20–21 “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen” (NIV) The prayer is closed by acknowledging that God’s abundant mercy and love will bless us beyond our comprehension, so we glorify His name eternally. The closing includes the name of Christ Jesus.

EPHESIANS 4

Worship in Unity in the Spirit

Ephesians 4:1–16

Ephesians 4:1–3 “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received . . . keep the unity of the Spirit through . . . peace” (NIV) We are admonished to live a life worthy of the calling we have received as Christians. This half of the letter is filled with action. There are 36 verbs in the imperative or commanding form of Greek in the rest of the letter. Our efforts should be directed to refine our Christ-like traits. Jesus also taught a lot about fostering unity (especially at the Last Supper in John 15–17). The Lord revealed to Joseph Smith that unity is the key to the celestial kingdom (D&C 105:3–5).

Ephesians 4:4–6 “. . . one body, and one Spirit . . . one hope . . . One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” In these three verses there are seven manifestations of oneness or unity. The Spirit is a unifier, as it teaches truth to all sincere seekers. God the Father is the subject of verse six, including the description of His omniscience.

Ephesians 4:7 “to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (NKJV) Jesus now becomes the main subject for the next several verses. The author transitions from “all” in unity to “each” receiving Christ’s gifts. God blesses the unified saints one by one.



The Descent of Christ into Limbo by Domenico di Pace Beccafumi, ca. 1535. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

like the way the NIV explains that Jesus gave the organization as gifts, “Christ himself gave the apostles.” Some of the names of the leaders differ—a pastor is a shepherd, but we use the name “Bishop.” Even though the Greek word for “evangelist” meant, “a missionary, bearer of good tidings,” Joseph Smith defined it differently: “An evangelist is patriarch...wherever the church of Christ is established in the earth, there should be a Patriarch for the benefit of the posterity of the Saints, as it was with Jacob in the giving of patriarchal blessings unto his sons.”³⁰

Regarding the foundation of apostles and prophets, Spencer W. Kimball taught, “Church authorities are a ‘hitching post.’ No one will ever go astray who ties himself to the authorities of the church. The majority of the 12 will never lead the church astray.”³¹ These church offices help the Saints attain a unity of faith “and thus grow up into Christ the head of the body” (NIV). Other lists are found in other Epistles and the Book of Acts.³²

Ephesians 4:8–10 “He who descended is the very one who ascended above all the heavens, in order to fill all things” (BSB) Christ captured the usurper and counterfeit, Lucifer, which then gave Him power over death. Psalms 68:18, describes Jesus’ resurrection as the act of releasing the captives from the Spirit Prison. The excerpt points to Christ’s condescension, too. Only those who hold the Doctrine and Covenants as scripture understand that during the three days that His body lay in the tomb, Jesus went to prepare a way for those in the Spirit Prison to be released (D&C 138). We, too, must descend in humility in order to ascend in faith.

Church Worship and Organization

Ephesians 4:11

Ephesians 4:11 “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers” I like Paul’s perspective of giving gifts. He treats the organization of the church as if it were another gift from God. “He gave...” is also translated, “Now these are the gifts Christ gave” (NLT). I also

EPHESIANS 4:11

Apostle
Prophet
Evangelist
Pastor
Teacher

1 CORINTHIANS 12:28

Apostle
Prophet

Teacher
Help
Government

MEANING

One sent, special messenger
Foreteller, interpreter
Bringer of good news
Shepherd
Teacher
Help, Aid
Director, administrator

1 TIMOTHY 3; TITUS 1

Deacon
Bishop
Elder

ACTS 14:23; PHILIPPIANS 1:1

Deacon
Bishop
Elder

MEANING

Servant
Overseer
A member of the Sanhedrin, an elder of a Christian assembly

Ephesians 4:12–13 “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith . . .” Under the Spirit’s direction, inspired members and leaders of the church seek united and church-wide edification. Most modern translations do not use the word “perfecting.” Instead, it reads: “equip his people for works of service” (NIV), or “for the training of the saints in the work of ministry” (HCSB). The word “saint,” means “holy ones” from the Latin, “*sanctus*.” The intent is that members of the church are to become holy. The road to become a joint heir with Christ requires that “we mature to the full measure of the stature of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13, BSB; also, Ephesians 1:13; 4:13; Romans 8:17). Line up on line, we progress in unity of faith and a personal knowledge of Jesus as our Christ.

Ephesians 4:14 “We should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (NKJV) The saints need spiritual maturity and grounding so as not to be swayed by the adversary’s schemes. We find people deliberately corrupting truths. Satan sends his henchmen to deceive truth-seekers.

Ephesians 4:15–16 “speaking the truth in love, we should grow up in all things into Him who is the head, Christ . . . the increase of the body makes for itself, to *the* building up of itself in love” (BLB) Paul is symboli-

cally using the image of Jesus' body as the body of the Church. When we are members of that body or when the church works in unity, then it grows as does Jesus' glorious body.

Worship through Christian Living

Ephesians 4:17-5:7

Ephesians 4:17-5:6 “As a follower of the Lord, I order you to stop living like stupid, godless people” (CEV)

Rather than living like the gentiles who were “separated from the life of God because of the ignorance . . . hardening of their hearts . . . sensuality . . . impurity, and . . . greed” (NIV), saints need to live a higher law. When we lie to someone else, or sin in any way, we are actually hurting ourselves as well as them.

The next ten verses list attributes needed to become disciples of Jesus and “children of God.” They are laced with imperative action verbs. These new commandments are included in our covenant to live the law of the gospel of Jesus Christ. These are just a few of the many selfish behaviors that need to be exchanged for a selfless Christ-like focus, and positive attributes that are needed to be called “followers of God” (Ephesians 5:1).

- “Put off your old self . . . corrupted by its deceitful desires” (Ephesians 4:22, NIV)
- “Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness” (Ephesians 2:24, NIV)
- “Put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor” (Ephesians 4:25, NIV)
- “Do not let the sun set upon your anger” (Ephesians 4:26, BSB)
- “Do not give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4:27, NIV)
- “Steal no longer” (Ephesians 4:28, NIV)
- “Work, doing something useful with their own hands” (NIV)
- “Share with those in need” (NIV)
- “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths” (Ephesians 4:29, BSB)
- “Building others up according to their needs” (NIV)
- “Edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (KJV)
- “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit . . . in whom you were sealed for . . . redemption” (BSB)
- “Stop being bitter and angry and mad at others” (Ephesians 4:31, CEV)
- “Don’t yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude” (CEV)
- “Be kind and tender-hearted to one another, forgiving each other” (Ephesians 4:32, BSB)
- “Follow God’s example . . . and walk in the way of love” (Ephesians 5:1-2, NIV)
- “There must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity” (Ephesians 5:3, NIV)
- “Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk, or crude joking (Ephesians 5:4, BSB)
- “Let there be thanksgiving” (ESV)
- “Let no one deceive you with empty arguments” (Ephesians 5:6, CSB)

Disciples who apply these steps (especially toward those we live with) become sanctified by the Spirit. The process of sanctification, or coming unto Christ, requires changes of behavior, attitude, and desire. By doing so, our way of live becomes our worship. We worship God by keeping His commandments. But, the author explains we are idolaters when we are greedy (Ephesians 5:4), and I add, whenever we deliberately sin. In our day, prophets have added to this list the commandment to avoid pornography as a plague. We need to control all our thoughts, including nursing a grudge. And, “repent daily.”³³

EPHESIANS 5

The Spirit’s Presence in Worship

Ephesians 5:8-14

Ephesians 5:8 “You were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light” (NASB) The reference to “children,” has less to do with age than with humility and meekness before God. Coming from the same general time period, we find other writings that discuss “light” and “darkness” as metaphors, including the Gospel of John and the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran.

GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

Faith,
Hope,
Charity,
Healing,
Wisdom,
Miracles,
Prophecy,
Knowledge,
Discernment of Spirits,
Tongues + Interpretation of Tongues
(1Corinthians 12:8–10; 13:13; Moroni 10; D&C 46)

FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

Joy,
Love,
Peace,
Patience,
Kindness,
Goodness,
Faithfulness,
Righteousness
Truth
(Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 5:9)

Ephesians 5:9 “For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth” Paul gave a longer list of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, but two of these three are new. By compiling and comparing the lists that Paul gives of the fruits of the Spirit beside the Gifts of the Spirit we learn new things about them. (We also find slight variations in the lists from each of the Standard Works.³⁴)

The major difference between the Spirit’s “gifts” and “fruits,” is that one is the *means* and the other, the *ends*. God gives us “gifts” as the means, or God’s power to bless others. (This purpose is repeated five times in D&C 46.) The

gifts are not given for selfish reasons, but as tools to improve our service. After one receives the “gifts” and serves others, then God blesses that disciple with the consequences or “fruits” of the Spirit (D&C 130:21).

Interestingly, there is only one duplicate: “*agapē*/love/charity.” It seems appropriate that charity bridges both God’s gifts and the fruits of our labors to follow the Spirit. If we work on love, we receive love. This is especially applicable in light of Lehi and Nephi’s vision of the most desirable, “fruit of the tree,” which is the love of God (1 Nephi 11:8, 22).

Ephesians 5:11–13 “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them” (NIV) In contrast to the fruits of the spirit, darkness is unfruitful. How do we expose those full of darkness? The KJV calls on the saints to “reprove them.” The CEV reads, “show how wrong they are.” The Epistle calls the saints to not only recognize the difference between light and darkness, but to also speak up for what is right.

Ephesians 5:14 “Wake up, O sleeper/rise from the dead, /and Christ will shine on you” (NIV) This appears to be a poem or hymn. It may be quoting Jonah 1:6, “O sleeper, Arise!” In connection with the author’s discussion on the fruits of the Spirit, goodness, righteousness and truth will often radiate light through the disciple’s countenance. The Book of Mormon describes when Christ’s light can literally “shine” as receiving “the image of God engraven upon your countenances” (Alma 5:19).

Worshipful Living with the Spirit’s Power

Ephesians 5:15–20

Ephesians 5:15–16 “Be very careful, then, how you live . . . making the most of every opportunity” (NIV) This is an exciting principle. At times we feel this life is a test, but this verse teaches that it is also a great opportunity to learn and grow and make the world a better place. Every person can make a positive impact within their sphere of influence every day. In the Old Testament, the Lord taught that righteous people in a community can actually save it. Remember, the Lord would not destroy Sodom as long as Lot lived there. Good people bless their communities now as well. We have also learned from that the world is wicked enough for the Second Coming, but the righteous still need to preach and finish their preparations.³⁵

Ephesians 5:17 “Be wise by understanding what the Lord’s will is” (NET) To act wisely, we need to understand the Lord’s will. We can find general guidelines in the scriptures, words from living prophets (more specific to our era), and through the still small voice of the Holy Spirit (for personalized guidance) (D&C 6:15, 23; 8:2–3; 9:7–9; etc.).

Ephesians 5:18 “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (NIV) Even though wine was often diluted with 10 parts water for normal use (and could be diluted with 20

parts water), and a strong drink was still diluted with 2 parts water to 1 part wine, drunkenness was denounced regularly in scripture (Luke 21:34; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:21; Proverbs 20:1; 31:4; Isaiah 5:11; D&C 89:7; etc.).³⁶

Ephesians 5:19 “**Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord**” (BSB) The KJV alone follows the Greek, which was more personal, “speaking to yourselves/*heautou*” which literally means, “of himself, herself, itself.” Whether it is to oneself or to others, the gift of music to accompany the truths of scripture is uplifting and blesses attitudes and lives. Sacred music adds to our worship in churches, homes, and our minds. It can foster inspiration and can bring the Spirit’s witness and peace. This is why the Lord asked for Emma Smith to prepare a hymnal shortly after the organization of the church, and only a few days after her baptism (D&C 25:11–12).³⁷

Ephesians 5:20 “**Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**” A heart and voice of gratitude fosters the Spirit. Whether for private or group worship, a grateful heart is always healthy. The Lord has commanded that we give thanks in “all things,” whenever something in our lives goes wrong or right. When we give thanks for trials it demonstrates our trust in God’s wisdom. Giving thanks in challenging times of can soften hearts, foster repentance, and open avenues of thinking to find solutions and growth. Giving thanks to God should be a major portion of our worship (Romans 1:21; Psalms 92:1; 138:2; etc.).

EPHESIANS 5:21–6:9

Household Code: Wives and Husbands

*Ephesians 5:21–33*³⁸

Ephesians 5:21 “**Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ**” (BSB) It is often easier to submit to Christ than to others. Yet, when there is cooperating with others in righteousness, we learn that we are also honoring or worshipping our Lord. The Greek word “submit/*hupotasso*” is a favorite in the Epistles. In various forms, it is repeated forty times (with 30 of those coming in the Pauline Epistles). The Greek roots deal with order, accountability and submission. In the New Testament, it is applicable to use its *nonmilitary* meaning of voluntarily helping out or sharing a responsibility.³⁹ This type of submission is described in the Book of Mormon as, “sanctification” which “cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God” (Helaman 3:35).

Ephesians 5:22 “**Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord**” In the previous verse, it says when Christians are asked to submit in unity to God, there is rarely offense taken. Yet, this verse and others like it are harder to

understand when we are asked to submit to mere mortals. In our generation, the word “submit” often carries negative connotations. We are sensitive to those who unwisely submit to other humans in abusive situations. However, by supplying the *nonmilitary* definition above, in the context of Christians who are striving for unity, we can interpret this verse in a more positive light. Wives should voluntarily cooperate and work with their husbands as they share their burdens together. This perspective also adopts the counsel God gave to Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail: “no power or authority can be maintained . . . only by . . . love unfeigned” (D&C 121:36–41; 131:1–4; 132:19–25).

Fresco of a Roman family feast in Pompeii, before A.D. 79. Image housed in the Naples National Archaeological Museum, via Wikimedia Commons.



The earliest Greek options of this verse do not have any verb placed there at all, but it references the earlier sentence about submitting to Christ.⁴⁰ The best manuscripts read, “. . . wives, to your own husbands, as to the Lord.”⁴¹ Jesus is our example in relationships just as He is in everything. We are all to submit to Him just as wives are to submit to their faithful husbands—voluntarily yielding through love.

Ephesians 5:23–24 “For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior” (NIV) These verses are also troublesome. It far easier to submit to, or cooperate with, a perfect being than an imperfect being. However, the ideal situation is still sought. Hugh Nibley sees this ideal relation between a husband and wife as including the Savior. He describes it as a system of checks and balances used in marriages. The three people included, like points on a triangle, each have to work in harmony. The wife follows her husband when he is in line with God (and she has to be in tune with God to recognize that). Similarly, if the husband is in line with God, then he can check on his wife, too.⁴²

The Epistle does not encourage blind obedience or resignation. Men are “heads” of their wives only if Christ is their “head.” Another rendering of the Greek is, “The wife stands [with] her husband in all things when the husband stands behind Christ; . . . she shows love, reverence, and respect to her husband.”⁴³ In Christ’s present-day church, we are taught that if the husband himself is not honoring that role, the wife has no obligation to submit to his guidance.⁴⁴ There is no room for a male chauvinist mentality in celestial marriages.

Ephesians 5:25–27 “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse her with . . . the word” The husbands also receive specific counsel in family matters. They are to follow Jesus’ new commandment, to love as He loves (John 13:34). The Greek word for “love/*agape*” is the same word that Paul uses for charity. There are at least five words that could have been translated as “love” (i.e. “*eros*/erotic,” or “*philo*/friendship,” etc.), but he chooses the pure love of Christ as the ideal aim for husbands toward their wives.

The word “church” is found nine times in this Epistle. All designate the same comprehensive group of believers. Christ loved His church and gave Himself over for her, and those outside of her protection. Even after His death, He continued to nourish and cherish His church (Ephesians 5:23–32). The promise is that as Christ sanctified the church, so too will He sanctify our marriages if we abide in love. The goal is to be unified together.

Ephesians 5:28–30 “In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives . . . just as Christ does the church” (NIV) This counsel on marriage was difficult to enact in Paul’s time as most first marriages were arranged by one’s father or guardian. Romance was not very often the source of the arranged marriage in part because marriages were arranged when girls were not yet in their teens.⁴⁵ In spite of all this, the message for Christian husbands was, “you need to love and serve and take care of your wife as Christ shows love. You need to develop

charity.” In the culture of the day, the average Greco-Roman person was divorced four to five times. This counsel was much needed. And, even when some couples did not divorce, the literature and dramas of the time describe simultaneous extra-marital relations.

Ephesians 5:31 “**For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh**” (NIV) Paul cites Genesis 2:24 just as Jesus had (Mark 10:7–8). The Christian attitude toward marriage is rooted in the creation story. The author is also open and positive about including the phrase on intimacy in marriage. The obligation of the husband to love his wife is treated more extensively than the obligation of the wife to cooperate. Both ideas are rooted in God’s initial plan for the union of marriage in the Garden of Eden.

Ephesians 5:32 “**This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church**” (NIV) The word mystery in this verse is explained in in at least three ways:

1. *Mysterion*: Equates marriage with an ordinance or a sacrament (in Catholic terms).
2. *Mysterion*: A mystical essence of either Christ and the church, or a husband and wife’s physical connection.
3. *Mysterion*: Allegorical interpretation of Genesis being brought to light.

Perhaps he is talking about celestial relationships in marriage (see footnote 27).

Ephesians 5:33 “**Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband**” (BSB) The author taught that especially as saints, they should love their spouses and respect each other. In our day, apostles often touch on counsel for marriage and relationships.

EPHESIANS 6

Household Code: Children and Parents

Ephesians 6:1–4

Ephesians 6:1–4 “**Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right . . . fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord**” In the context of Christ’s love with respectful and loving parents, this is good advice. The addition of, “in the Lord,” expands Moses’ fifth commandment (cited from Deuteronomy 5:16). The parameters, “in the Lord,” speaks to a place where children do not have to obey in wickedness or abuse. Verse 4 expands on that, by asking fathers (and I add mothers) to not exasperate their children. President Gordon B. Hinckley taught, “we seldom get into trouble when we speak softly . . . The voice of heaven is a still small voice.”⁴⁶

Household Code: Slaves and Masters

Ephesians 6:5–9

Ephesians 6:5–6 “Slaves, you must obey your earthly masters. Show them great respect and be as loyal to them as you are to Christ. Try to please them at all times, and not just when you think they are watching. You are slaves of Christ” (CEV) These are also troubling verses when looking at them with twenty-first century spectacles. In the ancient Roman world, there were millions of slaves—some estimate 30 percent of the population were slaves or servants. (They shared the same word, “*doulos*.”) It saturated their culture and infiltrated every aspect of their social order including their homes. Understanding the servant-master relationship at the time was more like a serf-landlord in most cases. Servants even owned slaves. To avoid starvation, men sold themselves, their wives, and children into slavery for the benefit of room and board.⁴⁷ In the Jewish world, at every seventh year of labor, the servant boy or man was released, if they wanted their freedom (Exodus 21:2; Leviticus 25:39–42; Deuteronomy 15:12).⁴⁸ In the Roman world slaves were released by age thirty. Many were given their freedom prior to that age.⁴⁹

We have no record of Jesus nor his apostles advocating to abolish slavery. Instead, the New Testament counseled both slave and master to work honestly and show respect and kindness towards one another. Yet, Jesus did advocate for another reform. Rather than to completely release servitude, Jesus taught masters how to serve. He himself said, “I came not to be served, but to serve.” He took on the role as the servant as He healed, taught, and even washed His apostles’ feet. His greatest act of servitude came during His passion in Gethsemane and beyond as He became the suffering servant described by Isaiah 49–53.

Ephesians 6:7–8 “the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free” (NIV) The Apostolic church followed through with the Lord’s example. This Epistle encouraged, “with good will doing service, as to the Lord.” This counsel echoes King Benjamin, “When you are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 3:7).

Ephesians 6:9 “Masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him” (NIV) We have no recorded evidence that the Lord and His apostles ever gave lip serve to any unfair or unkind relations between slaves and servants. Their difference in station was not as important as how they treated their fellow men. In heaven, all will be judged on how they loved and served, not on what position they held.

Worship Clothed with the Armor of God

Ephesians 6:10–18

Ephesians 6:10–11 “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (NIV) The power of God is what allows disciples to



be strong in moral, intellectual, and spiritual matters. The metaphor of “armor” would have been very familiar to this audience. Across the empire, the image of a Roman soldier’s dress was well known. A soldier’s clothing told of his station. All wore breast plates and helmets, and those higher in rank added extra signs of their authority. For example, a cloak was the sign of a general, and a sash, a field marshal.⁵⁰ These verse on the armor of God were recited or reworded by martyrs who died for the faith.⁵¹

Ephesians 6:12–13 “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (KJV) A Christian’s battleground is far more important than anything earthly. Saints should fight with more determination and skill.

Ephesians 6:14 “Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness” Roman breast-

plates were leather. They often had an inscription of a Roman goddess or god carved or painted into the leather. The Christian breastplates had no idols inscribed on them, but were breastplates of righteousness. Their covenants with Christ became their breastplates and protection.

Ephesians 6:15–17 “And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” Paul’s armor is mainly defensive and to protect ourselves from evil. The most important protection was for the head. By the time of the New Testament, the Roman military helmet had developed into a status symbol:

A helmet was made of leather, bronze, iron, or in special cases, gold. What was originally no more than a protective cap developed—especially by the addition of crests—into a heavy, decorative, and expensive item. An inside lining of felt or sponge made the weight bearable. Nothing short of an ax or hammer could pierce a heavy helmet, and in some cases a hinged visor added frontal protection. Roman soldiers wore a bronze helmet equipped with cheek pieces.⁵²

In the armor of God, the helmet represents salvation—a gift from God to all mortals. Salvation also is our greatest defense. In the Jewish Midrash, they also used the phrase: “helmet of salvation,” as something that belonged with “garments of glory” that the Messiah would wear when He came.⁵³

The one offensive tool to use in our battle against wickedness is the “sword of the Spirit,” and the word of God. Knowing how to hear and understand God’s Spirit and His word will help us move forward in the battle.

Ephesians 6:18 “Pray in the Spirit at all times, with every kind of prayer and petition. To this end, stay alert with all perseverance in your prayers for all the saints” (BSB) The seventh piece of armor required to fight against the adversary is prayer. The Anchor Bible commentary pointed out the connection between “pray,” “watch/stay alert,” and using the sword, or even putting on the whole armor. The Spirit’s presence in continual prayer “can be the essence and modality of the whole process of arming oneself.”⁵⁴ Whenever we pray, we must do so *in* the Spirit of God. Prayer with the Spirit is like entering into God’s house to commune in person. One way to invite the Spirit into prayer is to begin by repenting and meekly seeking forgiveness. I have also found that sincere and thoughtful gratitude carries an added portion of the Spirit’s peace.

Final Greetings

Ephesians 6:19–24

Ephesians 6:19–20 “I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should” (NIV). Paul solicits prayers as “an ambassador in bonds” (KJV). The word “halusis/chain/bond” does not mean he was chained to a location. The normal Roman practice for house-arrest had the prisoner’s “right hand chained to the left hand on his guard.”⁵⁵ As a Roman citizen, Paul may have enjoyed his house arrest without chains as was a concession for “high status prisoners” as they awaited trial. However we cannot tell because “the terms ‘chains’ and ‘prison’ could be virtually interchangeable, and one could be in chains and not in prison.”⁵⁶ The real message he wants to communicate is triumphing with God’s help. He does not ask the saints to pray for his release, but instead that he can boldly testify of truth. Whatever situation he finds himself, he focuses completely on his calling to testify as an ambassador or emissary of Christ.

Ephesians 6:21–22 “Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know about me and what I am doing” (BSB) Tychicus delivered and probably acted as

scribe for this Epistle (and Colossians too). He was trustworthy and educated in Greek and the gospel. The author does not take the time to share how he is doing in this letter, but rather delegates all greetings and updates to Tychicus.

Ephesians 6:23–24 “Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord . . .” (NIV) The author closes just as he began with peace and love.

Header Image: Photo of Gladiator armor via Pxhere.com

ENDNOTES

1. Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (NYC, NY: Oxford Press, 204), 381–384.
2. Marcus Barth, *Ephesians 1–3*, 10.
3. *Ibid.*, 10, 4–11. The Epistle has 80 words not used elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, but there are 100 unique words in Romans and 1 Corinthians (books about twice as large).
4. John Levi Hilton, *xx*, unpublished.
5. Markus Barth *Anchor Bible: Ephesians 1–3* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 51. The postscript from Ephesians 6:24 “written from Rome,” is not found in the early Greek manuscripts until the ninth century. However, other claims in the text hint at this (Ephesians 3:1, 4:1; 6:20). Some Biblical scholars remove the letter from Paul by a century, but I do not.
6. Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, “*charis*” 5485.
7. Skolnik, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1.73–34. From the time of the Second Temple, some Jewish prayers were set and recited daily and weekly, and others were contagious from the heart. One of the best-known Jewish set prayers was known as the “eighteen benedictions.” It began by referring to the God of: 1. the patriarchs, 2. nature, and 3. sanctification. Then, the prayer petitioned God for: 4. understanding, 5. repentance, 6. forgiveness, 7. redemption, 8. healing, 9. food, 10. gathering of exiles, 11. restore His righteous reign; 12. against heretics, 13. mercy for the righteous, 14. Jerusalem, 15. the messianic king, 16. hear our prayers, 17. return God’s presence to the temple, and 18. thanks to God for all his mercies. The prayer had variations for certain holy days.
8. Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, “*eulogétos*,” 2128.
9. 2 Nephi 2:28 “. . . look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit.” Alma 40:13, “And then shall it come to pass, that the Spirits of the wicked, yea, who are evil—for behold, they have no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord; for behold, they chose evil works.” 3 Nephi 19:20 “Father, I thank thee that thou hast given the Holy Ghost unto these whom I have chosen; and it is because of their belief in me that I have chosen them out of the world.”
10. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3.104. Lynne Wilson, “Joseph Smith’s Doctrine of the Holy Spirit Contrasted with Cartwright, Campbell, Hodge, and Finney,” PhD diss., (Marquette University, 2010).
11. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 266.
12. *Times and Seasons*, 15 February 1842, 689. <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/search?query=Gentile,%20adoption&sort=relevance&page=1&perpage=10&startdate=&enddate=&transcripts=false&issuggestion=false&types=documents-papers|documents-papers-documents|related-materials|biographical-directory|geographical-directory|glossary|event> (accessed 9-19-19).
13. Welch, *Charing the New Testament*, 4–6.
14. Robert L. Millet, Kent P. Jackson, *Studies in Scripture: Acts to Revelation* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1987), 114
15. Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger*, 319. Campbell spoke for many of his contemporaries who interpreted the

promise of the Spirit to mean the same thing as the Holy Spirit of Promise. In Charles Hodge's *Commentary on Ephesians* he explained that the elect "have obtained a portion in this inheritance, and, after having believed, have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (68). Similarly, I found two other publications from the nineteenth century that addressed the phrase from Ephesians 1:13 and 5. First, Rev. William G. Elliot, the pastor of the Church of the Messiah at St. Louis wrote, "The Holy Spirit or Spirit of God was 'poured out' or 'shed forth' both on Jews and Gentiles. Believers were 'sealed' with the Holy Spirit of promise. Jesus 'breathed on them' and said, 'receive ye the Holy Spirit.'" *Discourses on the Doctrine of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: American Unitarian Association, 1855), 33. Also Rev. William Guthrie explained that one "must first believe and . . . then look for the seal and witness of the Spirit: 'In whom, after ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,' &c. As long as people hold fast these principles, and the like, they can hardly [*sic*] come to the knowledge of their gracious state, which God hath warranted people to prove and clear up to themselves, other ways than by these foresaid things." William Guthrie, *The Christian's Great Interest* (Glasgow, Scotland: Wm Collins, 1828), 75.

16. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Smith*, 4, 15, 190, 209, 284, 335.
17. There was/is no saving grace in a baptism that was followed by a hypocritical life of sin. Instead, he believed all covenants and ordinances were only efficacious when humans live worthily—When we uphold our covenants with God, the Holy Spirit of Promise ratified the ordinance; when we do not, there is no eternal reward. Another deterrent to ratification by the Holy Spirit of Promise, is proper order and priesthood authority (D&C 107:18).
18. Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 651–652.
19. Mark McConkie, *Remembering Joseph* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 2003), 215. Between February 1846 and spring of 1848, Posthumous accounts of Joseph's visitations from heaven. Wilford Woodruff's recorded a conversation with Brigham Young about a visitation he had from Joseph at Winter Quarters. "Brigham said, 'Joseph told him to tell the people to labor to obtain the Spirit of God. That they needed that to sustain them and to give them power to go through their work in the earth.
20. *Thayer's Greek Lexicon* of Strong's #109: ἀήρ. <https://biblehub.com/greek/109.htm> (accessed 9-17-19).
21. Millet, *Studies in Scripture*, 114.
22. Raymond Brown, *Birth of the Messiah* (Harford, CT: Yale Press, 1999), 415–416. Ironically, Caesar Augustus also used the title "savior of the whole world" as one of his official nomenclatures.
23. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, xv.5.
24. Welch and Hall, *Charting the New Testament*, 4–6.
25. Donald L. Wasson, *Ancient History Encyclopaedia*, "Roman Citizenship," 2016. https://www.ancient.eu/article/859/roman-citizenship/#citation_info (accessed 9-17-19).
26. A. N. Wilson, *Paul: The Mind of the Apostle* (NYC, NY: Norton, 1998); James Tabor, *Paul and Jesus: How the Apostle transformed Christianity* (NYC, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2013).
27. Markus Barth, *The Anchor Bible: Ephesians* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 330.
28. Ehat and Cook: *Words of Joseph Smith*, 10; also 9, 42, 110, 210, 327–331. On multiple occasions, the Prophet Joseph explained that "Paul . . . knew . . . all the ordinances, and blessings were in the Church." With this understanding, this

may have referred to the endowment.

29. Neil L. Anderson, “Power in the Priesthood,” General Conference October 2013. “The priesthood is the power and authority of God given for the salvation and blessing of all — men, women and children. . . . As individuals make and keep sacred covenants, they are able to receive priesthood power and blessings.”
30. Joseph F. Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1938), 151.
31. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 623.
32. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 237; table adapted
33. Russell M. Nelson, General Conference, April 2019.
34. See chart comparing all four of them in “Come Follow Me Commentary,” 1 Corinthians 12:7.
35. Elder D. Todd Christofferson, “Preparing for the Lord’s Return,” General Conference April 2019 and Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Preparation for the Second Coming,” General Conference April 2004.
36. John MacArthur, ed. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: IL: Moody Press, 1985), ch 18, Eph 5:18.
37. The church was organized April 6, 1830. Emma was baptized June 28, 1830. The revelation was dated July 1830 and was given after in Harmon, PA, over 100 miles from the organization in Fayette.
38. Also a shorter version of a Household Conduct is found in Collisions 3:18–4:1; 1 Peter 3.
39. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, translator, Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1964), viii.41, *hypotasset, hupotasso*.
40. Andrew Robert Fausset, ed., *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1961), Ephesians 5:22.
41. Barth, *Ephesians 3–6*, 610.
42. Hugh Nibley, *Old Testament and Related Studies* (Provo, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1986), 93.
43. John W. Welch, *Charting the New Testament*, 15–15. I added the word [with] in place of behind, as both come from the same Greek word. Interestingly, the word *Islam* means, “*submission*.”
44. Russell M. Nelson, “Our Sacred Duty to Honor Women,” General Conference April 1999; D. Todd Christofferson, “Fatherhood,” General Conference April 2016; Elaine S. Dalton, “Love her Mother,” General Conference October 2011; etc.
45. *Mishnah, Kiddushin*, 2.1; “A man may give his daughter in betrothal while she is still in her girlhood either by his own act or by that of his agent.” Also see *Yebamoth*, 13.1, and Campbell, *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, 144. The day after a girl’s twelfth birthday, she was no longer a minor “young girl/*na’rah*,” and the day after she turned twelve-and-a-half she could legally be married, though there are examples of younger marriages.
46. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Ensign*, June 1971.
47. Keith Crim, ed. *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1976), Supplementary volume 830.
48. The Law of Moses stipulated that if a male servant received a wife from his master, he could not take his wife or children with him when released: “If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master have given him a wife, and she have borne him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master’s, and he shall go out by himself” (Exodus 21:3–4). This is where the situation became tenuous. Many

men chose to remain in the employ of someone else rather than leave their family. So The Law added, “And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him forever” (Exodus 21:5–6). The pierced ear was often filled with a hoop, so that servant for life was known by a hoop in his ear

49. Bromiley, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4.545. Campbell, *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, 135. Some sources record a release at age thirty, others thirty-five or forty. The process releasing a slave was known as manumission “Pertinent inscriptions indicate, however, that large numbers, approaching 50 percent, were set free prior to their thirtieth year.”
50. Graham Sumner, *Roman Military Dress* (Gloucestershire, England: History Press, 2009), 71–73, 175–177.
51. In the early 16th century Christian, Anne Askew wrote a beautiful poem filled with symbols from the armor of God as she, faced her martyrdom. The opening of the poem reads: “Like as the armed knight/Appointed to the field,/With this world will I fight/And Faith shall be my shield./Faith is that weapon strong/Which will not fail at need./My foes, therefore, among/Therewith will I proceed.”
52. Barth, *Ephesians 4–6*, 775.
53. *Ibid.* 775.
54. *Ibid.*, 777.
55. Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 68. “The reference to chains is important as it speaks to the nature of Paul’s confinement. A “prisoner” was not necessarily in a prison cell”
56. *Ibid.*



PHILIPPIANS; COLOSSIANS

CHRIST'S DIVINITY AND EXAMPLES OF SACRIFICE

CA. A.D. 62

PHILIPPIANS: GROW IN THE GOSPEL OF LOVE

Philippians Background

About twelve years before he wrote this Epistle, Paul first came to the walled city of Philippi. It had very few Jews. Many of the 10,000 inhabitants were Roman citizens, and was known as “Little Rome.”¹ Paul was preaching in Troas during his second mission when he had a vision of someone calling him from Macedonia (northern Greece). He and his companions, Silas and Timothy, sailed to the northeastern quadrant of Macedonia, just twelve miles from the Aegean Sea, and began preaching in Philippi, which sits at the foot of Mt. Pegasus.

Philippi was named after Alexander the Great's father, Philip II of Macedon (382–336 BC). It was a fertile plain where gold mines were discovered.² By the time Paul visited it, a major east and west highway that connected the Roman Empire (*Via Egnatia*) had been established next to it. Philippi was the “chief city” in northeastern Greece (16:12).

In Philippi, Paul converted and stayed with Lydia “the seller of purple;” he also cast out the evil spirits from a woman who was used by the soothsayers to get gain. The soothsayers then charged Paul and Silas with rabble-rousing, which led to their beating and imprisonment. The Lord miraculously released them, they converted the jailer and received an apology from the magistrates before leaving the city (Acts 16:14–30). Over the next decade, the young church grew in quality and quantity so that Paul refers to them as his “joy and crown” (Philippians 4:1), they have “bishops and deacons” (Philippians 1:1), and they sent Paul a gift while in prison.

Purpose

Philippians is one of Paul's four “Prison Epistles” that seem to come from the same time period and share many themes and names.³ Paul wrote to thank the Philippians for their thoughtfulness in sending Epaphroditus as a companion and co-worker for Paul in prison, and to let them know what had happened. Unfortunately, Epaphroditus became sick, but was well enough to make the return trip to Philippi (Philippians 4:18; 2:25–26). This letter also gives insight into Paul's autobiography and spiritual life. This is one of the six Pauline letters that set the sure standard as Pauline.⁴

Themes

1. Message of Love and Encouragement
2. Jesus is the Messiah/Christ
3. Obedience to Christ's Teachings
4. Salvation Requires Sacrifice

Outline

- 1:1–9 Greetings and Prayers of Thanks
- 1:3–11 Pray for More Love, Knowledge & Judgment
- 1:12–26 Paul's Imprisonment Advances the Gospel
- 1:27–30 Exhortation to Stand Worthy through Suffering
- 2:1–11 Unite with Christ's Nature by Selfless Service
- 2:12–18 Christian Obligations: Work & Shine as a Light
- 2:19–30 Coming of Timothy and Epaphroditus
- 3:1–11 Blessings and Sacrifices Come with Discipleship
- 3:12–21 Pressing Toward The Heavenly Goal

4:1–9 Last Advice: Appeal to Rejoice in the Lord

4:10–20 Thanks for the Philippians Gifts

4:21–23 Salutations and Final Wishes

PHILIPPIANS 1

Greeting and Prayers of Thanks

Philippians 1:1–2

Philippians 1:1–2 “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints . . . at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons. Grace *be* unto you, and peace” Paul opens with the standard introduction. His mention of the plural “bishops and deacons,” is evidence that the church has growth since his first conversions a dozen years earlier. The word, “deacon/*diakonos*” was used for both males and females who helped as “a waiter, servant; then anyone who performs any service, an administrator.”⁵ Here it refers to Christians called to serve with a bishop in different of ways (also used with the female, Phoebe in Romans 16:1, and married men in 1 Timothy 3:8, 12).

Prayer for Growth of Love, Knowledge and Judgment

Philippians 1:3–11

Philippians 1:4–6 “In every prayer for all of you, I always pray with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now . . .” (BSB) Paul feels a great bond of friendship with the Philippian saints and has confidence that they will endure faithfully. His opening and the entire letter are optimistic and full of love. Regardless of his imprisonment, Paul finds things to be joyful about.

Philippians 1:7 “in my chains . . .” This reference to “bonds/*halusis*/chains” (KJV, NIV) helps us to date this letter to an imprisonment—either during Paul’s first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28) or in Ephesus.⁶ As mentioned in Ephesians 6:19–20, house prisoners were not chained to a wall, but their right hand was chained to a guard’s left hand. (This way the guard could be free to use his dominate hand, most likely.)

“and confirmation of the gospel, you are all partners in grace with me” (BSB) The last phrase is also translated, “partakers of my grace” (KJV). Both of those seem to say that Paul had the power to give grace. But grace is the Lord’s to give, so I prefer the NIV, “share in God’s grace with me.”

Philippians 1:8 “For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus” God is “*my record*” is also translated, “my witness”(RSV) or “God can testify” (NIV), or “God knows” (NEB). The KJV uses the word, “*bowels*,” for what we would call, “affection” (NIV, RSV, NAS).

Philippians 1:9–10 “I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment” Paul expresses his greatest desire for them, and the thesis for this letter: to grow in the gospel in love, knowledge and judgment (or “discernment,” BLB, or “insight,” BSB). His instruction will focus on how to do this. He hopes they can discern between good, better, and best, to “be pure and blameless for the day of Christ” or when we all will stand for before Christ at the judgement day (1:10, NIV).

Paul’s Imprisonment Advances the Gospel

Philippians 1:12–26

Philippians 1:12 “I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel” (NIV) Paul addresses his audience as “brothers and sisters” as a title or name for members of the church, who were identified as sibling in the family of Christ. It is significant that Christian women were included in not only the worship services but in the communication with leaders. This was a radical departure from Paul’s Judaic pharisaic upbringing. In the KJV, “*fallen out*” is also translated, “served, been a help, or turned out.”

Paul is happy to observe that his imprisonment has actually brought growth to the church. When Joseph Smith was also imprisoned in Liberty Jail, the Lord taught him that all experiences—challenging and otherwise—“shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D&C 122:7). When we can internalize this, we can appreciate trials from an eternal perspective. Paul’s cheery attitude came in part because of the extra kindness that the Philippians had shown him (Philippians 1:4–6).

Philippians 1:13 “As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ” (BSB) “*Palace*” was translated from the Latin word, “*Praetorium*” (NHEB), In historical writings, the common meaning of praetorian during inscriptions of Paul’s century was for the “imperial guard” stationed in Rome (ESV), while the imperial guard was stationed only at Rome to guard the emperor. The praetorium may have referred to the military barracks, but probably the imperial guard in Caesarea or Ephesus.⁷ It sounds as though when Paul preached the gospel to his visitors, the Roman guards heard it, and spread the good news through Caesar’s staff (Philippians 4:22). As the Book of Mormon teaches, out of our small efforts, the Lord can create great things (Alma 37:6–7). These little miracles demonstrate God’s hand in our lives.

Philippians 1:14 “because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear” (NIV) Roman officials tolerated and recognized ten “imported” or foreign religions. They promised these members legal rights to practice without persecution. Judaism was one of them. Initially, Christianity received the same protection by piggy-backing on Jewish political protection. But, when Christians were separated by their choice or the local Jews’ choice, they no longer had legal status. This may be why the saints were reticent to testify. Paul’s example of missionary work, even while

in prison, motivated the other local saints to share Jesus' Good News more boldly. Paul became the yeast that motivated the whole branch of Christians.

Philippians 1:15–18 “It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill . . . whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached” (NIV) Unfortunately, some of their missionary motivation was only to compete with Paul, but others did so with honest hearts. Either way, the message was spread. The Book of Mormon also teaches that everyone can distinguish truth from pretense; all have the power to judge good and evil (Moroni 7:16, 18; D&C 84:45).

Philippians 1:19–20 “Through your prayers and God’s provision of the Spirit . . . I eagerly expect and hope that . . . Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death” (NIV) The KJV reads “Christ shall be *magnified* in my body” and the RSV, “will be *honored*.” Paul’s trial had yet to happen. Whether he would be acquitted or not does not seem to matter to him. He is just looking forward to the opportunity to testify again of Jesus as the Savior of the world. He is eager to honor the Messiah-Christ in his testimony during his trial.

Philippians 1:21–23 “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” Either way Paul looks at his future, it is good news. He has the attitude, “come what may and love it.”⁸ If he lives, he is Jesus’ servant, and if he dies, he will gain Eternal Life through Christ. Could he also be saying to God, “God’s will be done?” (The JST changes the verse order of 21 and 22.)

Philippians 1:24–26 “it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body . . . so that through my coming to you again, your exultation in Christ Jesus will resound on account of me” (BSB) Paul is old and tired so on one hand, he longs to leave his second estate and be united with Jesus in the heavens, but on the other hand, he is more useful to the saints if he continues to serve here on earth. Even though no verdict had been made, he felt he would be acquitted in order to continue serving the new Christians. He also mentions his hope to visit the Philippian saints, although we have no scriptural record that he returned there.

Exhortation to Stand Worthy through Suffering

Philippians 1:27–30

Philippians 1:27 “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel” (NIV) The KJV “conversation” in Greek is literally, “conduct” and means everything in one’s life, not just what one says.

Philippians 1:28 “in nothing terrified by your adversaries who reject the gospel, which bringeth on them destruction; but you who receive the gospel, salvation” (JST) Perfect faith casteth out fear. The KJV, “*perdition*,” is changed by most translations, such as the ISV, which reads: “they will be destroyed”

Philippians 1:29–30 “it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him” (BSB) Ambassadors of Christ often suffer for Him. Part of accepting our roles as Christ’s servants is to accept persecution and to plan on suffering for God’s sake. Bruce R. McConkie taught that the saints who “suffer persecution for righteousness’ sake, stand in the place and stead of Christ and are receiving what the ungodly would heap upon the Son of God were He personally present.”

PHILIPPIANS 2

Unit with Christ’s Nature by Selfless Service

Philippians 2:1–11

Philippians 2:1–2 “if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ . . . then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind” (NIV) With extraordinary pleading, Paul tells the saints the most important thing for them at this point is to strive for unity in love through the Holy Spirit. He asks them questions fully assuming that their answer is a resounding, “YES!” The KJV “bowels of mercy” is more often translated “affection and compassion” (Philippians 2:1).

Philippians 2:3–4 “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves . . . look out . . . the interests of others” (NASB) In this letter of joy and thanks, these few verses are Paul’s only counsel for improvement. For a people already living most of the commandments, he encourages them to not act for “vainglory” (KJV) or “empty pride” (BSB), but to sincerely turn their hearts away from any self-centered behaviors and to value each other more highly than themselves. Selfless service begins with our thoughts. Saints should esteem each person as a child of God with enormous potential. Then, our thoughts need to be consistent with our actions and carry out selfless acts of service for others.

Philippians 2:5 “Our Lord’s example is set forth as the pattern of that unselfish disregard of one’s own things, and devotion to the things of others” (NIV) Jesus left us a perfect example of putting other people’s needs before His own. He went to the extent of even disregarding His want of food and acknowledging that He would follow His Father’s plan on His Father’s timetable (Matthew 4:1–11). Paul repeats Jesus’ message.

“being in the form of God . . . and took upon him the form of a servant” In the next six verses, Paul lays out in a poetic or hymnal fashion, Jesus’ divine and human nature, or the doctrine of humility. The poem is filled with beautiful testimonies of Jesus as the Creator and Savior of the World—hence it is called in biblical vernacular, “high Christology,” and “the Christological Hymn.” It includes some of the most memorable lines penned by Paul.⁹

Different doctrinal interpretations of this verse have stimulated quite diverse translations.¹⁰ For example, those reflecting Trinitarian belief read: “. . . did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (RSV), and a less divine Jesus, “did not cling to his equality with God” (JB). Without modern scripture, these ideas are interpreted very differently by other Christians. Without the whole picture, some of the pieces are hard to fit in.

Through the restoration of Christ’s gospel, we learn that Jesus was a God before He came to earth (3 Nephi 9:18; 22:1; D&C 19:1; Moses 2:26). We see Paul referring to Jesus’ premortal existence by describing His Divine Nature—which included His intelligence, righteousness, majesty, and experiences.¹¹ He put His glorious nature aside to assume “the form of a servant.” This verse also can relate to Genesis 1:27 where Jehovah/Jesus created Adam “in His image.”

Hymn

*Philippians 2:6–11*¹²

Philippians 2:6 “In God’s own form existed he, and shared with God equality . . .” (ISV) This hymn is one of many witnesses that Christian worship included singing (probably acapella). Worship through music followed Jesus’ practice with His apostles (Matthew 26:30). We assume they had many hymns as we find traces of hymns throughout the New Testament (i.e. John 1:1–5; 11–14; etc.). Early Christian hymns were typically sung by two choirs facing each other—antiphonally.¹³

The hymn plays with opposites: Jesus’ lowliness/abasement (6–8) and exaltation (9–11). The movement of the hymn “exhorts the addressees for their own salvation to follow the exalted Christ, rather than looking out for their own interests and seeking to better themselves.”¹⁴ Christians are called to seek the mind of Christ by becoming humble, obedient, servants to God, and by serving their fellow men.

Philippians 2:7 “[Jesus] emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant” (BSB) This description of Christ as a servant is the most famous passage in Philippians. Jesus gave up His former heavenly status in order to come to

HYMN (PHILIPPIANS 2:6-11)

Jesus, being in the form of God,
Thought it not robbery
To be equal with God:
Laid aside his reputation
And took the form of a slave,
Being born like a man:
Assuming the likeness of mankind,
He humbled himself,
Becoming subject to death,
Even death on the Cross.
Wherefore God exalted him,
And bestowed on him a name
Above every name,
That in the name of Jesus
Every knee would bow
Under heaven, on the earth and under the earth;
And every tongue would confess
That Jesus Christ is Lord

earth with “no reputation” (KJV) or “made himself nothing” (NIV). Jesus’ example was to put aside His glorious nature and all self-centered desires, in order to do work as a slave. His servitude is even more impactful in His culture where the social strata was strictly enforced. Servants and slaves made up half the population of big cities at the time and everyone knew their station. Jesus’ devotion to teachings, healing, ministering, and preaching were all roles for servants and slaves. His prototype of service becomes an archetype for all Christians. Those who humble themselves in selfless service and figuratively empty all sense of pride and egoism, are following the example of our God, the greatest servant of all.

Philippians 2:8 “Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” Once Jesus became human, or a “being as all men are” (JB), He did not forget His Father’s will. Even as a man, He was obedient in all things even through crucifixion. His passion is described by Isaiah as a suffering servant (Isaiah 49:1–6; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12).

Philippians 2:9–11 “God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name above all names” (BSB) Paul describes two separate Divine Beings with distinct roles. When he addresses Jesus’ “name,” he does not mean just the pronunciation of the word “Joshua/Jesus” (Hebrew and Greek), but he refers to the authority and power that His name carries. “Every knee should bow” means not only that everyone will show reverence, but that everything in heaven and earth will worship the Great Creator. This great promise will be fulfilled when every voice will confess that Jesus is the Christ or Promised Messiah, the Anointed One.

Philippians 2:11 “Every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” Again Paul’s words can be interpreted as referring to two separate Godly beings. He also teaches that by confessing Jesus as our Lord, we also glorify God the Father. Gratefully, we have the perspective of Moses 1:39: “This is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and Eternal life of man.” Everything fits into place with this view.

Obligations as Christians: Work for Salvation, Shine as a Light

Philippians 2:12–18

Philippians 2:12–13 “my beloved . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” Paul praises the Philippian saints and calls them his “dear friends” (NIV). Judging from the canonized Epistles, they are his most valiant branch. Even in that state, he still points out how they can improve. They know that Christ brings salvation, but he reminds them that they must gain exaltation just as the Savior did.¹⁵ Christ set the pattern by working out His salvation, which in returned opened the possibility for all individuals to work out their own salvation. This does not negate the truth that we are saved by grace. Immortality is given by complete grace. Eternal Life is too, but humans must become like Christ, and the process requires work and sacrifice. “God . . . works in you to will and to act on behalf of His good purpose” (BSB). This does not mean that God controls the righteous, but rather, He encourages humility and eternal happiness through doing His will.

Philippians 2:14–16 “Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God’ . . . that I did not run or labor in vain” (NIV) I fear our generation has forgotten this commandment to not complain, or else we are just out of the habit of obeying it. It was first given by Moses to the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 32:5.

In the Bible, the phrase “children,” or “sons of God” (KJV), is used in conjunction with becoming or working toward developing a Christlike nature. In Greek philosophy, “children” was interpreted literally, but other Christian faiths interpret “children of God” as those adopted through Christ. By following His example, saints follow Jesus’ call to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount “to shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15).

Philippians 2:17–18 “if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you” (BSB) Paul sees his years of sacrifice and service as an offering on God’s temple altar. Even in times of hunger and need, the Israelites offered their own meat and drink offerings to God out of obedience. The drink was poured onto the altar to be evaporated and burned in in the fire as a selfless gift to God. In spite of all the hardships Paul had endured (including now possibly facing death), he feels it was worthwhile if his converts continue to follow the Lord Jesus.

Coming of Timothy and Epaphroditus

Philippians 2:19–30

Philippians 2:19–20 “I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you” Paul hopes to send Timothy soon, so that Timothy can return to tell Paul how the Philippians are doing. This would give a more accurate and detailed report than another letter. He also hopes to come shortly (Philippians 2:24). He assures them of Timothy’s kind nature, and I assume that Timothy was needed to accompany Epaphroditus as a companion (2:25).

Philippians 2:21–22 “For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (NIV) Paul contrasts Timothy’s sincere care with the normal self-centeredness that plagues nearly every generation of the world. Timothy has been loving; like “a son with the father, he hath served with me” (KJV).

Philippians 2:23–24 “I hope to send him as soon as I see what happens with me” (NIV) This gives us a clue that the letter may have been written near the end of Paul’s two-year Roman imprisonment (Acts 28). He expects to receive his verdict and release soon so that he can visit them.

Four of the five “Prison Epistles,” appear to be written within close proximity (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon). Paul mentions in the letters that he hopes to send his companions to visit the saints in various locations (Philippians 1:7–22; 2:19–30; 4:18; Ephesians 6:19–24; Colossians 4:7–18; Philemon 1:19–22).¹⁶

Philippians 2:25–27 “I thought it necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier” (BSB) These verses hint at Epaphroditus’ mission situation. If we try to piece together the history, it sounds as if the Philippians sent Epaphroditus as a companion to Paul while in prison. However, while there, Epaphroditus became deathly ill and the Philippians heard about it. They were worried, which Epaphroditus heard about, also making him upset. So Paul carefully sends him home in hopes of keeping everyone happy.

Philippians 2:28–29 “. . . when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less anxious. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him” Paul asks his audience to welcome Epaphroditus home with open arms, understanding that this is an honorable release from his mission. By asking them to “hold such in reputation” (KJV), he asks them to honor missionaries who willingly accept their call and try to serve, even if they become ill, like Epaphroditus, and it does not work out as they had hoped in the beginning. Paul rejoices in Epaphroditus’ good heart and willingness to serve.

Philippians 2:30 “he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for your deficit of service to me” (BSB) Throughout the history of the world, there have been many noble saints who have worn out their lives in serving God. Many in this dispensation serve like this too, including the families of our General Authorities—who care more about others in their work to build the kingdom than their own lives. The last phrase means that Epaphroditus served Paul in behalf of the Philippians who were not able to take care of Paul from a distance. The RSV translation reads, “to complete your service to me.”

PHILIPPIANS 3

Blessings and Sacrifices Come with Discipleship

Philippians 3:1–14

Philippians 3:1 “Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord!” Paul is suffering in prison, most of the early saints are struggling with serious difficulties and apostasy (Corinthians, Galatians, etc.), and yet he still finds a way to see the beauty of life through the gift of the Savior. He repeats this again with more fervor in Philippians 4:4. No matter how bad our lives are, we can always rejoice in our Redeemer. The rest of the verse refers to him having to rewrite a message: “It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again.” We do not know if he wrote an earlier letter that got lost, or if the saints needed to work on the same problem, or something else.

Philippians 3:2 “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers” The word “dogs” had a double meaning. In the Law of Moses, they were unclean or unholy (Leviticus 11:27; Matthew 15:26). “Dog” was also used for Greek leaders who were cynical or skeptic. The warning against “dogs” is also used in 2 Peter 2:22, against unworthy or unclean

persons. Paul did not have anything against the animal, canines. Some have suggested that Paul was attacking Judaizers. “Evil workers” indicates those who thought they were righteous but were not. The last word in this verse, “concision” means those people who mutilated the flesh. Strangely, “concision” was used by some Greeks instead of circumcision.

Philippians 3:3–4 “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” Paul also uses a different definition of two words: 1) “circumcision” as one of the covenant—which is extended to Christians who have not been physically circumcised; and 2) “flesh” as the unclean lusts of the world. The Greek, “*sarx*/flesh,” can mean many things: “body, human nature, materiality; or kindred.” But, Paul most of the time uses it to describe “lusts of the flesh” or “the natural man”¹⁷ (i.e. Romans 8:1–13; 1 Corinthians 2:14 Galatians 5:17; etc.) Prior to his conversion, Paul, an Israelite, thought he was saved through living the Law of Moses. But, he now shares that he was not saved because of the outward ordinances, the laws of circumcision, or things done in the “flesh,” but only through his faith in Jesus as his Savior. However, he used to completely trust in the flesh or rules of the Law.

Philippians 3:5–6 “Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal . . . touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” Paul shares an autobiographical section on his strict observance of the law of Moses during his childhood and young adult years. He was named after King Saul, who was also a Benjaminite and became a shining example of orthodox Jewish zealotry. To claim that he was “blameless” in 1st century Judaism was quite a claim. It meant that he lived all 613 written Laws of Moses and the 10,000 Oral Laws. However, living the Mosaic laws was never intended to save one. They were there to prepare one to come unto Christ.

Philippians 3:7–8 “. . . compared to the surpassing excellence of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (BSB) By converting to Christianity, Paul lost everything that he once thought was important. Everything the rising young Pharisee valued was lost when he gained Christ. As a result of his conversion, he probably lost all of his influence, close family, and friends. Even his education had to be realigned. All those years of study and living the law meticulously were “but rubbish/*skubalon*/dung, refuse, dregs.” Either rubbish or dung (KJV) was a polite translation for the refuse that was thrown to the dogs.¹⁸ So, Paul refers to all his Jewish learning to garbage as compared to the “surpassing worth of knowing” (RSV) Christ. Giving up his remarkable past was worth it for an even more remarkable future serving Christ.

Philippians 3:9 “not having mine own righteousness . . . but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” Paul came to realize that salvation did not come through the 10,000 oral laws of the Pharisees, which he had strongly defended, but rather, “through the faith of Christ.” Many Jews

at that time thought that they were saved through their obedience to the Law of Moses. There have been several ideologies—whether religious, health, environmental, or political—that fall into a similar camp. Paul’s warning words are not just for Judaism, but anything that takes one away from Christ.

Philippians 3:10–11 “I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to Him in His death and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection” (BSB) Paul seeks to know Jesus and share in the power of His resurrection and His sufferings; he even feels comfortable with dying, thanks to the glorious truths of the resurrection.

Pressing Toward the Heavenly Goal

Philippians 3:12–21

Philippians 3:12 “I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (NIV) “Press” connotes the image of an olive or wine press that is a crushing, arduous process to achieve a goal/mark. Paul humbly acknowledges that he is not finished or perfect, but is merely pressing forward. It is the direction one heads that is important (The word repent means to return to God). He wants to grasp or “take hold of,” to “apprehend” (KJV) Jesus. Paul recognizes the challenge and difficulties that come with resistance from the world. Theodore Burton observed, “Life is a constant series of challenges and trials. Notwithstanding, we should never fail to strive for that perfection of life which can bring us closer to harmony with God.”¹⁹ The image of holding onto the iron rod from the Lehi’s Tree of Life vision seems applicable (1 Nephi 8:19–24).

Philippians 3:13–14 “Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ” (NIV) As long as Paul is reaching, growing, learning, and straining in the right direction, that is **the goal**. Learning through the journey or process of gaining experience is the goal of life. It is an actively challenging process at which Paul continues to labor. This is a good example of Paul’s theology. He does not promote push-button salvation. He knows it is a long hard struggle that requires his best efforts even at this stage of his life.

Philippians 3:15–16 “Let us therefore, as many as would be perfect, be thus minded . . . [that] which we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule” (KJV, 2000) The word “perfect” is also translated, “mature” (NIV, RSV, ESV, BSB). This gives a different twist to the verse, Paul is not sarcastically denouncing the conceited members who think they are perfect, but I see him asking those who are spiritually mature in the gospel to carry on with full steam ahead. Sounds like: “lengthen your stride.”²⁰

Philippians 3:17–19 “Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters . . . as I have often told you before . . . many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction” (NIV) Paul warns them

to follow a good example, as there were some Christians who not only had left the faith, but were now fighting against Christianity. He denounced those as following the devil and being governed by their selfish appetites.

Philippians 3:20–21 “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there . . . [to] transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (NIV) These verses open by speaking of celestial citizenship—or “homeland” (JB), and “commonwealth” (RSV). However, the KJV does not follow the same Greek meaning of *“politeuma/a form of government”* with its translation, “our conversation.” Paul may be yearning for his heavenly home, or for the Second Coming when many will be resurrected with glorious bodies in a twinkling of an eye” (1 Corinthians 15:52).

Last Advice: Appeal to Rejoice in the Lord

Philippians 4:1–9

Philippians 4:1 “my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!” (NIV) The love between Paul and the Philippian saints is strong. He admired them enough that it appears he had his wife stay there with them. She is included in this “joy and crown” (4:3).

Philippians 4:2 “I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord” (NASB) Paul begins his concluding notes with several person messages to individuals. He must have heard about two sisters in the Philippian branch who had some sort of disagreement, and he asks them to be reconciled and return to focusing on their unified faith in the Lord.

Philippians 4:3 “I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and *with other my fellowlabourers*” For centuries, Bible readers have wondered who Paul meant by his “yokefellow/*suzugos*/those united by the bond of marriage, relationship, office, labor, study, business, or the like, . . . consort, comrade, colleague, partner.”²¹ An early church father recorded that it referred to Paul’s wife.²² I agree, especially as the assignment is with other women, it was probably a very close female, whom the local saints knew as Paul’s “yokefellow.” Other debate covers the gamut from a proper name for Luke; another thought he meant Luke, or even Lydia. Whoever Paul meant, it is significant that he regards the men and women who labored with him as equals.

Paul also refers to Clement, which was a common name at the time. We do not know if this Clement is the third Bishop in Rome who wrote, 1 Clement in AD 95 or 96.²³

“whose names are in the book of life” Paul links his fellow servants with the Book of Life. This is the only time Paul refers to it, but the Book of Revelation includes seven references that attach the righteous to Heavenly Father and His angels.²⁴ It is found only once in the Old Testament, which happens to be in a negative context:

“May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous” (Psalms 69:28). We learn much more about this topic in modern scripture. Alma teaches us that the “names of the righteous shall be written in the book” (Alma 5:58). The Lord revealed several references to the “Lamb’s Book of Life” to the Prophet Joseph Smith (D&C 132:19; 76:68; 128:7; etc.).

Philippians 4:5 “Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (NIV) The different translations of this verse communicate a different message. The KJV “moderation,” is also translated: “gentleness” (BSB), “forbearance” (ASV), or “humility” (ABPE).

Philippians 4:6 “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (NIV) Paul calls on the saints to use prayer and gratitude to overcome undue worry. The KJV used “careful” which missed the meaning of our use of the word “*merimnaó*/ anxious, to care for.” It is most often used to explain, “I am over-anxious; distracted.” It figuratively means, “to go to pieces.” The word was used in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:25, 27, 28, 31, 34), and ten other times in the New Testament. The Lord and Paul called on disciples to not fret, but to treat their distractions and extreme worry with the healing power of supplicating the Lord with thanksgiving to keep perspective on life. Prayer can lead one to stronger faith, trust, and hope.

Philippians 4:7 “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” Peace becomes the guardian for Christians as it “guard[s]” one’s heart and mind (NIV, ASB, BSB, etc.). We find “peace/*eiréné*” ninety-two times in the New Testament, with half of those coming from Paul. This favorite Christian gift, is never used as a political statement, but always as an attribute of God, the glorious Spirit, or as a greeting and farewell in the Lord. In D&C 6:23, we learn more— that peace is a sign and witness of the Holy Spirit. Paul claims this great gift of peace from God even with a death sentence hanging over his head.

Philippians 4:8 “whatsoever things are true . . .” These verses were incorporated into part of Joseph Smith’s thirteenth Article of Faith.

KJV

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things.

NIV

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

13TH ARTICLE OF FAITH

We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things.

If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.

Two words have changed meanings since the seventeenth century translations: 1) Honest in Greek meant, “*seminos*/reverent, venerable, serious, dignified,” and three centuries ago meant: decent, honorable, suitable, and 2) Virtue, which initially in Greek meant “*areté*/goodness, a gracious act, uprightness.” It was for prowess on the battlefield, and skill in living. In the personal sense, and in modern translations, it means “excellence” (RSV, NIV). Semantics aside, there is an important underlying principle here, “It is only when gospel ethics are tied to gospel doctrines that they rest on a sure and enduring foundation, and gain full operation in the lives of the saints.”²⁵

The Prophet Joseph Smith loved the writings of Paul and often recited or referenced them. They appear approximately 140 times in the sermons recorded in Nauvoo.²⁶ Even more telling, these sermons were spontaneous, not written out or researched ahead of time. When he was speaking from his heart and head, phrases from the Pauline Epistles often came to his memory. As a child he his family had read from the Bible every morning and evening in family devotionals. He knew these books well in his youth, and even better after making his own inspired translation of them in his early twenties.

Philippians 4:9 “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you” (NIV) Again Paul asks the saints to follow his example. His verb

choice, “saw in me, these do” (NKJV) gives more evidence that he expects the saints to live the higher laws. Paul is an action man. This comes as a reassurance; when he refers to freedom from the law, he is not talking about a lack of Christian obedience. He has set an example to live a life within God’s guidelines (Galatians 3:13; 4:5; 5:1; etc.).

Thanks for the Philippians Gifts

Philippians 4:10–19

Philippians 4:10 “I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it” (BSB) The Philippians may have given Paul something recently in addition to sending him Epaphroditus as an assistant. It sounds as though he wrote the second sentence to clarify the first (rather than waste the space on the page with very high cost of writing). The context of the rest of the letter does not suggest that Paul meant, “it is about time you helped me out.”

Philippians 4:11–12 “I have learned to be content regardless of my circumstances” (BSB) Paul’s message is even more powerful coming from his current condition in bonds. Wherever or whatever we do we can find joy and contentment. Throughout his life he lived in the contrasts of plenty and poverty. He claims that he has learned to be “abased” and to “abound” (Philippians 4:12, KJV). One of the places he learned this was about a decade earlier when he was beaten and imprisoned in Philippi. The saints knew well how that scenario turned out with the conversion of the jailor and his household.

Philippians 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” God empowered Paul through His Spirit. Paul sounds like Nephi when he said: “I will go and do the things the Lord commands, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them” (1 Nephi 3:7). The key to finding strength to overcome and endure is through the Spirit of God.

Philippians 4:14–17 “you have done well to share in my affliction . . . no church but you partnered with me in the matter of giving and receiving” (BSB) Paul had opened at least a few branches of the church in Macedonia a dozen or so years earlier, yet only generous Philippi sent funds to him (2 Corinthians 11:7–9). Generosity is not a matter of means as much as it a matter of the heart and habit. This may be how I think they shared in Paul’s “affliction,” repeatedly (while he was in Thessalonica, now, and probably at other times). Paul was not as interested in receiving more of their gifts (Philippians 4:18), as much as he was thrilled to see their gratitude as a fruit of righteousness.

Philippians 4:18 “he gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God” (ESV) Paul likens the Philippians’ gifts, including Epaphroditus, to a temple incense or sacrificial offering to the Lord

(Exodus 29:18, 25, etc.). For Paul, it is a beautiful image bridging the old and new laws. The Philippians' sacrifice of a broken heart was a sweet sacrifice in the Lord (D&C 59:8).

Philippians 4:19 “my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” Paul blesses the saints with a promise that the Lord will provide for their needs too. The same promise is given with the law of tithing (Malachi 3:10, “Bring ye all the tithes . . . and prove . . . if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing . . .”)

Philippians 4:20 “To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen” Paul concludes by glorifying God and witnessing of Him in testimony.

Salutations and Final Wishes

Philippians 4:21-23

Philippians 4:21-23 “The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings . . . especially those who belong to Caesar’s household” (NIV) Paul’s final farewell is not just to the responsible leadership or to certain people, but to all of his beloved saints in Philippi. His benediction also includes a salutation from those converts who were part of “Caesar’s household.” The Caesar reigning at the time was Nero. His “household,” included the building, goods, property, or means. As mentioned in the Philippians 1:13, it may refer to the Roman praetorian or “imperial guard” (stationed in possibly Rome, Ephesus or Caesarea), or possibly Caesar’s staff.

COLOSSIANS: EVIDENCES OF JESUS’ DIVINITY

Background of Colossae

Colossae was built in the Lycus River Valley in Asia Minor, 110 miles east of Ephesus in modern day western Turkey. A major east-west trade route connected it with two larger cities: Laodicea, ten miles west (a famous textile center), and Hierapolis, eleven miles north (with famous medicinal hot springs and a temple to Apollo). The Roman philosopher and statesman, Cicero (106–43 BC) estimated that 10,000 Jews lived in these three cities in his day. Colossae lay on a beautiful volcanic mountain range with arid grazing valleys. Even though Colossae was a small town, it was famous for its black sheep that produced black wool for the Laodicean’s cloth-dyeing industries (especially the dark red wool was known as “*colossinum*”). It is the smallest town where we have communication from Paul.

The audience appears to be both Jewish and Gentile converts from Phrygian and Greek lineage. Paul knew at least three of the saints named in the letter: Epaphras, Philemon and Onesimus. All three are mentioned in other letters (Philemon 1:1, 10, 23). Epaphras was staying with Paul in prison (Corinthians 1:7; 4:12–13). But the general letter suggests Paul did not know many of the saints there.

Dating the Letter

The Epistle falls in the latter half of Paul's writing. All three cities experienced a major earthquake in AD 63–64. The third century Christian historian, Eusebius, reported that Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis were destroyed and rebuilt later.

Purpose

Colossians is to arm the early saints with evidences of Jesus' divinity in order to attack falsehoods. Paul and Timothy list several heretical ideas and provide evidence on how to battle them. He intended for it to be circulated to the three neighboring towns (4:15–16). It also was sent to strengthen the branch on the return of Onesimus, and to correct the false doctrines. The Letter focuses on the following:

Themes

Colossians is Paul's most philosophical Epistle. He discusses the creation, cosmology, wisdom, and a new order for social duties. These topics were all debated in the Hellenistic world. The region was filled with students of science and philosophy.

1. Testify of Jesus Christ
2. Warns against falsehoods
3. Christlike Principles

Outline

A proclamation of the Christian Worldview

1:1–2 Opening Greetings

1:3–14 Thanksgiving and Prayer for Redemption

1:15–23 Hymn: Jesus Christ is Creator

1:24–29 Paul's Labor for The Church

2:1–5 Built Up in Christ—Beware of Deceivers

2:6–8 Walk in Christ and Beware of Tradition of Men 2:9–15 We are Made Complete in Christ

2:16–23 Avoid False Worship of Angels' Asceticism

3:1–4 Set Your Affection on Heavenly Things

3:5–17 Develop Christlike Qualities

3:18–4:1 Household Relationships

4:2–6 Concluding Exhortation: Pray, Live Wisely

4:7–18 Final Personal Greeting

COLOSSIANS 1

Opening Greetings

Colossians 1:1–2

Colossians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus *our* brother” (NIV) The letter opens with Paul and Timothy’s greeting—the same co-senders from two other “Prison Epistles,” Philip-pians and Philemon. Writing a letter from two authors was unusual for Greek correspondence.²⁷

Colossians 1:2 “Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God . . .” We find that this standard greeting for both Greek and Hebrew speakers begins thirteen of the fourteen letters attributed to Paul. (The one exception is the Epistle to the Hebrews.)

“To God’s holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ” (NIV) In most English transla-tions, Paul greets his audience as “faithful brethren” (KJV). Yet, the Greek “*adelphoi*,” meant, “a fellow believer, united to another by the bond of affection,” which applies to both genders (also see Corinthians 4:15, NIV). Paul and Timothy write this as a public letter to be read to the whole congregation.

Thanksgiving and Prayer for Redemption and Good Works

Colossians 1:3–14

Colossians 1:3–5 “We give thanks to God . . . for the hope which is laid up for you” Paul and Timothy pray for the saints and are grateful for their faith and love. The Colossian saints have a reputation of great faith and love, which should give them hope for their afterlife.

Colossians 1:6 “All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you” (BSB) The JST clarifies that the gospel truths will be available to all generations: “which is come unto you, as in all generations of the world.” Just as the gentiles can be adopted into the fold, so too will all generations have the opportunity to hear and learn the gospel at some point. This is made possible with missionary work in the spirit world and vicarious work for the dead. A slightly different passage is found in D&C 84:17 where the priesthood will continue in the church for all generations: “Which priesthood continueth in the church of God in all generations, and is without beginning of days or end of years.” Yet, this is puzzling as the scriptures say the priesthood has been take from the church at times; this makes more sense in an eternal perspective (also see D&C 110:12; Exodus 3:15).

Colossians 1:7–8 “**Epaphras our dear fellow servant . . . also declared unto us your love in the Spirit**” Epaphras is introduced as the fellow servant or missionary. It appears that he served with Paul in Ephesus and opened the city of Colossae to the gospel (Colossians 4:12–13). This gives credence to the idea that many outlying areas of Ephesus heard Paul speak during the three-year mission there (“all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord” Acts 19:10). Epaphras’ name is shortened from the common Greek name, Epaphroditus, meaning, “lovely, fascinating, charming.” He was in prison visiting Paul at one point and is mentioned in Philemon 1:23. Epaphras is probably the one who gave Paul a positive report of the Colossian saints (Colossians 1:4–5).

Colossians 1:9 “**We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives**” (NIV) Note the subject of Paul’s prayer for the Colossian saints. He prays for what is most important from an eternal perspective—their spiritual understanding. Saving knowledge comes through the Holy Spirit. Applying the preeminence of what is most important to our prayers rather than just good can open the windows of heaven in a better way.

Colossians 1:10 “**walk worthy of the Lord . . . being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God**” To walk with our Savior, we must “live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way” (NIV). The increase in “knowledge” of the Lord is also prioritized so that the saints’ learning can direct them to salvation and Eternal Life. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, “Others may equal or excel [the saints] in scientific knowledge, in philosophical comprehension, or in any of the things of the world, but only the saints... can understand the atonement, comprehend the doctrines of salvation...and have a sure hope of eternal life.”²⁸ To those “saints” I would add all sincere disciples of Jesus.

Colossians 1:11–12 “[**You**] **being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father . . . to share in the inheritance**” When we have more patience and endurance, do we see God’s hand as blessing us? The sanctification of the Spirit “qualifies” (RSV) disciples for the Father’s inheritance. It requires joint team work between the Savior’s atonement, the Spirit’s cleansing and sanctification, and the disciple’s hard work to make one “fit” (NEB).

Corinthians 1:13–14 “**He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins**” (NIV) The letter beautifully outlines Jesus’ mission to create and redeem. It begins with the Father’s plan to bring exaltation through the sacrifice of His Son, our Redeemer (These verses are similar to Hebrews 1:1–3, 6). These verses are the clearest identification of the Father and Son as separate beings within the Godhead that we have in Paul (reaching back to Colossians 1:8 for a description of the Spirit’s role).

HYMN: Christ the Creator and Redeemer

Colossians 1:15-23

Most biblical scholars suggest this was an established hymn quoted or adapted by Paul.²⁹

Colossians 1:15 “The Son is the image of the invisible God” (NIV) This is also translated, “who cannot be seen” (CEV), and “the image of The Unseen God” (ABPE). This verse speaks of the separate natures and beings of the Godhead. The Son looks like His Father. This refers to Jesus sharing a visible likeness with His unseen Father.

Jesus also referred to this by teaching about Caesar’s image on a coin in Matthew 22:20, and later at His last supper (John 14:9). The first creation story also states: “God created man in his own image” (Genesis 1:27). Paul identifies Jesus’ pre-mortal position as the spiritual firstborn of every human on earth. This idea confuses most biblical scholars who have no understanding of the first estate. John’s Gospel prologue opens with the same theology and truths, but the rest of Christianity (and all other religions) do not understand the truth of our premortal existence. We are so blessed to have the perspective of the Restoration as we study the New Testament.

Colossians 1:16 “. . . visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. All things were created through Him and for Him” (BSB) Jesus created not only the physical world, but unseen elements and other worlds (Moses 1:33). He has also prepared for after earth-life with future “thrones, or dominations.” The last phrase, “for Him” can be interpreted through the perspective that Jesus’ glory is enhanced by having children of God exalted too; “This is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and Eternal Life of man” (Moses 1:39)

HYMN 1 COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

Who is the image of the invisible God

The firstborn of every creature:

For by him were all things created

That are in heaven, and that are in earth

Visible and invisible,

Whether they be thrones, or dominions,

Or principalities or powers

All things were created by him, and for him

And he is before all things.

And by him all things consist.

And he is the head of the body, the church:

Who is the beginning,

The first born from the dead;

That in all things he might have preeminence.

For it pleased the Father that in him

Should all fulness dwell;

And, having made peace through the blood of his cross

By him to reconcile all things unto himself,

Whether they be things in earth

or things in heaven.

Colossians 1:18 “He is the head of . . . the church” God gave Christ authority as the head of His kingdom and church. Peter is not the head, nor Paul, nor Joseph Smith, nor Russel M. Nelson. The Savior is our Head.

“the firstborn from the dead” So far in this letter, Paul has referred to Jesus as the “firstborn” in three different ways: 1) Firstborn as the literal Son of God in mortality (1:3); 2) Firstborn of the Father pre-mortality (1:15); and here as the 3) Firstborn of the dead—or first to be resurrected.

Colossians 1:19 “For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell” Christ carried out the Father’s plan, so the Father gave Jesus of His fullness (Matthew 28:18). However, we learn in the D&C 93, that Jesus did not receive that fullness at first but as He progressed from “grace to grace,” until the Father gave Jesus “of His fulness” (D&C 93:3–5, 12–14, 16–20). The same revelation taught how the fulness is inherited: “if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness . . . he keepeth his commandments. He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things” (D&C 93:20, 27; also see D&C 76:71; 76–77; etc.). This is such an important and sacred doctrine that it is also found in the Book of Mormon. When Jesus visited the Nephites he touched on this important doctrine as well: “Ye shall have fulness of joy; and ye shall sit down in the kingdom of my Father; yea, your joy shall be full, even as the Father hath given me fulness of joy” (3 Nephi 28:10).

Colossians 1:20 “to reconcile all things to Himself, by . . . having made peace through the blood of His cross” Jesus’ atoning sacrifice was the way and means that reconciliation occurred. Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, King Benjamin, Alma, Mormon and many more Book of Mormon prophets each beautifully taught about Jesus’ atonement in far more detail than we find in the Bible.³⁰ The only account of the Savior’s suffering written in first-person is found in D&C 19:16–19. This verse can also include the work of repentance in spirit prison. Jesus reconciles us on earth and in heaven. In the Restoration we are blessed to learn more of the missionary work that goes on in the after-life (D&C 138).

Colossians 1:21 “Once you were alienated from God . . . because of your evil deeds. But now He has reconciled you by Christ” (BSB) We estrange ourselves from God by wickedness. (Paul elaborates on this again in 1:27.) We are not only reconciled or cleansed, but as our Mediator, Christ will also present the saints, clean and holy, to His Father, if they ground their faith in Him.

Corinthians 1:23 “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven” Paul teaches that everyone has already heard the Gospel—note the past tense in this literal translation, “having been proclaimed in all creation under heaven” (BLB). Without an understanding of our premortal state, biblical commentaries interpret Paul’s “hyperbole . . . insist[ing] on the universality of its proclamation.”³¹ Yet, we have a sec-

and witness that is more clearly explained in the Book of Abraham. The phrase, “every creature heard the gospel preaching” may refer to the premortal counsels, or first estate, when all heard God’s plan and chose to follow Jesus through their own agency and mortality (Moses 3:5; 4:2–4; also see Jude 1:6).

Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was . . . And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon (Abraham 3:22; 25–26).

Paul’s Labor for The Church

Colossians 1:24–29

Colossians 1:24–25 “I rejoice in what I am suffering for you . . . I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness” Paul is writing while imprisoned—probably chained to his guard as was the practice. A list of his major physical sufferings over the past two decades was recorded in 2 Corinthians 11:23–26. Paul refers to himself as “*diakonos*/a servant/minister,” which literally means, “to kick up dust,” as one *running an errand*.³² As discussed in the Gospels, Jesus choose to serve and not be served. His example to the apostles was to serve—even as a slave would.

Colossians 1:26 “the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints” There are many mysteries that the early church knew. The apostles knew the Lord’s plan of salvation, the mystery that Jesus is the promised Messiah, and the ordinances of the temple endowment and sealing. Joseph Smith taught that, “Paul . . . knew . . . all the ordinances, and blessings that were in the Church.”³³

Colossians 1:27–29 “He is the one we proclaim . . . To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me” Paul leaves us a valiant example of consecrating his time, talents, money, physical stamina, and energy to building the kingdom. It is those who are “valiant in the testimony of Jesus” who will receive a celestial reward (D&C 76:79, also see 53–60). He “contended,” or “labored and fought” (ABPE), because the powers of the adversary fought against him. He did not just share the good news or his testimony of Jesus, but he also warned his audiences against the powers of Satan.

COLOSSIANS 2

Built up in Christ—Beware of Deceivers

Colossians 2:1–5

Colossians 2:1–3 “I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea . . . That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches . . . of the Father, and of

Christ” Paul assures these neighboring congregations, even those whom he does not know personally, that he worries about them and hopes the best for them. The saints are unified or “knit together” when they value and understand the same things. Jesus’ life and death answers so many Old Testament questions and mysteries. The revelation received as part of the Restoration answers even more Christian mysteries.

Colossians 2:4–5 “I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments” Those who intentionally perverted Christ’s doctrines crept into the church early on. Paul’s letters are filled with examples of deceptive arguments that led the saints astray, even without their notice. His warning to be on guard is needed in our generation where wolves in sheep’s clothing can inundate our minds at the click of our fingertips (Matthew 7:15). The marketing of falsehoods has been refined over the centuries by the adversary. Whenever I dive into an attack on truth, I usually find a shallow observation that is blown out of proportion. We are fortunate to have many resources to analyze our sources.³⁴

Walk in Christ and Beware of the Tradition of Men

Colossians 2:6–8

Colossians 2:6–7 “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith” The best way to avoid falling away is to remain anxiously engaged and build your faith with hearts “overflowing with thankfulness” (NIV). When we are focused on growing our faith and serving others, when questions arise, we can seek answers without us falling into a faith crisis.

Colossians 2:8 “See that there be no one who shall lead you away as a prey through philosophy and vain deceit” (DBT) or **“Do not let your minds be captured”** (NEB) or “take you captives” (NIV) Paul repeatedly warns against false teachings (Galatians 4:17; Philippians 3:2). The source of the information was crucial. He wants the saints to carefully guard their faith and rationally discern when truth or falsehoods are being discussed. No matter how enticing they may appear, Paul’s warns all Christians to beware of philosophy and “tradition of men” who beguile “after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” In the Hellenistic time the term “rudiments” also referred to the cosmic rulers or spirits that dominated the world.³⁵ In this scenario it may refer to devils.

We are Made Complete in Christ

Colossians 2:9–15

Colossians 2:9 “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” We now come to the first specific heresy of the letter: the physical nature of God’s body. This verse needs clarifying, but many commentators avoid the word “bodily.” Richard Anderson observed, “Paul used *somatikos*, formed from *soma*, the Greek word for ‘body,’ which Paul uses equally for man’s earthly body and Christ’s resurrected body. Thus, Paul testifies that Christ possesses godhood physically.”³⁶ This word translated here as “Godhead” is only used once in the New

Testament, and it also means “deity *theotés*.” Paul clarified what he meant by the Godhead earlier in this same letter (Colossians 1:14–15), and again in 3:1. Christ’s body was a revolting concept to the Greeks. His death and resurrection conflicted with their philosophy of what a God should be like.

Colossians 2:10–11 “**In Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority**” (NIV) Paul and Timothy correct the second heresy by explaining that Christ is the head of all “authority/principalities.” Only through unifying our desires with Christ can we find complete fulfillment or perfection, not in laws of men (Colossians 2:14–16).

Colossians 2:11–12 “**The circumcision made without hands . . . Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God**” Paul describes the covenant to follow Christ as a symbolic circumcision—of God’s covenant cut into our hearts. Paul would have known that this was the ideal application of the Law, as it was spelled out over and over in the Old Testament: “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked” (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; 9:25). Paul also taught this earlier in Romans 2:18.³⁷

Christian baptism is to represent the burial of our old self and sins, thus best enacted by immersion. When one comes out of the water one figuratively has a new life in Christ (also see Romans 6:3–6). Early Christians saw baptism as a dramatic reenactment of Christ’s death and resurrection as they walked into the water as a symbolic grave and rose as a symbolically resurrected being following Jesus’ example (Colossians 1:19–23).³⁸ The sinful life is buried and a new life in Christ is born again. The sign of circumcision has been done away with and the ordinance of baptism has become the sign of the covenant.

Colossians 2:13–15 “**When you were dead in your trespasses . . . God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our trespasses . . . He took it away, nailing it to the cross!**” (BSB) When Jesus suffered for humanity’s sins, He redeemed us from the fall (Galatians 3:13). Paul refers to Jesus’ crucifixion, or being nailed to the cross, as if our sins were also being nailed, as Jesus carried them. Interestingly, “one ancient mode of cancelling bonds was by striking a nail through the writing: this seems at that time to have existed in Asia.”³⁹

Colossians 2:16–17 “**Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath. Which are a shadow of things to come**” The next heresy Paul denounces deals with the Judaizer trying to enforce Jewish worship as part of Christianity. He explains that they were only to foreshadow their promised Messiah. As he described earlier, the Law of Moses was given as a “schoolmaster” to lead the Israelites to God (Galatians 3:24). “Meat” means food in this context. For over a decade, Christians no longer were required to follow the Mosaic dietary laws of clean and unclean animals. After Paul’s first mission to the Gentiles, a Jerusalem Council was held where Peter and the other leaders decided that the only food

restrictions placed on Christians would be to “abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled” (Acts 15:29).

The reference “new moon” and “holydays” could refer to Jewish celebrations that Christians should not follow (Isaiah 1:13–14; Ezekiel 45:17; Hosea 2:13, etc.). The day that a new moon rose, the priests added an additional animal sacrifice: two bullocks, a ram, and seven sheep (Numbers 10:10; 28:11–14). When a new moon fell on their fall month of Tisri, they celebrated the beginning of their new year (Leviticus 23:24–25).

A sabbath was still honored by Christians, but they moved it from Saturday to Sunday—in honor the Lord’s resurrection. But Christians no longer needed to keep the hundreds of Jewish sabbath restrictions as part of their rest and worship.

Colossians 2:18 “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels” (NASB) Paul warns the saints that some will defraud or “beguile you of your reward” (KJV), or “disqualify you” (RSV). There were some who worshiped angels in conjunction with fasting, which may be what is meant by the “ascetic practices” (CSB).⁴⁰ Humility is a wonderful attribute, but “false humility” (NIV) in order to entrap the disciples is what Paul complains about. These practices of asceticism and angel worship were also seen in some pagan practices that Paul and Timothy attack next.

The false teachers had beguiled Christians by combining Jewish and pagan ideas into a hierarchical system of heavenly beings. Even Christ was supposedly subordinate to these angelic powers. Some of the problems sound similar to the Gnostic practices of inflated mind, visions, and angles. It wasn’t until the medieval age that Christianity added the theory that angels needed to intercede for mortals to get to heaven.⁴¹

Colossians 2:21–22 “Which are after the doctrines and commandments of men, who teach you to touch not . . . all those things which are to parish with the using. Which things have indeed a show of wisdom . . . neglecting the body as to the satisfying the flesh not in any honor to God” (JST) These verses are a helpful addition that explain what the opponents were falsely teaching.

Colossians 2:23 “Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence” (NIV) Paul denounces those who act out of pretense, and those who come up with their own “man-made worship”. The last phrase is also translated, “no use at all in combating sensuality” (NEB), and “no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh” (RSV). Neglecting the body was a tendency of the Gnostics, who believed the physical body was evil. This led to two extreme behaviors: complete denial of marriage and sexual relations or complete indulgence of physical urges. Both negated the purpose and value of the human body.

COLOSSIANS 3

Set your Affections on Heavenly Things

Colossians 3:1-4

Colossians 3:1-2 “Since you have been raised with Christ, strive for the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (BSB) Once Christians repent of their past sins, thanks to Jesus’ Redemption, they can receive the cleansing of baptism by water and spirit. They can enjoy a new life as they are born again and focus on building the Lord’s kingdom. Disciples who have been raised to holier things focus their heart and mind on seeking and serving Christ. Christians align their desires or “affections” (KJV) with “things above,” not materialism, where “moth and rust” corrupts (Matthew 6:19). This is another verse that distinguishes God the Father from His Son as separate beings (also see Colossians 1:14-15; Hebrews 1:3; Romans 8:34).

Colossians 3:3 “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” The overall meaning of the verse is quite simple: through the sanctification of conversion, disciples selfish appetite driven behaviors, defined as the “the natural man,” dies. While the real person, who is raised in Christ, grows more Christlike.

But how is our life ‘hid with Christ’? The Greek word, “*kruptó*/to hide, conceal, lay up,” is used 18 times in the New Testament. The verb is used in the parable of the talents when the man hides his talent (Matthew 25:25). It is used when the wicked ask to be covered or rescued from the sight of God (Revelations 6:16). Metaphorically, it was used to conceal the unknown, and for God’s saving counsels (Matthew 11:25; 13:35). However, this three-word-phrase, “hidden with Christ” (NAS), is unique to this verse. Similar words are also found in D&C 86:9, “For ye are lawful heirs, according to the flesh, and have been hid from the world with Christ in God.” Joseph also included the biblical phrase and interpretation in a journal entry now printed in the History of the Church. I have compared Joseph’s interpretation with the standard Christian perspective below.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARIES

“As we are hidden with Christ in God in heaven with Christ according to the letter to the Colossians, we will appear in glory together with **Christ**.”⁴²

“The spiritual life in man is a ‘hidden life,’ having its source in God; the full conviction of it, as distinct from the mere instinctive consciousness of it in the mind itself.”⁴³

JOSEPH SMITH USAGE

On May 16, 1843, Joseph wrote:

“ . . . putting my hand on the knee of William Clayton, I said, ‘**your life is hid with Christ in God**’ and so are many others. Nothing but the unpardonable sin can prevent you from inheriting eternal life for you are sealed up by the power of the Priesthood unto having taken the steps necessary for that purpose.”⁴⁴

We can find in scripture and from the Prophet Joseph Smith's writings and sermons, at least four other phrases used to describe some aspects of this same sealing:

1. "Calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10; D&C 53:1),
2. "Holy Spirit of Promise" (Ephesians 1:13; D&C 76:53; 88:3; 124:24; 132:7, 18–19, 26),
3. "More sure word of prophecy" (2 Peter 1:19; D&C 131:5)
4. "Rest of the Lord" (Moroni 7:3; D&C 101:31–32)

The sacred doctrine will be discussed in more detail in 2 Peter 1:10.

Colossians 3:4 "When Christ *who is our life* appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (NKJV)

Paul continues to encourage his readers to focus on living with Christ—either in the afterlife, or, as the early Christians thought, at His imminent return. John touched on this same principle, "when he shall appear, we will be like him" (1 John 3:2). Paul suggests the transformative power of Christ: it is in fact what he wants Christians to focus on. When we are consumed by Him, He changes us—both in mortality and beyond. And thus we can appear with him "in glory."

Develop Christlike Qualities

Colossians 3:5–17

Colossians 3:5–7 "Put to death, therefore, the components of your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry" (BSB) Paul's list of vices is described differently in each translation. In the KJV, "fornication/*porneia*," encompasses all sexual sins. All five vices listed in this verse destroy our relationships with each other and with God. Paul asks the saints to "deaden" their carnal desires through a change of heart and repentance. It is easy to pass over the lists of vices. However, a close analysis of idolatry includes several insightful points that can apply to our Christian devotion as we "mortify" (KJV for the BSB's "put to death") carnal desires. The scripture reminds the readers that when we "walked some time" in our own evil desires or "will," we superseded God's will (Colossians 3:7). That is how it becomes idolatry. This may extend to when we pray or act "in vain." In doing so, we may also be taking the Lord's name in vain (Exodus 20:7). When we idolize something ungodly, we dabble with idolatry. Many sins are a form of idolatry.

Colossians 3:8–9 "put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another" Certain archaic words are also translated: "rage . . . slander, and filthy language from your lips" (NIV), or "hateful, and evil. . . insulting or cruel things about other" (CEV). These translations make it more applicable to the modern reader.

The KJV, "*put off*," is actually, "*stripping off*" the old sinful ways and implies baptismal language too.

Colossians 3:10 “put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (NIV) By putting on a “new self,” Christians are not only born again, but they are clothed in Christ’s atonement. The Hebrew word for “atone/*kaphar*” implies “covering.”⁴⁵ For more, see Hugh Nibley’s explanation of the etymology of the word.⁴⁶ Becoming a “new man” connotes dressing in the image of the Lord by “covering” ourselves in His atonement. It is through the cleansing power of the at-one-ment that we are thus clothed and covered.

Colossians 3:11 “Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond *nor* free: but Christ *is* all, and in all” (NIV) The Judeo-Greco-Roman society was laced with distinct social classes. Paul emphasizes this in particular by mentioning the “Scythian tribe.” They lived around the Black Sea and were at the time deemed the lowest of barbarians. Josephus refers to the Scythians as “little more than wild beasts.”⁴⁷ Paul chose them to make the contrast more extreme. God is absolutely no respecter of persons by race, gender, education, handicaps, wealth, beauty, or profession. In Christ, all are the same.

Colossians 3:12–13 “As God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another . . . as the Lord forgave you” (NIV) Paul asks us clothe ourselves in seven virtues (the symbolism of his numerology is probably intentional). Roman dress codes communicated one’s station, privilege, or lack thereof. Paul asks Christians to adorn their internal thoughts with Christ’s covering of the at-one-ment. He admonishes his readers to “put on” or internalize the teachings of Jesus—to develop an attitude of meekness, kindness, humility, forgiveness, etc. “*Bowels of mercy*” means “compassion” (RSV, NIV, JB).⁴⁸ These verses sound a lot like the verses Joseph Smith received when he was incarcerated, “. . . no influence can or ought to be maintained by persuasion, by long suffering, by gentleness, and meekness, and by love unfeigned” (D&C 121:41–45).

Colossians 3:14 “Above all, put on love—the perfect bond of unity” (HCSB) The Greek, “*agape/love/charity*” is chosen by the New Testament to describe Christlike love. Disciples strive to have a loving attitude as the underlying motivation of all actions. The KJV connects a powerful idea: love is the bond of “*perfection/teleiotes*,” which can also mean “*completion/maturity/combination* of truths or stages of spiritual growth.” Many things can bring us together, but nothing can truly bind us in unity the way love can.

Colossians 3:15 “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts. . . and be ye thankful” (NIV) Peace is a witness of the Spirit (D&C 6:23). When disciples internalize Christ’s teachings they may also be blessed with His peace. Paul reminds the saints to be thankful. Gratitude is a key to meekness and humility. He then goes on to describe how we can express our gratitude to God.

Colossians 3:16 “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your

hearts” (NIV) When we ponder the words of Christ, they will bless us richly with wisdom. Good music can edify and uplift us. Throughout the letter, Paul and Timothy repeated different approaches to encourage us to sing uplifting music. In this case, Paul uses music as part of his three-fold means of giving thanks: hymns, psalms and songs.

Colossians 3:17 “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (NIV) Baptized disciples who have taken on the name of the Lord, and especially those called to serve him as missionaries and special witnesses who represent the Lord in a more literal way, need to do everything in the name of the Lord. This includes sanctifying our daily actions in the name of the Lord. As Nephi taught: “Ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul” (2 Nephi 32:9). If we disciples hold God at the center of our lives, then everything we do and say is in the name of the Lord: we will be fulfilling our covenant to “always remember Him” (Moroni 4:3). This will lead us to be filled with gratitude and give thanks to God the Father through Jesus.

Household Relationships

Colossians 3:18–4:1

Colossians 3:18–19 Wives, submit yourselves to the husbands, as is fitting in *the* Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them” Paul gives a much shorter list of domestic instructions to the Colossians than he did to the Ephesians. Again, the women/wives only submit to their husbands if it is congruent with the Lord, or “fit in the Lord.” Submission indicates a willingness to give oneself over to the guidance of another. This should not interfere with the principal of agency, or the ability to act and not “be acted upon” (2 Nephi 2:13). It is best if our submission to God and each other is voluntary, filled with love, and following Christ’s example (1 Peter 3:5–6; John 13:6–9).

Husbands should “love/*agapao*/charity” in a social or moral sense, the highest form of love. This is completely unlike the Judeo-Greco-Roman discussions of a husbands’ household duties. Love was not conventional counsel then. If Christian husbands loved their wives and were not harsh or “bitter” (KJV) it would be easier for their wives to unite in their counsel. This is added right after Paul described love as the culmination of the virtues (3:12–13). One commentary described:

The exhortation to sacrifice one’s own interests for the welfare of others, which was so necessary for the harmony of the community, now finds a more specific application in the husband’s role in contribution to marital harmony. Husbands are asked to exercise the self-giving love that has as its goal only their wives’ good and that they will care for their wives without expectation of reward.⁴⁹

Colossians 3:20–21 “Children, obey *your* parents . . . Fathers, provoke not your children *to anger*, lest they be discouraged” The cultural place of children was often equated to a slave or servant. They often shared the same responsibilities. The father or guardian had complete control over the child—the right to sell them into slavery, and legal or not, there is pervasive evidence of infanticide.⁵⁰ In the Jewish tradition, “if you honor your parents you will be pleasing before God.”

However, in Christianity, the cultural norm was dramatically changed. Fathers are to control their tempers, not “exasperate,” or “embitter” their children (NASB, NIV). The writer exhorts children to obey their parents in everything (although Ephesians 6:1 added, “in the Lord”). And, there is no distinction for the age of a child—no matter how old we are, we must honor and obey our parents—when they are in line with the Lord’s teachings. Paul sets bounds for this authoritative use though and directs the fathers to not aggravate their precious children.

Colossians 3:22 “Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only to please them while they are watching, but with sincerity of heart and fear of the Lord” (BSB) Paul’s next household relationship mentioned is between servants or slaves and their masters. Average “middle class citizens often owned eight slaves.”⁵¹ As mentioned earlier, a servant/slave/master relationship was often like an indentured servant, often for only a few years before they received their freedom. Paul’s statement is almost verbatim to his admonition in Ephesians 6:5–6, so I will not repeat the commentary.

Colossians 3:23–24 “Whatever you do, work at it with your whole being, for the Lord and not for men, because you know that you will receive an inheritance . . . It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (BSB) Whatever circumstance we find ourselves in, whatever we are doing, do it “*heartily*” with “in singleness of heart” unto God (KJV). Similar council was given at least twice before. By Jesus: “if ye do it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” (Matthew 25:40); and King Benjamin, “when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17).

Colossians 3:25 “Whoever does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism” (BSB) There will be an unbiased judgment day. We must be accountable for our thoughts and actions. This is a regularly repeated topic by Paul and most prophets, with hundreds of references across scripture.

COLOSSIANS 4

Colossians 4:1 “Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven” Christianity encouraged masters to be “right and fair” (NIV) or literally, “righteous” (BLB), in their care of servants or slaves. In Christianity called for love and cooperation in relationships—especially in

families. We see the same thing in our modern dispensation.⁵² One of the masters in Paul's immediate audience probably was Philemon. This counsel may have been directed towards him as Paul sent his runaway slave, Onesimus back to Philemon (4:9).

Concluding Exhortation: Pray, Live Wisely and Speak Graciously

Colossians 4:2-6

Colossians 4:2-4 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message . . . for which I am in chains" (NIV) Prayers can help disciples "to watch," meaning both to be alert to the Spirit's promptings, and aware of the deceptions of the devil. Prayers are sometimes most worshipful when they are filled with expressions of our gratitude toward God.

Paul also asks the saints to pray for him that somehow, he might be allowed to share the gospel while in prison. Significantly, Paul does not ask them to pray that he can be released, but rather that he can be about the Father's business while imprisoned. It can be interpreted that a date has been set for his trial and he solicits their prayers in order to testify as God would have him. For more on Paul in chains see commentary on Ephesians 6:19-20.

Colossians 4:5 "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity" (NASB) The KJV is hard to understand, but Paul's message is still focused on the saints' responsibility as member-missionaries to share Christ's message of redemption. His sensitivity to "walk with wisdom" as we take every opportunity to share the "Good News" with those not of our faith.

Colossians 4:6 "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (BSB) Paul's reference to salt, may have meant more than adding flavor. Jesus admonished to be "the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13). In addition to salt acting as a preservative and enhance flavor, it was also a symbol of the covenant in ancient temple rituals. If we remember our covenants, then we will know what and when to say something because we will be blessed with the direction of the Holy Ghost in our lives.

Final Personal Greetings

Colossians 4:7-18

Colossians 4:7-8 "Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant" (NIV) Tychicus and Onesimus (v. 9) are the men who carry Paul's letter to Colossae. Tychicus is also mentioned in Acts 20:4 as one of the nine men who traveled with Paul to carry the offerings from Ephesians to Jerusalem (about six years earlier). His name is found again in 2 Timothy 4:12 and Ephesians 6:21-22. The word "servant" here is the same word as "slave" (NET) or "bond-servant" (NASB). If we can peel away the cultural evils of slavery, I think this image can add a powerful dimension to our discipleship as we think about God as our master and we as bondservants.

“I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances” (NIV) The KJV reverses the meaning of the last phrase. Rather than, “he might know your estate,” all of the other English Bibles end this verse with the direction that the audience will learn about Paul (i.e. “news about us” (NEB), or “know the things concerning us” (BLB).

Colossians 4:9 “With him I am sending Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you” (BSB) Onesimus was a runaway slave who joined the church and helped Paul. But it sounds as if his master was in the church of Colossae. Paul carefully points out that he is “*a faithful and beloved brother.*” See the letter to Philemon for more.

Colossians 4:10 “My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas” (NIV) Aristarchus is Paul’s fellow prisoner who was one of those who were dragged into the theater in Ephesus when the great outrage blew up about the silver smiths (Remember, “Great is the goddess Diana!” Acts 19: 29). He also journeyed with Paul to Jerusalem with the offerings (Acts 20:4), and then after Paul appealed to Caesar, he sailed with Paul to Rome.

“Marcus” (KJV) or Mark the scribe of the Gospel is traditionally thought to be John Mark (Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13;15:37–38; etc.) who joined Paul as a junior companion on his first apostolic mission. Mark’s relationship as a “cousin” or “nephew/*anepsios*” of Barnabas gives additional insight as to why Barnabas tried so hard to have Mark join him on his second mission. It sounds as if Mark were visiting Paul at the time. If that is the case, this speaks to the healing of that relationship. Also, the early Christian Papias, claim that John Mark was Peter’s companion and scribe in prison in Rome.

Mark became Peter’s interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him, but later on, and I said, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded . . .he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in him.⁵³

This may help us with the location and timing of the prison letters.

Colossians 4:11 “Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me” (NIV) The name “Jesus /Joshua” was a common Jewish name because of the great deliverer. Paul listed at least five men, who by the context may all have been Jewish-Christian converts who had ministered to him in prison.

Colossians 4:12–13 “**Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you . . . I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis**” (NIV). Epaphras is also mentioned at the beginning of the letter (Colossians 1:7) as Paul’s information source on the Colossian saints. He was a devoted church worker laboring on their behalf.

Colossians 4:14 “**Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas send you greetings**” (BSB) Luke, the Greek author of the Gospel and Acts, was also Paul’s missionary companion and “physician.” Both men are mentioned in three Epistles in close proximity (Philemon 1:24; 2 Timothy 4:9–11).

Colossians 4:15 “**Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house**” (NIV) Paul sends personal greetings to the Laodicean saints, too. Nympha is a woman’s name, and the Greek reads “her house.” This is one of five women who are mentioned as offering and serving the church by providing a meeting place in their home as a “house church”:

1. Mary, the Mother of John Mark: Acts 12:12.
2. Chloe: 1 Corinthians 1:11
3. Lydia: Acts 16:14, 40
4. Priscilla/Prisca: Acts 18:2–3, 18–19, 26; Romans 16:3–5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19
5. Nympha: Colossians 4:15

Colossians 4:16 “. . . see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the *epistle* from Laodicea” Paul mentions yet another lost letter—giving more evidence that the canon of sacred writings is not complete. The extra letters and several forgeries have created quite a debate among Christian scholars over the centuries.⁵⁴

Colossians 4:17 “**Tell Archippus: “See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord**” (BSB) This is good advice for all. When we have a call to serve in God’s kingdom, “*fulfill it.*”

Colossians 4:18 “**The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen**” Paul’s personal handwritten note at the end of most letters, gives evidence that he used a scribe.

Header Image: Philippi’s forum and basilica B seen from the acropolis. Photo by Marsas via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

1. John Reumann, *The Anchor Bible: Philippians* (New Haven, CT: Yale Press, 2008), 3.
2. Richard N. Holzapfel, Eric D. Huntsman, and Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 2006), 241.
3. The “Prison Epistles” include: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. (Paul was also imprisoned when he wrote 2 Timothy, but that falls in a different category.) For the imprisonment information, see Ephesians background. Visiting these four cities would have been more problematic for Rome than it would have been in Ephesus. Though we have no evidence of an imprisonment in Ephesus.
4. Thirteen letters claim Pauline authorship, but only six are undisputed to be written or dictated by the apostle: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon. The others have slight differences in style, vocabulary, messages, and theology that have made scholars question if the letters were only directed, outlined, or signed by Paul. There are also those who see no Pauline attachment to some letters (i.e. Hebrews) and question if the letter only his name and style to claim apostolic authority.
5. *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* is the source of all my Greek definitions.
6. Reumann, *Philippians*, 171–172. Paul’s imprisonment may have been Rome, Caesarea, or Ephesus. See earlier notes on Ephesians 3:1, and Ephesians “Background.” The details about Paul’s prison described in 2 Timothy much harsher (i.e. cold and alone), so many assume that it was a second Roman imprisonment. However, without the book of Acts collaborating on that theory, we have no clear knowledge of it.
7. Ibid.
8. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “Come What May and Love it,” General Conference October 2008.
9. Other examples of hymns tucked into the New Testament can be found in: 1 Corinthians 13; Ephesians 1:3–14; 5:14; Colossians 1:15–20; 1 Timothy 3:16; 2:11–13; etc.).
10. *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*, Philippians 2:6. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/philippians/2-6.htm>
11. Abraham 3:21–28; Colossians 1:17; John 1:1–13; 5:58; D&C 76: 88:47; Exodus 24:10, 11, etc.
12. Holzapfel, Huntsman, Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the New Testament*, 132.
13. John W. Welch and John F. Hall, *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 13–1. We learn of this in part from a letter dated a110 and 120 AD. Shortly after 98 AD when Trajan became Caesar, the governor, Pliny, wrote him about some judicial proceedings about Christians. In the letter he said that the Christians met early in the morning and “sang hymns to Christ as though he were a God.” Holzapfel, Huntsman, Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the New Testament*, 132.
14. Brown, *Intro to the New Testament*, 493). Scholars debate where the strophes fall, in the poem, but I have chosen the translation in Holzapfel, Huntsman, Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the New Testament*, 132.
15. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 297.
16. The travel to these four locations across modern Turkey and Greece, would have been more problematic from Rome or

Caesarea than Ephesus. This is one of the reasons why Scholars suggest Ephesus as a possibility. However, in the Book of Acts and Paul's Epistles, we have no evidence that he was ever imprisoned in Ephesus.

17. The “natural man” is mentioned once in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 2:14), but many more times in restored scripture (Mosiah 3:19; Alma 26:19–22; 41:11; 42:7–24; D&C 20:20; 29:41; Moses 5:13, 6:49; etc.). It is another example of the Prophet Joseph Smith taking a word or phrase from the Bible, and expounding on it through revelation in beautiful clarity (also see “Holy Spirit of Promise”).
18. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*: “4657 *skýbalon* (from 2965 /*kýōn*, “dog” and 906 /*bállō*, “throw”) – properly, *waste* thrown to dogs, like filthy scraps of garbage (table-scraps, dung, muck, sweepings); (figuratively) *refuse*, what is good-for-nothing except to be discarded (used only in Phil 3:8)” <https://biblehub.com/greek/4657.htm> (accessed 9–24–19)
19. Robert L. Millet, Kent P. Jackson, *Studies in Scripture: Acts to Revelation* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1987), 132.
20. Spencer W. Kimball,
21. The word is only used once in the New Testament, <https://biblehub.com/greek/4805.htm> (accessed 9-24-19)
22. Reumann, *Philippians*, 608–609. The Anchor Bible translates it: “faithful partner” though the early church fathers, Clement and Origin, record that it was his “lawful” wife. We assume as a “pharisee of the pharisees” Paul would have obeyed the law of marriage.
23. The letter from Clement focused on peace and concord among the Saints. He was influenced by popular Greek and Roman philosophies. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/1clement.html> (accessed 9-24-19).
24. Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19.
25. Elder Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, (SLC, Deseret Book, 1985), 700.
26. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 423–424.
27. Marcus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *The Anchor Bible: Colossians* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1994), 117–122. Some biblical scholars doubt complete Pauline authorship. Others find plenty of early authentication by the Church Fathers, and stylistic vocabulary. Joint authorship allows for many ways that Timothy and Paul may have worked out the writing, with Paul adding his personal handwritten greeting at the end (see 4:18.)
28. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary: Volume 3*, (Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 2002), 23.
29. Holzapfel, Huntsman, Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the New Testament*, translation in text is from 132. Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 229 (193–250). The translation of the Hymn below is quoted here is from Barth and Blanke's Anchor Bible, 193.
30. 2 Nephi 2:7, 10; 9:7, 26, 10:25; 11:5–6; Jacob 4:11; 7:12; Mosiah 3:11–15; 4:6–7; Alma 7:11; 13:5, 28; 34:9; 42:15; Moroni 7:41; 8:20; 10:33; etc.
31. Herbert E. Ryle, ed., *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, 58 volumes, 1 Colossians 1:23. John Gills, *Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*, 1 Corinthians 1:23; “This must be understood not of every individual creature, even human and rational, that was then, or had been in, the world; but that it had been, and was preached far and near, in all places all over the world, to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews; who are sometimes styled “every creature.” <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/colossians/1-23.htm> (accessed 9-26-19).
32. Strong's Concordance, #1249 diakonos, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1249.htm> (accessed 9-26-19).

33. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 10; also 9, 42, 110, 210, 327–331.
34. BookofMormonCentral.org; FairMormon.org; JosephSmithPapers.org; BYUStudies.byu.edu; MormonHistoryAssociation.org; rsc.byu.edu; PearlOfGreatPriceCentral.org; churchofjesuschrist.org; etc.
35. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 606. “Rudiments” included astrological bodies that they thought controlled human affairs.
36. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 254.
37. Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 319.
38. David Bercot, ed., *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 54–57. Immersion was also clear in Tertullian’s statement: “It makes no difference whether a man I swashed in the sea or a pool, a stream, or a fountain, a lake or a trough . . . we are plunged in water . . . He commands them to baptize into the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—not into a unipersonal God. . . . we are immersed into the three Persons, at the mention of each individual name” (57).
39. *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*, Colossians 2:14. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/colossians/2-14.htm> (accessed 9-26-19).
40. Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 314.
41. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 607.
42. Hans Burge, *Being in Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, OR: WIPF and Stock, 2009), 220.
43. Charles J. Ellicott, *Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers* (Harrington, DE: Delmarva, reprint 2015 from 1878), Colossians 3:3.
44. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:391.
45. Strong’s Concordance, *kaphar*, “to cover over, pacify, make propitiation;” <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3722.htm> (accessed 9-27-19).
46. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, 558–559. “The basic word for atonement is *kaphar*, which has the same basic meaning in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic, that being ‘to bend, arch over, cover; . . . to deny, . . . to forgive, . . . to be expiated, . . . renounce.’ The Arabic *kafara* puts the emphasis on a tight squeeze, such as tucking in the skirts, drawing a thing close to one’s self. Closely related are Aramaic and Arabic *kafat*, meaning a close embrace, which are certainly related to the Egyptian *hpet*, the common ritual embrace written with the ideogram of embracing arms. It may be cognate with the Latin *capto*, and from it comes the Persian kaftan, a monk’s robe and hood completely embracing the body. Most interesting is the Arabic *kafata*, as it is the key to a dramatic situation. It was the custom for one fleeing for his life in the desert to seek protection in the tent of a great sheik, crying out, “*Ana dakhiluka*,” meaning “I am thy suppliant,” whereupon the Lord would place the hem of his robe over the guest’s shoulder and declare him under his protection.” We see this image in the Book of Mormon too (see 2 Nephi 1:15; 4:33; Alma 5:24).
47. Flavius Josephus, Steve Mason, ed., *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary: Against Apion* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2007), 321.
48. John Durham Peters, “Bowels of Mercy,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 4, 27–41.

49. Leander Keck, *New Interpreters Bible* (1994), 655.
50. Brent D. Shaw, *Brill: Mnemosyne*, “Raising and Killing Children: Two Roman Myths,” *Fourth Series*, Vol. 54, Fasc. 1 (Feb., 2001), 31–77. www.jstor.org/stable/443318 (accessed 9-27-19).
51. Heshey Zelcher, *A Guide to the Jerusalem Talmud* (Universal Publishers, 2002), 92. “The middle class citizens often owned eight slaves, the rich from five hundred to a thousand, and an emperor as many as twenty thousand.”
52. Forty-eight General Conference talks span from 1972–2018. See on line <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/general-conference/topics/fatherhood?lang=eng> (accessed 9-27-19).
53. Joel Marcus, *The Anchor Yale Bible: Mark 1–8* (New Haven, CT: Yale Press, 2000), 21–22.
54. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 600. Early Church Fathers debated Paul’s Epistle known as 2 Corinthians as supposedly this letter to the Laodiceans, but the Marcions thought it was Ephesians (remember that letter had no addresses or names mentioned). Other early Christians mention of a letter the Laodiceans that the Marcionites forged. In the fourth century, the Eastern church challenged apocryphal letter to Laodiceans. Catholics circulated a Latin apocryphon, “To the Laodiceans” between the sixth and fifteenth century, but the council of Trent rejected it. John the Revelator wrote of the Laodiceans too (Revelations 1:11; 3:14).



1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS

ENCOURAGEMENT AND GROWTH IN
CHARITY, HOPE, AND HOLINESS

CA. AD 50–51

1 THESSALONIANS

Thessalonica

Thessalonica was the capital of Northern Greece (Macedonia) and the most populated city in the province (65,000 to 80,000 people within the city, and 100,000 living directly without the wall).¹ In 316 BC, a general in Alexander the Great's army founded the city. In 146 BC, it became a Roman "free city" and capital of the province. "Free cities" enjoyed special tax concessions, privileges, and patriotism. By the time of Paul, the city was a great commercial center as it intersected the major highways, east to west and north to south, that spanned across the Roman Empire.

PAUL AND THE THESSALONIANS

Most of our historical information comes from Acts. Shortly before Paul first visited Thessalonica, he met with the elders at the Jerusalem Council in approximately 49 AD (Acts 15:4–21). After the group’s verdict was agreed on—not to require Christians to live the Law of Moses—Paul and his new companion Silas embarked on his second apostolic mission. While preaching in Troas, Paul had a vision of a man saying: “Come over into Macedonia” (Acts 16:9–12). Paul took Silas, Luke and Timothy and sailed to northern Greece. After preaching in Philippi, the missionaries made their way inland, 80 miles further west, to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1).

Paul started his missionary efforts in Thessalonica at the synagogue, as well as working with “devout Greeks, a great multitude, and the chief women not a few” (Acts 17:4). After three weeks, the angered Jews caused an uproar to destroy the Christians. In the tumult, they took a new wealthy convert, Jason, to prison (Acts 17:7–9). The Lord blessed Paul and Silas to sneak out by night and flee to Berea (and later to Athens, and Corinth, Acts 7:10–15).

The new converts held their new faith together, and they grew to the point that they offered Paul at least four other missionary companions over the next few years (Acts 19:29; 20:4). By the time Paul got to Corinth (250 miles away), he had taken the time to write them this letter.

In ancient Thessalonica, archeologists have found a Jewish and a Samaritan synagogue, a Roman forum, a Hellenistic Stadium, a temple of Serapis, the Cardar Arch, a gymnasium, and coins with Zeus and a variety of other gods (including Egyptian cults like Isis, and Osiris). All of this is evidence that the city enjoyed extensive wealth and variety of worship.² Paul added one more religion there when he introduced Christianity.

Attested Pauline Authorship

When Bible studies claim “attested Pauline” they mean:

1 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philemon, Philippians.

*This Chronological Grouping Represents Pure Paul.*³ Paul wrote to the saints in Thessalonica shortly after he established the church there. He was still on his second apostolic mission, either in Athens or Corinth.

Purpose of the Letter

Paul divides his Epistle into two sections: A celebration of the saints’ faithfulness and encouragement for them to progress, “to supply what is lacking in their faith.” He divides the two sections with a prayer or blessing (1 Thessalonians 3:11–13). He begins and ends the Epistle with a prayer or blessing as well.

Outline of 1 Thessalonians

REJOICING IN THE SAINTS’ FAITHFULNESS

- 1:1–10 Greeting and Thanks
- 2:1–12 Paul’s Ministry in Thessalonica
- 2:13–16 Reception and Opposition to the Message
- 2:17–20 Paul’s Desire to Visit Them Again.
- 3:1–5 Timothy’s Visit
- 5:6–13 Timothy’s Encouraging Report

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE SAINTS TO PROGRESS

- 4:1–12 Live to Please God: *Sanctification and Love*
- 4:3–8 Sexual Immorality
- 4:9–12 Charity and Self-Sufficiency
- 4:13–18 The Dead Saints Will Come When Jesus Returns
- 5:1–11. The Timing of the Second Coming
- 5:12–15 Relationships with Each Other
- 5:16–22 Relationships with God
- 5:23–28. Paul’s Final Blessing or Prayer

1 THESSALONIANS: OLDEST EPISTLE IN THE BIBLE

Chronologically, 1 Thessalonians was the oldest Epistle written and the first of Paul’s fourteen canonized letters. As we see, Paul was already a skilled writer by this time.

When the NT was compiled, the scholars chose to organize the Epistles not by date, but by length—the longest were placed first. As Paul wrote more than any other author, his Epistles came first. His first nine NT Epistles are to communities (which were read out aloud to the congregation), followed by his four shorter Epistles written to individuals.

PART 1: REJOICING IN THE SAINTS’ FAITHFULNESS

Formal Greeting

1 Thessalonians 1:1

1 Thessalonians 1:1 “Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, *servants of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, unto the church of the Thessalonians*” (JST) Paul formally opens with his companions’ Greek names: Silvanus for Silas and Timonethus for Timothy. They had just joined Paul in Corinth after visiting the saints in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:6; Acts 18:5). Eight of Paul’s fourteen letters include another name as a co-sender. Six times it is Timothy, twice Silas, and once, Sosthenes. The JST adds a doctrinally significant phrase. We find the apostles introducing themselves as “servants” of Christ in at least seven Epistles. This highlights that Paul is not claiming leadership but servitude. He honors the Lord as the head of his work and church.

“**Grace be unto you and Peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus**” In Paul’s opening formula, he usually includes a combination of the traditional Hebrew and Greek greetings.

Section of Thanks

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering . . . you work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord” In formal letters, after the opening greeting, is a “thanksgiving section.” Paul’s prayer in their behalf begins here (1 Thessalonians 1:2-5). Paul’s expression of gratitude for the saints continues far beyond these first verses to the entire chapter. It speaks of his leadership style, expressing thanks often and prayer. As Christians, our prayers also follow the same pattern with a thanksgiving section following the greetings. Paul’s expression of gratitude is mixed with an exhortation and encouragement.

1 Thessalonians 1:4 “For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you . . .” (NIV) The KJV “beloved brethren/*adelphoi*,” refers here to all believers. Paul thanks Jewish and Greek converts, men and women, young and old. He uses this same “*adelphoi*/all believers,” as part of God’s family, fourteen times in this short letter (1 Thessalonians 2:1, 9, 14, 17; 3:7; 4:1, 10, 13; 5:1, 4, 12, 14, 25, 27).

The KJV “election/*eklogé*/chosen you,” is found seven times in the New Testament. It refers to a divine selection or a general choosing out.⁴ In the KJV, “God’s elect,” can be interpreted differently such as with the Reformed and Calvinistic doctrines where it means unconditional election. But Paul’s Greek word choice has a broader meaning.⁵ Many of the King James translators and most of the protestant movements for centuries believed in predestined election. Yet, the Lord revealed a different definition of “election” to the prophet Joseph Smith in D&C 29:7. He restored the meaning of “the elect” as those who “hear my voice and harden not their hearts.” Agency and love function on both sides. The “elect” in this sense are those who seek a closeness with God and humbly receive His direction. God offers humans the gift of His grace, but mortals must choose to receive it.

1 Thessalonians 1:5 “Our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction” (NIV) This is Paul’s definition of conversion. The Spirit is a favorite topic and is mentioned in most Epistles. Paul witnesses that the Spirit comes with power and with logical words. The Spirit can speak to our combined hearts and minds verifying truth with a powerful assurance. This was also a major theme of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ (D&C 6:14-15, 23; 8:1, 3, 23, 9:7-9; etc.).

Paul describes the spirit with the word “power.” The Bible couples the “Spirit” or “Holy Ghost” with “power” ten times. Looking for the same pattern in The Book of Mormon, we find “power” linked with God’s Spirit fifty-seven times (seventeen times more frequently than the Bible when evaluated on a per thousand-word basis). The Doctrine and Covenants has an even greater ratio, with thirty-five connections—or twenty-six times the concentration of the Bible and one-and-a-half times more than in The Book of Mormon.

In the Bible, we find the phrase “power of the Holy Ghost” once (Romans 15:13), but in the Book of Mormon, we find it thirty times. This is clearly a message emphasized in the Restoration—the Spirit is powerful.

1 Thessalonians 1:6 “ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost” Christianity was not for cowardly converts. Most of the Thessalonian saints had to endure “much affliction” along with the joy of their conversion (Acts 17:6–9). They courageously put their love for the Lord first, and what happened to them second. Before the first century was over, early Christians, including Paul, often faced physical persecution (2 Corinthians 11:24–26). Shortly before he arrived in Thessalonica, he was beaten, chained, and imprisoned for the sake of the Word (Acts 17:5–10). Perhaps this is why Jesus included the last beatitude: “Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10). Today our religious persecution is more intellectual, emotional, and mental.

1 Thessalonians 1:7–9 “you became a model to all the believers . . . The Lord’s message rang out from you . . . your faith in God has become known everywhere . . . how you turned to God from idols” (NIV) Paul teaches that a good example blesses twice: to the doer and the viewer. One person’s goodness motivates another and becomes a catalyst for positive change. As the Thessalonian saints turned from idolatry, other converts were motivated to turn from worldliness to a godly life.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 “to wait for his Son from heaven” Initially, the early Christians thought that Jesus’ return to rule and reign was imminent (Acts 1:10–11; Revelation 1:1, 3). Even Paul speaks at times as if he expects the millennium to begin in his own lifetime (1 Thessalonians 4:15–17; Hebrews 9:28). But the Lord said that no one knew, “of that day and *that* hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father” (Mark 13:32, 26–31; Acts 1:7). They did not understand that Jesus came in the “meridian of time,” and that He would not rule and reign until after an apostasy and restoration (2 Timothy 4:3). In reality, each person has only their lifetime to wait before he or she will come before the Lord. In this sense, Paul’s exhortation to watchfulness is appropriate for each person in each generation.



Icon of Second Coming, ca. 1700. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

1 THESSALONIANS 2

Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

1 Thessalonians 2:1 “You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results” (NIV) Paul turns to share a short historical recap of their time together. He believes that the Lord blessed their paths and union. The KJV “vain/*kenke*/empty” can also be translated, “was not a waste of time” (ISV). On the contrary, Paul’s fruitful mission left them with truths and riches.

1 Thessalonians 2:2 “with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition” (NIV) Paul refers back to being beaten in Philippi right before he arrived in Thessalonica (Acts 16:11–37) and he probably could have included several other physical persecutions he suffered while preaching. The translation choice of “opposition (RSV, NIV),” or “conflict” (ASV), fits better than “contention” (KJV). Jesus’ first warning to the Nephites included “he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me” (3 Nephi 11:29). Even in places of conflict a disciple can avoid contention.

1 Thessalonians 2:3–4 “We [are not] trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God” (NIV) This is a little confusing in the KJV. Paul did not fear what men could do to him. (He obviously endured much physical abuse). He worried about fulfilling his responsibility to God’s call. Joseph Smith verbalized the same thing as a young man, “Who am I that I can withstand God, or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen? . . . I could not deny it, neither dared I do it; at least I knew that by so doing I would offend God, and come under condemnation” (JS-H 1:25). Even outside of missionary labors, disciples must watch to “speak not as pleasing men, but God” (KJV). Paul emphasizes that God will try or prove our hearts. We need to show our devotion to God in all situations.

1 Thessalonians 2:5 “neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness . . .” As God knew, Paul’s deepest motivation was love. His outward appearance was not a pretext or “mask to cover up greed” (NIV). But, as we only have one side of the story, we do not know why Paul defends himself. Was someone attacking his reputation? Was he setting an example to encourage the saints to do likewise?⁶ We learned in Acts 17:13 that earlier, rabble-rousers from Thessalonica had tried to stop Paul’s work.

1 Thessalonians 2:6 “Nor did we seek praise . . . although as apostles of Christ we had authority to demand it” (BSB) In all other attested Pauline epistles, Paul begins with a declaration of his authority and priesthood position. In this letter, he waits until verse 6 to use his title “*apostolos*/apostle/one sent forth with orders/mes-

senger.” He may have waited because the greeting includes Silas and Timothy, who were not apostles.⁷

1 Thessalonians 2:7–12 “. . . you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God” (NIV) Paul’s memories of their few weeks together (at least three, Acts 17:2), speaks of his gentle and affectionate approach as a missionary. He felt charity towards his converts. His love led him to risk his life and share his means with them (2 Thessalonians 3:8–9).



Reception and Opposition to the Message

1 Thessalonians 2:13–16

1 Thessalonians 2:13 “when ye received the word of God . . . ye received *it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God*” During Paul’s missionary labors, the Spirit actively testified of the truths he taught. God blessed the believers in Thessalonica with the same witness that He blesses all sincere seekers. The Spirit “worketh” to change and cleanse all those that believe. At times, the Spirit’s witness is undeniable. Other times, the disciples must learn the language of the Spirit in order to understand its witness. Either way, it is rewarding.

1 Thessalonians 2:14–16 “you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews . . .” (NIV) Persecution became a common consequence for becoming Christian. Both Jews and Gentiles attacked Christians by instigating riots against them, chasing them out of their towns and cities, stoning them, imprisoning them, crucifying them, and it grew worse in the second and third centuries.⁸

Paul’s Desire to Visit Them Again

1 Thessalonians 2:17–20

1 Thessalonians 2:17–18 “brothers and sisters, after we were forced to leave you for a short time (in person, not in heart), we greatly desired and made every effort to return and see you face to face” (CSB) Paul explains that he attempted to return earlier, and he continues to think fondly about his new friends, but unfortunately, “Satan hindered us.” Later in the Epistle, he writes of sending Timothy in his place (1 Thessalonians 3:2).

1 Thessalonians 2:19 “Who is our hope? . . . you yourselves in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming” (BSB) Again we see an example where the early saints speak as if the Lord’s Second Coming would come soon.

1 Thessalonians 2:20 “**You are indeed our glory and our joy**” (BSB) Paul’s work and glory (“crown”), is the same as our Heavenly Father’s work— “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Disciples, too, have that as our model.

1 THESSALONIANS 3

Timothy’s Visit

1 Thessalonians 3:1–5

1 Thessalonians 3:1–3a “**when we could bear it no longer, . . . we sent Timothy . . . to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that none of you would be shaken by these trials**” (BSB) Paul thought it best to stay and preach in Athens, so he sent his beloved and capable companion, Timothy, back up to Thessalonica to minister to the new branch. Paul knew that new converts needed help to become “established,” and needed “comfort” (KJV). Satan consistently tries to uproot new faith with temptations and doubts. The young converts need regular witnesses of the Spirit to combat the opposition.

1 Thessalonians 3:3b–4 “**we kept warning you that we would suffer persecution; and as you know, it has come to pass**” (BSB) This is an interesting reality of life. We are here for trials, to “learn to distinguish good from evil by our own experience.”⁹ Life is filled with thorns and challenges of all sorts—spiritual, emotional, hunger, and pain—as well as Satan’s temptations. Shortly before Elder Neal Maxwell’s death, during his years of suffering from cancer, he described earthy afflictions as coming from three sources: 1) part of life, 2) tailored made to help us grow, or 3) as a consequence of sin.¹⁰ In order to progress in life, most of us must learn obedience through trials and suffering (Hebrews 5:8). Discipleship includes suffering to help us grow, “as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same” (1 Peter 4:1).

In our dispensation, the Prophet Joseph Smith learned that even “if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D&C 122:7). As recently as April 2019, President Russel M. Nelson warned the saints: “The adversary is quadrupling his efforts to disrupt testimonies and impede the work of the Lord. He is arming his minions with potent weapons to keep us from partaking of the joy and love of the Lord.”¹¹

1 Thessalonians 3:5 “**When I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you**” (ESV) Paul worried about his young flock, so when he couldn’t stand the suspense any longer, he sent Timothy over three-hundred miles north to go check up on the saints, shower them with love, and bolster their faith. The book of Acts says that Paul was only allowed to teach in the synagogue of Thessalonica for three weeks before the persecution began (Acts 17:2). More time may have passed before the

uproar and Paul's nighttime escape, but in either scenario, he was not able to stay long enough to strengthen the saints as he had hoped before persecution started. On Timothy's return visit he may have carried a message from Paul, too.

Timothy's Encouraging Report

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

1 Thessalonians 3:6-9 “Just now, Timothy has returned from his visit with the good news about your faith, your love, and the fond memories you have preserved . . . we have been reassured” (BSB) Timothy's return and report comforted with the news of the Thessalonians' faithfulness and “charity” (KJV). Half of this letter speaks of the joy of faithfulness.

1 Thessalonians 3:9 “How can we thank God for you in return for all the joy we experience before our God because of you” (CSB) The principle of reciprocity is especially applicable with God. As King Benjamin taught, “if ye do keep his commandments he doth bless you and prosper you” (Mosiah 2:22).

1 Thessalonians 3:10 “we pray . . . [to] supply what is lacking in your faith” (NIV). In the next chapter Paul dedicates the rest of the letter to “supply what is lacking” in their faith. As fellow saints, we covenant to help carry each other's burdens. Perhaps the most important burdens to share are spiritual burdens. To help build each other's faith, disciples can share spiritual experiences, pray together, study together, testify, and encourage each other. Everyone who walks by faith not only builds their own faith, but also impacts those within their sphere of influence. Building our own faith can strengthen our peers' faith.

When a rich young man asked Jesus what he lacked in his faith, the Lord told him to sell his possessions and follow Him (Matthew 19:20). Each disciple should humbly and regularly ask the Lord what is lacking in their faith or how He can encourage them on the covenant path. **Elder Larry R. Lawrence** felt “a perfect time to ask, ‘What lack I yet?’ is when we take the sacrament. The Apostle Paul taught that this is a time for each of us to examine ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:28).”¹²

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 “Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus . . .” Paul's sincere love spills out into a sincere prayer or blessing. The prayer divides his Epistle into two sections. The prayer covers the next three verses:

- “May our God . . . clear the way for us to come to you”
- “May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else”
- “May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy . . . when our Lord Jesus comes.”

This blessing or prayer is another example of how the early saints expected a quick return of Jesus in his glorified state surrounded with His saints. We feel a sense of immediacy in all their writings. They only focused on existing problems and on preparing for Jesus' Second Coming (i.e. 1 Thessalonians 4:14–15). For example, the *Didache* from between AD 80 and 140 reads: “be ready, for you do not know the hour in which our Lord comes.” And Cyprian from AD 250, “Already His second coming draws near to us . . . He will soon come from heaven for the punishment of the devil and for the judgment of the human race, with the force of an avenger and with the power of a judge”¹³

PART 2: ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE SAINTS TO PROGRESS

Live to Please God: Sanctification and Love

1 Thessalonians 4:1–12

1 Thessalonians 4:1 “As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God” (NIV) Paul turns to the main purpose of his Epistle: What is lacking in their faith. Paul introduces what he wants to say with a transition: “It is in order then . . . we beseech and exhort” (JB2000), or “Finally. . . we ask and encourage you” (BSB), or “Furthermore, we beseech . . . and exhort you” (KJV). The goal is to live worthy or “it behooves you to walk and to please God” (BLB). The young saints have already felt the witness of the truth, so Paul now encourages them to live more and more by the Spirit and in keeping with the law of the Gospel. Throughout the New Testament, “walk/ *peripateo*” means in an ethical sense, “conduct my life, live.” Paul then dives into five topics that stemmed from either their questions, what Timothy observed, or the Spirit’s direction.

1 Thessalonians 4:2 “you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus” (NIV, BSB) Paul stresses that the “commandments” (KJV) or “precepts” (DRB) he teaches are from Jesus not from just the missionaries or fellow humans.

Sexual Immorality

1 Thessalonians 4:3–8

1 Thessalonians 4:3–4 “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body” (NIV) Paul begins with a straight-line approach. It is for their own good and sanctification. (*Sanctification* is the process of becoming a Saint, holy and pure.¹⁴) The first issue is to avoid “fornication/*porneia*” (including incest and adultery, etc.) The law of chastity must have been a real problem in the Greco-Roman world as Paul repeats it in nine of his fourteen letters.

Biblical translators debate verse four more than any other in the letter. The KJV phrase, “possess his vessel,” meant controlling one’s own body. Other translations read: RSV “take a wife for himself in holiness and honor.” NEB “gain mastery over his body, to hallow and honor it.” NIV “control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable.” LV “keep clear of all sexual sin so that each of you will marry in holiness and honor.”

1 Thessalonians 4:5–6 “not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister” (NIV), Paul contrasts heathen immorality with Christian conduct. He addressed “selfish lust” (JB) in light of the heathen practices of “sacred fornication.”¹⁵ Paul also repeats that God will “punish all those who commit such sins.” He repeatedly warned them (“forewarned you” KJV), that all will be held accountable for sexual impropriety against another.

1 Thessalonians 4:7–8 God did not call us to be impure . . . therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God” (NIV) Christians have been cleansed through Christ’s at-one-ment, and have the responsibility to keep themselves clean and holy, in order to receive the Spirit and act as His servants. If one “disregards” (RSV) or “despiseth,” (KJV) or “objects” to (JB) this counsel, that person has offended God. The Holy Spirit is offended by uncleanness and cannot dwell in unclean temples, hence, the Spirit is lost.

Charity and Self-Sufficiency

1 Thessalonians 4:9–12

1 Thessalonians 4:9–10 “Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God . . . yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more” (NIV) Of the four or five Greek words for love, Paul chooses “*agapá*/charity” which he includes in the hymn to charity in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. Jesus’ foremost teaching was the importance of love. As converts become more Christlike, they strive to develop charity more and more.

1 Thessalonians 4:11 “aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands . . . that you may lack nothing” (NKJV) Paul encourages living a calm and quiet life for the intent of being a good neighbor to Christians and non-Christians (v. 12, “outsiders” BLB, or “those without,” KJV). Yet, minding one’s own business does not mean we must be silent and cloistered. Often, he encourages saints to “serve one another” (Galatians 5:13; also, Romans 7:6; 9:12; 1 Timothy 6:2; etc.). Paul’s counsel to work with your hands is in direct opposition to the teachings of the Epicureans who scorned work. It also addressed the Greco-Roman patronage system that allowed the elite on the ladder of social hierarchy to have lower class servants and slaves do all their work—including feeding, washing, dressing, and performing all other menial labor.

Paul may also be encouraging an important aspect of the Law of Consecration. The early Christians in Jerusalem lived this law, and it was taught across Christ’s churches (Acts 2:44; Romans 15:26; Galatians 2:10; etc.). All

worked for the benefit of the whole. Perhaps some slacked, attempting to live off the generosity of everyone else. Paul has already written that brotherly love and hard work go hand in hand (1 Thessalonians 2:8–9). It also could refer to carrying for one another and sharing burdens. If we love our neighbor, we will do our share. It may have also been a lesson on personal preparedness. Consecration and preparation go hand in hand. The bottom line is to help each other to become a Zion's people with “no poor among” us (Moses 7:18).

The Righteous Dead Will Come when Jesus Returns

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

1 Thessalonians 4:13 “Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind” (NIV) Paul addresses one of their questions about grieving for their departed loved ones. To “sleep,” is a euphemism for death that even Jesus used (John 11:11–13). Christians understand that Jesus will awaken them from death to immortality. Death in the ancient culture a common experience for most ancient people. Death of a child was more common than an infant living beyond age ten.¹⁶ After death, the Jews and Greeks mourning practices included long and loud shrieking. Their culture interpreted a demonstration of sorrow as dressing in sack cloth, overtly weeping, screaming, putting dirt on



The Resurrection by Sebastiano Ricci, ca. 1715. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

one's head, throwing dirt in the air, and making a theatrical demonstration of remorse. Jews would hire a female mourner to dramatize mourning with hours of wailing and throwing dirt in the air. The Jewish Mishnah records: "Even the poorest in Israel should hire not less than two flutes and one wailing woman."¹⁷ To Paul this excessive ranting did not demonstrate a belief in the resurrection.

1 Thessalonians 4:14–15 "through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep" (ESV) Paul tries to correct another misunderstanding of the early saints here. When Jesus returns at the Second Coming, he will be accompanied by the righteous who have passed from their second estate. Paul teaches what he learned from Jesus' words. The text describes the saints will still be alive when Jesus' returns, "we," assuming even Paul will participate. But the JST took out Paul's "we" (and in verse 17), and replaced it with "they" who are alive. This allows for a much longer period before Jesus' Second Coming. Nonetheless, the early Christians thought that Jesus' Second Coming in their lifetime or at least soon.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first" At the Second Coming, the soul stirring call of the archangel (Adam, or Michael as he is called in heaven) will be heard as a "loud command" (NIV). The "trump of God" may refer to the Jewish priests who blew shofars at the temple (Ezra 3:10). Paul also teaches that the Christians will rise first in the Resurrection.

1 Thessalonians 4:17–18 "After that, we who are alive and remain 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" (BSB) "Caught up" in Latin is "*rapemur*" which is where we get the English identification of "the rapture" colloquially used for the Second Coming of the Lord. The righteous will be caught up with those already resurrected. (This imagery is also found in Daniel 7:13; and D&C 77:12). Part of the finishing of the saints' faith was to share this encouragement of the hope of God's Plan of Salvation. Paul clarified this for the Thessalonians probably because they were confused or were asking how the dead would come forth.

1 THESSALONIANS 5

The Timing of the Second Coming

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

1 Thessalonians 5:1 "Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates . . . you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (NIV) Paul's eschatological message was already well known by them. The "times and the seasons" (KJV) refer to when the Lord will return and reign in glory. Paul refuses to

even discuss the timing with them—it was unpredictable. Jesus taught a similar message in Matthew 24:36–7, 43 and Luke 12:44 JST. There are many times when Paul may have heard of Jesus’ words—including his fifteen days visiting with Peter (Galatians 1:18). Paul uses the image of “a thief in the night” to underscore that those who are not watching will be caught unprepared. That day was prophesied clear back in Amos 5:18.

1 Thessalonians 5:3 “when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape” Even though the Lord’s coming will be unexpected, Paul’s choice of imagery, a woman in labor,” has many predictable warnings (her size, months gestation, her pain, speed of contractions, baby’s position, etc.). Likewise, the timing of the Second Coming can generally be estimated as when the signs are fulfilled. The same imagery was used often in the Old Testament, including Isaiah 13:8; 21:3; Jeremiah 6:24; 49:24; and Micah 4:10. Jesus used it for his death (John 16:21).

1 Thessalonians 5:4–5 “. . . this day should [not] surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light” (NIV) As followers of the Light, Christians are given apostles and the Spirit as their guide, so they do not have to be unprepared or unexpected. The symbols of light and fire go together with the Spirit. As Amos taught, “Surely, the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

1 Thessalonians 5:6–8a “Let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober” Paul plays with the symbolism of spiritual light and darkness in the setting of day and night, as Jesus did, as recorded in the Gospels (Matthew 6:23; John 1:5; 12:35, 46; etc.). Children of light are like a light house. They must warn others of Satan’s temptations by staying “alert” (NASB), and use “self-control” (CSB) to be ready.

1 Thessalonians 5:8b “putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation” Paul draws from military protection to symbolize how the saints can defend themselves in the spiritual warfare against the adversary. President Russel M. Nelson has used the same imagery since being called as the prophet.¹⁸ Here Paul uses only two pieces of spiritual armor: 1) the breastplate as a defensive shield built on our faith and love, and 2) the helmet as the hope of salvation. Paul uses this image from Isaiah 59:17; “He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on His head.” Paul’s most in depth description of the armor of God is in Ephesians 6:10–17.

1 Thessalonians 5:9–11 “God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord . . . Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another” Paul explains that his fellow disciples should rejoice in the Lord’s gift of salvation, and not spend needless energy worrying about God’s timing or wrath. Rather than worry if “we wake or sleep,” when the Lord comes to reign in glory, is not that issue. Paul wants to make sure saints have kept their covenants so that they may “live together.” He hopes that the saints will love and support each other to “build each other up” (NIV).



The Second Coming by Georgio Klontzas, ca. 16th century. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Relationships with Each Other

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 “We ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work” (NIV) These two verses encourage the saints to respect and “know” (KJV) their fellow leaders who labor in their behalf. Other translations refer to having “respect” (RSV), for the leaders, and to “appreciate” (NAS), and “be considerate” (JB) of them. Back biting or complaining is not compatible with God’s Kingdom. This does not mean that the leaders are without fault and need for improvement. But as fellow laborers, the saints need to encourage, sustain and support them.

1 Thessalonians 5:14 “We urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone” (NIV) Paul lightly touched on another problem here (and even stronger in his next letter to the Thessalonians). There were some who were “idle and disruptive.” Unlike their cultural hierarchy that allowed for some to not work, in the church, everyone needs to work hard. In the larger context, Paul addresses the need to contribute to the welfare of the whole church. Especially, the “feble-minded,” “timid,” or “apprehensive” (KJV, NIV JB). Paul knew that those who lacked courage to testify, or even live the gospel, needed encouragement and support. He asks the saints to be patient with each other (and I add, *as well as with ourselves*).

1 Thessalonians 5:15 “Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other” (NIV) Paul closes his subsection on relationships with more of Jesus’ teachings (which also found in Proverbs 20:22). No longer does Paul encourage, “an eye for an eye” but he follows Jesus’ teaching, “I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” both in and out of the faith (Matthew 5:44).

Relationships with God

1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

1 Thessalonians 5:16-22 Paul concludes with ways to increase our relationship with God.

- **“Rejoice evermore”/ “Be joyful”** (ISV) The message to always praise God keeps us faith focused.
- **“Pray without ceasing”/ “pray constantly”** (CES) A prayerful mind tethers us to God all day. President Ezra Taft Benson explained, “Pray always means to pray regularly, consistently, day in and day out. And, also have the Spirit of prayer always in your heart, so that your thoughts, words and actions are always such as will please Him who is Eternal.”¹⁹
- **“In every thing give thanks”/ “Give thanks in every circumstance”** (BSB) . . . especially for trials. Feeling gratitude is a wonderful way to feel good. I am more satisfied with life, with people, even with the weather, when I have a grateful heart. Selfishness is the antithesis of gratitude. Gratitude can fill one with the love

of God and remove anger.

- **“Quench not the Spirit”/ “Don’t stifle the Spirit”** (CSB). Just as a blacksmith quenches hot metal in water, our hearts become hard when we ignore the Spirit, like a spark or fire. Sometimes we douse the Spirit by ignoring or misinterpreting promptings. We extinguish the Spirit by unkind thoughts, words, inattention, and fear. Similarly our thoughts, words, and focus can enflame our spiritual sparks as we seek inspiration.
- **“Despise not prophesyings”/ “Do not reject prophecy”** (ABPE). We hear these regularly at general conference.²⁰
- **“Prove all things”** This is becoming more and more important with information flying at us from our every click. Especially examine attacks that pull down our faith. Seek the gift of discernment by asking, “Is this idea from God or the adversary?”
- **“Hold fast that which is good”** As in Lehi’s vision, hold onto the iron rod, or the word of God.
- **“Abstain from all appearance of evil”** Abstaining from all of evil’s forms is getting harder and harder.

Paul’s Final Blessing

1 Thessalonians 5:23–28

1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 “**May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord**” (NIV) Paul concludes with a blessing or prayer for their souls. He prays with all the love of a parent praying for his children. Equally as important, he prays for what is most important in their eternal well-being. Rather than reviewing some of their needs, Paul asks God for what they need most for their spiritual wellbeing. God is “faithful” and will fulfill all his promises, so we too must ask for what is most important in our prayers.

1 Thessalonians 5:25–27 “**Brothers and sisters, pray for us. Greet all God’s people with a holy kiss . . . have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters**” (NIV) Four times Paul encourages this greeting. A “holy kiss” in early Christianity was not a Greek custom. This tradition may be why a few European Catholic countries greet friends by touching cheeks and kissing the air (*la bise*). Although the Joseph Smith Translation changed this verse it to read “with a holy salutation,” we still find “holy kiss” repeated in four other Epistles (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Peter 5:14).

1 Thessalonians 5:28 “**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen**” Grace is the precious gift of forgiveness from God; it is a gift of Himself received through the cleansing of His Holy Spirit. We can share it with others as we forgive them and share God’s love. The post script was not part of the original Epistle, but added much later by a scribe.

2 THESSALONIANS

Ca. AD 50–51

Three Challenges: Persecution, Christ's Second Coming, Working Together

Outline of 2 Thessalonians

- 1:1–4 Salutation and Thanksgiving
- 1:5–10 Persevere through Persecutions
- 1:11–1 First Prayer for Them
- 2: 1–15 The Second Coming
- 2:1–3 Apostasy
- 2:4–12 Satan's Power
- 2:16–17 Second Prayer for Them
- 3:1–5 Request Prayers
- 3:6–15 Need for All to Work
- 3:16–18 Third Prayer for Them
- 3:17–18 Salutation (4th C)

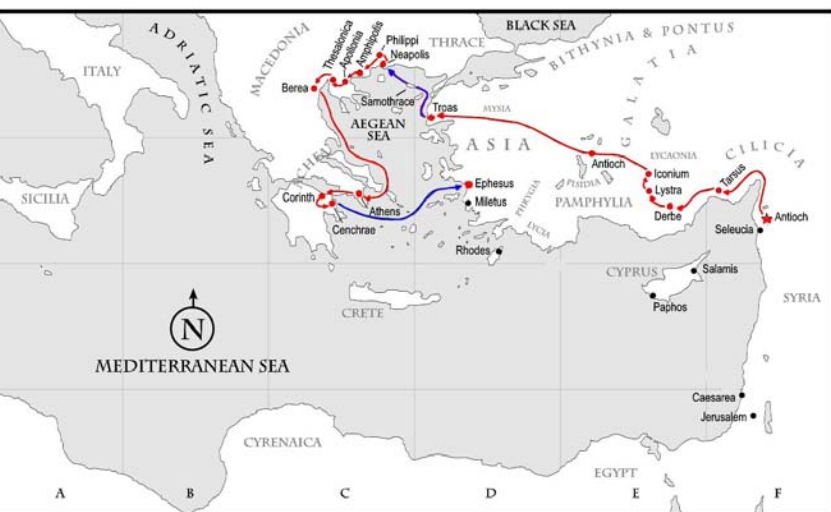
BACKGROUND:

Shortly after Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians, Timothy returned with the news that the saints were struggling even more with three of the same problems: persecution, fear about the Second Coming, and idleness or disruptive behaviors. Paul addresses the three issues a three-sectioned letter—each ending with a short prayer for the saints.

Salutation and Thanksgiving

2 Thessalonians 1:1–4

2 Thessalonians 1:1 “Paul and Silvanus, and Timotheus, the servants of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ . . .” (JST) Paul opens his letter with his standard Greek greeting. For the second and last time Silvanus (Silas) joins him as the co-author. This helps us date the epistle to the second mission where the two were companions. The JST re-arranged the KJV greeting and added the important title of “servants,” to the missionaries. This is also the title Jesus chose for Himself during His ministry (“The Son of Man came . . . to serve” (Matthew 20:28, WEB; Mark 10:45).²¹ A servant of the Lord is the greatest role a disciple can fill.





2 Thessalonians 1:2 “Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” Paul’s entreaty for grace and peace is a gift from “our” Father in Heaven. In every Epistle that Paul wrote to a group of saints, he began by expressing his testimony that God is “our Father” (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3–4; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; and 2 Thessalonians 1:1; as well as many times in between). The restoration brought back a literal and spiritual interpretation of this that now every primary child sings, “I am a child of God.”

2 Thessalonians 1:3–4 “We . . . thank God for you, brothers and sisters . . . your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing . . . we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring” (NIV) The thanksgiving portion of Paul’s opening is only two verses this time. He acknowledges their endurance during tribulations. Difficult as it was, these saints increased their faith, charity, and patience during their persecutions. Paul spends the first third of his letter encouraging them to draw closer to God during their trials. Earlier in Acts, we learned that the saints in Thessalonica suffered under the hand of the Jews (“Jews were jealous; so, they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city” Acts 17:5, NIV).

Persevere through Persecutions

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

2 Thessalonians 1:5 “**This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God that you may be made worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering**” (ESV) The saints persecution appears to have intensified. Paul comforts them with the hope that God’s justice will come to bear. It is also healing for them to rely on God to take care of the justice. This way the victims can turn the punishment over to God and not hold onto feelings of anger or vengeance, which will thwart their healing. The saints were suffering because of their beliefs in God’s kingdom, but suffering also helps refine us for the Kingdom. This verse may be misinterpreted as suggesting that suffering is required. Even though suffering is often addressed in the New Testament (Acts 5:40–42; Romans 8:17; Philippians 1:29; 3:10; 1 Peter 2:20–23; etc.), nowhere is innocent suffering encouraged.

This verse can also be understood that by exercising a patient attitude while enduring persecution, the Lord will see it as a token of their worthiness to enter His Kingdom. Suffering for the Kingdom’s sake can be a time of refining our souls, as Jesus “learned obedience from what He suffered. And, having been made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:8–9, BSB).

2 Thessalonians 1:6–8 “**since indeed God deems it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant rest with us to you who are afflicted, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire inflicting vengeance**” (ESV) The hope of justice and peace when the Savior returns has sustained many suffering servants of God. Richard Anderson explains, “Judgment implies freedom to make choices, so the goal of Paul’s letter is stronger faith and plus righteous action.”²²

When Jesus comes again the earth will receive a baptism by fire to cleanse it from the wicked (Joel 2:30; Malachi 3:2; Matthew 13:40; 2 Peter 3:10; D&C 64:24). Those “that know not God” (2 Thessalonians 1:8 KJV) may include those who refuse to know and obey Him (Romans 1:19–21, 28–29).

2 Thessalonians 1:9–10 “**They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord . . . on the day He Comes to Be Glorified**” (NIV) The wicked will receive their just reward. In addition to their “destruction,” they will also be excluded from the presence of the Lord. However, the Lord taught Joseph Smith that after the wicked are punished and acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, they will also enjoy a kingdom of glory (D&C 76:109–112). At the Second Coming when Jesus will be glorified, the righteous believers who have passed on and those still on the earth will add to His glory, as God’s work and glory are His saints’ eternal life (Moses 1:39). Jesus will be “regarded with wonder” (BSB), or “marveled at” (ESV), or “admired,” (KJV), by the believers who see His glory.

Paul's First Prayer or Blessing

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

2 Thessalonians 1:11 “we pray always for you, that He may count you worthy of the calling of our God . . . and work of faith with power” (BLB) Our leaders (on both sides of the veil) likewise pray for us to be worthy of this calling to prepare for the return of the Lord as King. The Lord's Spirit acts as a mantle that empowers His servants to do His work.

2 Thessalonians 1:12 “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him” It is a beautiful reciprocal relationship. The name of the Lord may be glorified in us. As part of our sacramental covenant to take upon His name, we can radiate His light. When saints live righteously, they will receive God's blessings and add glory to Him.

2 THESSALONIANS 2

Preparing for the Second Coming

2 Thessalonians 2:1-15

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 “Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us” (NIV) Paul wrote his previous letter to the Thessalonians, in a large part, to clarify the misunderstanding that the Lord's Second Coming was imminent, “no man knows the season” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). Here, it sounds as if others continued to disrupt the persecuted saints with false ideas. Paul basically says, do not believe everything you hear, “except ye receive it from us” (JST). The false prophecy “purported” (RSV) that the Second Coming was just around the corner, or had already happened and they missed it. The spreader of these false ideas is clearer in the Greek, which removes the responsibility for the idea away from the author, Paul, and onto another.

2 Thessalonians 2:3 “Let no man deceive you by any means: for there shall come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition” (JST) This is the clearest prophesy of a Christian apostasy in the New Testament (also see Acts 20:29 “grievous wolves enter in among you”). The Greek word for “falling away/*apostasiai*,” is a strong word which is translated, “rebellion” (RSV, NIV), “revolt” (JB), “mass apostasy” (NAB). The apostasy was not a passive movement, but rather a planned defection or desertion, to oppose authority—by the devil. He is also described as “that man of sin”(KJV), “the Rebel, the Lost One” (JB), the “man of lawlessness” (NIV, NAS, RSV), and “wickedness” (NEB). In this verse, “the son of perdition,” is Satan. In Latin, perdition is to destroy.

Remember that this is only Paul's second letter. The apostasy is already underfoot within two decades of Jesus' ministry, resurrection and forty-day-ministry. It was neither passive nor gradual. Jesus foretold it, and so did Paul (Matthew 24:24). Satan's and his minions work overtime at their counterfeiting business.

2 Thessalonians 2:4 “He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God” (NIV). The verse uncovers Satan as the great usurper and counterfeit. Almost always Paul uses “temple” figuratively, occasionally as the body, but usually as the church.²³ Here Satan is trying to usurp the place of God.

2 Thessalonians 2:5–6 “when I was yet with you, I told you these things . . . And now ye know . . . that he might be revealed in his time” Paul had previously warned them, but they mixed up their messages between true apostles and false teachers. Paul had taught that Jesus' glorious return was not impending, but the apostasy was.

2 Thessalonians 2:7 “The mystery of iniquity doth already work, and he it is who now worketh, and Christ suffereth him to work until the time is fulfilled that he shall be taken out of the way” (JST) The JST kept the Lord Christ in control, allowing opposition and temptation to separate out the wheat from the tares.

NIV reads: “For the secret power of lawlessness, is already at work; but the one [God] who now holds it back will continue to do so till he [Satan] is taken out of the way.” God's servants (like Paul), are also restraining Satan and his falsehoods. But it is not until Jesus comes to “annihilate [Satan] by the majesty of His arrival” (BSB) that Satan will finally be conquered.

2 Thessalonians 2:8 “The coming of the lawless one will be accompanied by the working of Satan, with every kind of power, sign, and false wonder” (BSB) Satan's use of power and signs will deceive even the elect (Mark13:22). This is why President Nelson has emphasized, “in coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.” He said that as we practiced and worked at it, “day after day, month after month, year after year,” we would “grow into the principle of revelation.”²⁴ We know the ending though. God will defeat evil. Jesus will come with celestial beings and destroy all things telestial by His glory (D&C 5:19).

2 Thessalonians 2:9–10 “Yea, the Lord, even Jesus, whose coming is not until after there cometh a falling away, but the working of Satan withal power and signs and lying wonders . . . because they received not the love of the truth.” (JST) The prophet felt inspired to add a repeated warning on the Apostasy led by Satan. The adversary has only limited powers, although his counterfeits are deceiving. As we saw with Moses at Pharaoh's court, the devil has the ability to imitate God's miracles (Exodus 7:11, 22, 8:7). Satan also has some limited power

over the elements (D&C 61:14–19). He is a master of deceit and can even appear as an angel of light (D&C 129:8). He can counterfeit the gift of tongues and visions, but not the gifts of healing, hope, and charity.

In this dispensation, the Prophet Joseph Smith repeatedly preached that clever demonic forces counterfeited the truth and perpetuated their false ideas, so that everyone must carefully guard against being deceived.²⁵ In 1842, he published two editorials: “Try the Spirits,” and “The Gift of the Holy Ghost” that addressed the different supernatural influences and need for vigilance.²⁶ He spoke on the discerning of spirits more than on any other topic and felt that its need was paramount.²⁷

Nothing is a greater injury to the children of men than to be under the influence of a false spirit when they think they have the Spirit of God. Thousands have felt the influence of its terrible power and baneful effects. Long pilgrimages have been undertaken, penances endured, and pain, misery and ruin have followed in their train; nations have been convulsed, kingdoms overthrown, provinces laid waste, and blood, carnage and desolation are habiliments [*sic*] in which it has been clothed.²⁸

Similarly, Brigham Young taught, “In all this the power of the devil is limited; the power of God is unlimited.”²⁹

2 Thessalonians 2:11–12 “And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie that they all might be damned who believed not the truth” Damned means stopped in progression. It comes from finding pleasure in unrighteousness—our society’s specialty. In many translations these two verses sound as if God has predestined some people to damnation. This Calvinistic interpretation is wrong.³⁰ God does not delude us, or act in any way out of spite or trickery. Instead, we humans are deceived to believing Satan’s lies.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit” (NIV) Paul thanks the Lord for the steadfastness of these new converts. He refers to them as “firstfruits,” which were offered as a temple sacrifice of the most cherished fruit of the season (Exodus 23:16, 19; 34:22, 26; etc.). Paul credits the Spirit’s work of cleansing that purifies believers through the process of sanctification towards exaltation. God chose them



Lucifer by Franz Stuck, 1890. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

because they accepted the truth and believed the Spirit. However, that is not the message in several translations (like the KJV). Some interpret this verse as laced with the Protestant theology of God's elect as saved unconditionally.³¹

Like the early Christians, the early saints in our dispensation also expected the Lord to come sooner than later. Brigham cautioned them,

Do not be too anxious for the Lord to hasten this work. Let our anxiety be centered upon this one thing, the sanctification of our won hearts, the purifying of our affections, the preparing of ourselves for the approach of the events that are hastening upon us. This should be our concern, this should be our study, this should be our daily prayer...Seek to have the Spirit of Christ that we may wait patiently the time of the Lord, and prepare ourselves the times that are coming. This is our duty.³²



Virgin and Child, Prophets, Apostles, and Saints, ca. 14th century. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

2 Thessalonians 2:14–15 “He called you to . . . share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you” (NIV) The saints must hold onto the teachings of living prophets and apostles. Our God calls many, but Joseph taught that only few are chosen, because of unrighteous dominion (D&C 121:39–42). Paul’s words were to comfort the saints who had been persecuted, and fearful. The whole section on the apostasy offered hope to Paul’s audience as it “wove the plight of the church into a

larger drama. We must respond to life's seemingly meaninglessness with a perspective that places life in a larger drama.”³³ Fortunately, life is not a one-act play. We must see the larger picture to see our Savior's mercy and the Father's grand plan.

Second Prayer or Blessing

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 “. . . God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word” (NIV) To close this section Paul records a prayer or blessing to the saints. Their fears associated with the calamities of the Lord's Second Coming, Satan's deceptions, and the looming Apostasy, were kept in perspective with the hope that God's love encourages hope and positive action. Paul weaves the need for good works and faith together in and out of his Epistle to the Thessalonians.

2 THESSALONIANS 3

Request for Prayer

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

2 Thessalonians 3:1-3 “Finally, pray for us, brothers and sisters, that the Lord's message may spread . . . that we may be delivered from . . . evil people . . . and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one” (NET). Paul opens the last third of his letter with a short request for prayers before diving into the last problem. His request to deliver them from evil echoes the Lord's example to pray “lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:13). This may also equate to asking for the gift of discernment which identifies evil in order to avoid it.

2 Thessalonians 3:4-5 “ye both do and will do the things which we command you. And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ” Paul's request shows that his desires are spiritually grounded. He asks the Lord to bless them with the spiritual gifts of “love/agape/charity” and patience. He has no requests for physical safety or meeting his daily needs, but Paul prays that the saints can become more Christlike. He focuses on what is most important from an eternal perspective, and what is best for them to develop.

Need for All to Work—No Idleness

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

2 Thessalonians 3:6-7 “we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive . . . follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you” (NIV) There must have

been a problem with those who were not working or disrupting the Christian community. The word for “idle” is actually “*ataktós/disorderly*.” The context suggests this refers to those who refuse to work and live the laws of the gospel. This may have been part of the culture where wealthy Roman patronage expected servants to do their work, or perhaps it stemmed from expecting Jesus’ immanent coming. It would have been a further problem if the saints were trying to live the law of consecration as discussed in 1 Thessalonians 4:14, as the saints shared all things in common in Jerusalem (Acts 2:44). Everyone needs to work to follow the ideal example of the Lord serving others and making the world a better place.

2 Thessalonians 3:8–9 “nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you” (NKJV) As an example, Paul worked for his own wages while he was in Thessalonica. Elsewhere we learn that Paul was a tent maker or leather worker (Acts 18:1–3; 2 Corinthians 11:9). He uses a Semitic idiom here “to eat someone’s bread” means to earn a living (see Genesis 3:19; 2 Kings 9:7). This verse provides the context to define that the problem was more with idleness than disorder.

2 Thessalonians 3:10 “we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (NKJV) The word Paul uses for “commanded/*paraggelló*,” is also used for military and court orders. He really means command! He is not referring to the sick or those who cannot work, but those who are unwilling to work. If they were living a form of the Law of Consecration, it would have required everyone to contribute what they could for the community to be sustainable.

2 Thessalonians 3:11 “We hear . . . they are not busy; they are busybodies” (NIV) This play on words in Greek is also “they may have.” Not only do the idle not cover their own costs, but they also distract others with their behaviors.

2 Thessalonians 3:12 “Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat” (NIV)

2 Thessalonians 3:13 “brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good” I love this verse. It is the adversary who discourages us in doing good. It sounds like one of our LDS prophet’s statements, “Life is like my shoes to be worn out in doing good.” We can obey all that God has commanded us, just like Nephi. I only become overwhelmed when I have too much of worldliness creeping in on the things that I am commanded to do.

2 Thessalonians 3:14–15 “Take special note of anyone who does not obey . . . Do not associate with them . . . Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer” (NIV). This counsel may sound harsh at first, but I really feel that Paul is wise in saying, “choose your examples, and gently encourage the

members who need to be corrected.” Disruptive members, or those who do not follow their leaders, often lead others astray. To protect the other saints, Elder McConkie taught, “Enemies from within, traitors to the cause, cultist who pervert the doctrines and practices often draw others away with them, and added souls lose their anticipated inheritance in the heavenly kingdom . . . the course of wisdom is to avoid them as Paul directs, and leave them in the hands of the Lord.”³⁴

Paul’s Closing Blessing and Personal Greeting

2 Thessalonians 3:16–18

2 Thessalonians 3:16 “Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always” This blessing or prayer is significant in light of the persecution and fears. Even in times of persecution and eager anticipation, the saints can be at peace as they trust in God and allow the Spirit to guide their thoughts and actions. At His last supper, Jesus promised his disciples gathered in the upper room, “my peace I give unto you” (John 14:27). The Spirit also witnesses with peace (D&C 6:23). What a beautiful gift.

2 Thessalonians 3:17–18 “salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen” The handwriting probably changed from a scribe to Paul’s shorter note. However, the italicized post script was added by a fourth century scribe, and it may be wrong as Corinth fits more closely into the account from Acts.

Header Image: Mosaic of Christ Pantocrator in the baptistry of Sav Giovanni, Florence, Italy, ca. 1300. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

1. Abraham J. Malherbe, *Anchor Bible: The Letters to the Thessalonians* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 14.
2. *Ibid*, 14–15.
3. These are the books that have the most evidence of being written by Paul without as much editing or scribe interference. The other Pauline Epistles still may have been outlined, approved, or signed by Paul Paul's scribes may have been strictly following Paul's words (Romans 16:22) or allowed some freedom (i.e. Ephesians). But these seven are the standard by which the others are measured (i.e. vocabulary, style, etc.). This list is in the order that they were probably written, at least according to our best historical estimation.
4. Thayer's Greek Lexicon, Strong's Concordance of the New Testament #1589: *ἐκλογή*. "particularly that by which he determined to bless certain persons through Christ" (Romans 11:28), "according to an election which is due to grace, or a gracious election" (Romans 11:5). In addition, see Acts 9:15; Romans 11:7, 28; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Pe 1:2.
5. As discussed in Romans 8:33, "God's elect," the main five points of Reformed and Calvinistic theology stem from five points known as TULIP:
 - Total depravity (from birth to adulthood, all are in sin until God elects them for regeneration)
 - Unconditional election (predestined for Eternal Life without any effort, only by God's choice)
 - Limited atonement (the Savior's atonement only covered the few whom God elected)
 - Irresistible Grace (humans have no ability or agency to resist His choice of election through grace)
 - Perseverance of the Saints (those whom God elects are the saints who will persevere eternally)By the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the new Colonies were saturated with this belief. The majority of Americans believed in Calvinism's passive election waiting and willing to submit oneself to Christ and seeking the Holy Spirit's call. Mark A. Noll, *America's God: from Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (NYC, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 166. Also, see Lynne H. Wilson, "A New Pneumatology: Comparing Joseph Smith's Doctrine of the Spirit with His Contemporaries and the Bible," *BYU Studies*, 51.1 (Winter, 2012).
6. Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 153–155.
7. As mentioned earlier, just because Paul is included among the "apostles" does not mean he was a member of the "Quorum of the Twelve." This definition of apostle is further complicated when we read a modern revelation to Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer from Joseph Smith in 1829, "I speak unto you, even as unto Paul mine apostle, for you are called even with that same calling with which he was called" (D&C 18:9) These two men were asked to seek out the Twelve Apostles, but they were not called to the original quorum in 1835 (D&C 107).
8. The *Annals* of Tacitus 15.44 recorded how Nero blamed Christians for the fire he started in Rome in AD 64: "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.” Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, 3 ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), Chapter 7, “Christ or Caesar.” Most persecution was local until the third century. In the Roman government, “religion could be tolerated only as long as it contributed to the stability of the state . . . [There was] no rival for the allegiance of its subjects. The state was the highest good in a union of state and religion.”

9. Bruce C. Hafen, *The Broken Heart*, 50; also *Liahona*, “Beauty for Ashes,” April 1997.
10. Neal A Maxwell, *All these things shall give thee experience*, (SLC: Deseret Book, 2007) 30.
11. President Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” General Conference April 2019.
12. Elder Larry R. Lawrence, “What Lack I Yet?” General Conference October 2015.
13. Bercot, *Early Christian Beliefs*, 606.
14. Bruce R McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, (SLC: Deseret Book, 1958), 675. “Sanctification is to become clean, pure, and spotless; to be free from the blood and sins of the world to become a new creature of Holy Ghost, one whose body has been renewed by the rebirth of the Spirit.”
15. RSV, *Navarre Bible: The Revelation to John* (NYC, NY: Four Court Press, 2005), 42.
16. Ken Campbell, ed., *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 143. Christian Laes claims that less than fifty percent of those lived fifteen years. *Children in the Roman Empire: Outsiders Within* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
17. Mishnah, *Ketuboth*, 4.4.
18. Russel M. Nelson, “We can do better and be better,” General Conference April 2019.
19. Ezra Taft Benson, “To the Boys and to the Men,” *Liahona* January 1999, 66; *Ensign*, November 1998, 54.
20. Ezra Taft Benson, “Prepare Ye,” *Ensign* January 1974, 69; “Getting a year’s supply is as important as the council to get on Noah’s ark.” Or did you hear Pres. Hinkley first tell the priesthood session to “pay off your mortgages as soon as you can.” Then two or three years later he repeated it to the general congregation at conference. A couple of years later in 2009 the economy crashed followed by September 11, 2011. Was that prophecy? How about FHE and Sabbath observance?
21. To emphasize the message of ministering or serving, I especially love the WEB translation of Mark 10:45, “The Son of Man also did not come to be waited upon, but to wait on others.”
22. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 84.
23. The Epistle known as Ephesians teaches that Christ becomes our temple cornerstone, apostles as the foundations, and members fitting in to their places as a holy temple of the Lord (Ephesians 2:21).
24. Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for our Lives,” *Ensign* May 2018.
25. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 11–12; 62, 65, 72; 113–114; 366–368.
26. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph*, 21. “We may look for angels and receive their ministrations, but we are to try the Spirits and prove them, for it is often the case that men make a mistake in regard to these things. . . . Every Spirit, or vision, or singing, is not of God. The devil is an orator; he is powerful; he took our Savior on to a pinnacle of the Temple, and kept Him in the wilderness for forty days. The gift of discerning Spirits will be given to the Presiding Elder. Pray for him that he may have this gift. Speak not in the gift of tongues without understanding it, or without interpretation” (Smith,

History 3.391–392).

27. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph*, 21. George A. Smith, one of Joseph's closest companions and cousins observed, "There was no point upon which the Prophet Joseph dwelt more than the discerning of Spirits." "We may look for angels and receive their ministrations, but we are to try the Spirits and prove them, for it is often the case that men make a mistake in regard to these things. . . . Every Spirit, or vision, or singing, is not of God. The devil is an orator; he is powerful; he took our Savior on to a pinnacle of the Temple, and kept Him in the wilderness for forty days. The gift of discerning Spirits will be given to the Presiding Elder. Pray for him that he may have this gift. Speak not in the gift of tongues without understanding it, or without interpretation" (Smith, *History*, 3.391–392).
28. *Ibid.*, 4.573. Joseph Smith continued, "As we have noticed before, the great difficulty lies in the ignorance of the nature of spirits, of the laws by which they are governed, and the signs by which they may be known; if it requires the Spirit of God to know the things of God; and the spirit of the devil can only be unmasked through that medium, then it follows as a natural consequence that unless some person or persons have a communication, or revelation from God, unfolding to them the operation of the spirit, they must eternally remain ignorant of these principles; for I contend that if one man cannot understand these things but by the Spirit of God, ten thousand men cannot; it is alike out of the reach of the wisdom of the learned, the tongue of the eloquent, the power of the mighty. And we shall at last have to come to this conclusion, whatever we may think of revelation, that without it we can neither know nor understand anything of God, or the devil; and however unwilling the world may be to acknowledge this principle, it is evident from the multifarious creeds and notions concerning this matter that they understand nothing of this principle, and it is equally as plain that without a divine communication they must remain in ignorance" (4.573–574).
29. Brigham Young, and John A. Widstoe eds., *Discourses of Brigham Young*, (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1954), 117.
30. John Calvin (1509–1564) reformed Christianity by emphasizing five beliefs known as T.U. L. I. P. or Calvinism: 1) Total Depravity from the original sin; 2) Unconditional Election; 3) Limited Atonement 4) Irresistible Grace; 5) Perseverance of the Saints. Joseph Smith denounced all five of these foundational points of Reformed Christianity.
31. The KJV translation speaks of their belief that the elect were saved or damned without any mortal effort. By honoring God with complete control, agency was removed from their perspective. See on their part and the damned cannot change God's mind. The *Westminster Confession* writings on election, which taught that God chooses to save only certain mortals: "As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, fore-ordained all the means thereunto." *Westminster Confession* 3.6. Again in 12.1 and 3: "All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death . . . this effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit."
32. "Brigham Young, "This is Our Duty," *Journal of Discourses*, 9:3.
33. Beverly R. Gaventa and David Petersen, *New Interpreters Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 760.
34. Institute Manual



1 AND 2 TIMOTHY; PHILEMON

PASTORAL LETTERS

1 TIMOTHY

Pastoral Letters

The “Pastoral Letters” is the title given to four letters written to Timothy and Titus, as *pastors* or shepherds of local or regional flocks of Christians. All three letters claim Pauline authorship. The more experienced apostle wrote to guide his beloved younger leaders. He gives Titus and Timothy instructions on how to supervise their regional responsibilities: Timothy in Ephesus, and Titus on the isle of Crete. The traditional dates for these letters are after Paul’s first Roman imprisonment, between AD 62 and 66 (1 Timothy 1:3). 2 Timothy appears to fall later in a harsher imprisonment.

Paul’s Tie to Titus, and Timothy’s Family

Paul may have been involved in the conversion of the Greek Titus and half-Greek Timothy as he refers to them as his spiritual “sons.”

- **Titus** was present at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:2–22) and is mentioned by name in 2 Corinthians 2–3, and Galatians 2:3. Paul became the spiritual father to him (Titus 1:4).
- **Timothy** is mentioned in nine Epistles and as a co–author of five. He joined Paul as a missionary halfway through Paul’s second apostolic mission when in Lystra. Timothy joined Paul’s missionary force shortly thereafter and became his closest companion (Acts 16:2; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2).
- **Eunice and Lois**, Timothy’s mother and grandmother are highlighted as women of great faith who knew their scriptures. These Jewish-Christian converts shared their faith and love of scripture with Timothy in “his infancy” (Acts 16:1; 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15). Paul met them as family in Lystra, during his second apostolic mission.

Outline: 1 Timothy

1:1–16 Paul’s Charge to Timothy

- 1:1–2 Greetings
- 1:3–7 Confront the False Teachers
- 1:8–11 The Church is Here to Help Sinners
- 1:12–16 Paul is Proof of God’s Forgiveness
- 1:17–20 **1st Hymn:** To the King Eternal

2–3 Practical Instructions, part 1

- 2:1–9 Directions for Prayer
- 2:9–15 Corrupt Teachers
- 3:1–7 Qualifications to Be a Bishop
- 3:8–13 Qualifications to be a Deacon
- 3:14–16 Reasons for Paul’s Instructions
- 3:16 2nd Hymn: A Story of Jesus

4–6a Practical Instructions, part 2

- 4:1–16 Correcting False Teaching
- 5:1–16 Carrying for the Widows
- 5:17–25 Corrections for Men
- 6:1–2a Christian slaves

6:2b–16 Timothy’s Commission

- 6:2b–14 Confront the False Teachers
- 6:15–16 3rd Hymn: Honor to the Only King
- 6:17–18 Charge to the Rich and Timothy

Themes

- Beware of False Teachers Usurping Authority
- Church Organization—Priesthood Offices,
- Christian Belief Shapes Christian Life

Greetings

1 Timothy 1:1-2

1 Timothy 1:1-2 “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God . . . unto Timothy, *my own son in the faith*: Grace, mercy, *and* peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord” Just as is in eight other Pauline epistles, the author introduces himself as Paul, the apostle. Then he acknowledges his Master, the head of the church, Jesus Christ. Paul introduces himself most often as a steward, “sent” by Jesus, who continued to run the church from heaven. This is the third assignment mentioned for Timothy (1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2).

Confront False Teachers Against Unsound Doctrine

1 Timothy 1:3-7

1 Timothy 1:3 “stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer” (NIV) Timothy held some ecclesiastical responsibility in the region of Ephesus. Paul knew that area well as he served there for three years during his third apostolic mission (Acts 19:1, 20:31). Tradition holds that the apostle John also lived and presided there at one time.¹ Even after prolonged periods of service by those two apostles and then Timothy, we still read of an apostasy, like a “misty fog,” seeping into the new church.²

Paul writes with an urgent tone throughout the whole letter to correct doctrine. He asks Timothy to “command” or “charge” (KJV) the false teachers to stop their corruption of the church. In nearly every chapter of 1 Timothy, the author warns against the problem of false and inappropriate teachers (e.g., 1 Timothy 1:3; 2:12; 3:2; 4:11; 6:2, 3).³

1 Timothy 1:4 “nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith” (NKJV) Paul specifically attacks fables, “myths” (NIV), or “senseless stories” (CEV), and “endless genealogies.” They are both contaminated with worthless speculation and a waste of time. He is not denouncing what we define as genealogy work. The New and Old Testaments are filled with genealogies as an important link (i.e. Matthew 1, Luke 2:36; 3; Romans 1:3; 11:1; etc.).

Paul condemns false or foolish genealogies twice (here and Titus 3:9). Both times we assume people were seeking their genealogies for the wrong purposes. This Jewish practice may have given the Jewish converts a sense of superiority as they traced their lineage to the prophets or kings. However, in a church predominately of Gentile Christians, it may have made them feel inferior. Or, perhaps Paul just wanted them to stop searching for important distant relatives for vanity’s sake. We do know there was vicarious baptism work going on (1 Corinthians 15:29), but this was not for that purpose. Paul mentions that the “endless genealogies” were not edifying but fostered speculation. Paul wanted to foster things that would edify or provide “divine training” (RSV). Paul’s warning instructs all Christians to carefully test one’s teachers to make sure they are trustworthy servants of God.

1 Timothy 1:5 “Now the goal of our instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith” (CSB) Again Paul touches on one of his favorite themes, “charity” (KJV) or pure love. He mentions it in every letter we have attributed to Paul. Even when condemning falsehoods, Paul asks that it be done with a pure heart filled with love.

1 Timothy 1:6–7 “Some have strayed from these ways and turned aside to empty talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not understand what they are saying” (BSB) Paul points out evidence of the apostasy here as new Christian teachers leave their foundation of Christ to teach “janglings” (KJV), “fruitless discussion” (JB), or “meaningless talk” (NIV). Paul may also be speaking against intellectuals, Gnostics, or Judaizers.

1 Timothy 1:8–10 “We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for . . . whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine” (NIV) Paul may be referring again to the Law of Moses. *If it is used lawfully, it can produce good.* However, as a lesser law for a people not ready or willing to live a higher law, it was used inappropriately as well. Many laws are for the weak (i.e. Alma 25:15–16; D&C 89, “for the weakest of all saints.”) But some, like consecration and sealings, are for the noble saints. (For more information on the list of specific laws see commentary on Romans 1:26–27; 1 Corinthians 6:9, etc.)

Paul is Proof of God’s Forgiveness

1 Timothy 1:12–16

1 Timothy 1:12–13 “I thank Christ . . . appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a . . . violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief” (NIV) Jesus “hath enabled me” (KJV), or “given me strength (RSV), and “made me equal to the task (NEB).” Paul was completely changed from a deceived blasphemer to a forgiven saint (Acts 9:4–7).

1 Timothy 1:15 “The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love . . . Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst” (NIV) We are all included in the category of the sinners that Jesus came to save. Paul calls himself the chief sinner. In the Book of Mormon, King Benjamin reminded everyone to humbly realize, “Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all” (Mosiah 4:19).

1 Timothy 1:16 “. . . in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life” (NKJV) Paul became an example of the power of the atonement. After living as a vile sinner, he still found forgiveness through repentance and through the Redeemer. Jesus showed Paul long-suffering, and now Paul is learning the same lesson.

First Prayer: King Eternal

1 Timothy 1:17

1 Timothy 1:17 “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen” This is the only verse in the New Testament where God is described as invisible without adding that He made Himself known in Christ or the work of His creation. In Greek the word for “invisible/*aoratos*” can also be translated “unseen” (see Colossians 1:15). But even that does not accurately describe the word. It means *invisible* to the physical or “naked” eye, but figuratively, it is seen as a *spiritual reality* through *faith*. In the New Testament, unseen and faith are often connected (Romans 1:17–20; 1 Timothy 1:17–19; Hebrews 11:27). “The antonym of faith is not fear—but sight!”⁴ Paul also probably heard Stephen’s witness that he “saw God” on “the right hand” (Acts 7:55).

1 Timothy 1:18–19 “Timothy, my child, I entrust you with this command in keeping with the previous prophecies about you . . . that by them you may fight the good fight . . .” Timothy has either received a blessing or had prophecies made about him (perhaps like our patriarchal blessings) that have given Paul the confidence that he will faithfully be able to carry out his command.

1 Timothy 1:19–20 “Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck . . . Hymenaeus and Alexander” Paul had dealt with other teachers or leaders who had caused trouble. Those two men he names have “shipwrecked” or been “delivered unto Satan” meaning they were probably excommunicated.

1 TIMOTHY 2

Directions for Prayer

1 Timothy 2:1–8

1 Timothy 2:1–3 “I urge . . . that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and . . . holiness” (NIV) Paul exhorts (KJV) the saints to pray with hearts full of gratitude for everyone—even for the political rulers. “All people” includes those that are hard to get along with, or those for whom we are not grateful. If we pray for our enemies, our hearts may also change so that “we may live” in tranquility; “*éremos*/quiet/without needless commotion or disturbances.” The word for “peaceable/*hésuchios*” (KJV) means “steady (settled) due to a *divinely-inspired inner calmness*.”⁵ As we pray for peace, the Lord may not answer the prayer with an absence of warfare, but we can feel the Spirit’s peace which allows the saints to maintain hope and faith to trust in God in order to weather the storms of life.

1 Timothy 2:4–6 “Who is willing to have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth which is in Christ Jesus, who is that Only Begotten, Son of God, and ordained to be a Mediator between God and man; who is one God, and hath power over all men” (JST in *italics*). The addition of “is willing” reminds us that our Savior will never force anyone, but respects choice or agency (unlike Satan). The JST also adds four titles and roles of the Savior to verse four. They seem to focus the call for prayers on the source of power connected with prayer. Paul notes our relationship to Jesus as Mediator (also see Galatians 3:19–20; Hebrews 9:15; 12:24; etc.). The concept of the Mediator as a “go-between” to overcome alienation and bring God the Father and repentant mortals back together is motivating and humbling. (Outside of the bible, Jesus is also identified as the mediator in D&C 76:69; 107:19; and 2 Nephi 2:9).

1 Timothy 2:8 “I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” Paul singles out “men/male/aner” on how to pray appropriately and respectfully. Praying with “lifting up holy hands” offers a physical demonstration of drawing on the powers of heaven (and has temple symbolism, too). The men also needed direction on praying “without anger or dissension.” (NIV). The Lord taught his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount to prepare for prayer by making peace with our fellowmen, and to cleanse our hearts before prayer (Matthew 5:23–24).

Corrupt teachers

1 Timothy 2:9–15

This is a puzzling passage because the Epistles attributed to Paul speak positively in at least twelve examples of women teaching or preaching in the church.⁶ Unlike the positive counsel, this passage seems inconsistent. As it reads in the KJV, it reduces the women’s opportunity for participation in church services. Either this section is incongruous with the other dozen examples, or we have misunderstood the author’s intent. We must again ask ourselves, what problem was the author trying to address? In this letter, Paul’s main concern was to stop false teachers as well as those who usurped priesthood authority (1 Timothy 1:6–8; 4:12; 5:17).⁷ That may shed light on to whom and why he gave this direction on women’s worship.

1 Timothy 2:9–10 “In like manner also . . . adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works” His next words act as a linking phrase to address women. He does not continue his advice on prayer, probably because praying in anger or with doubts was not a problem for the women. Instead, he warns against prioritizing appearance and fashion.⁸ The mention of gold and pearls also suggests Paul is talking about a problem with wealthy women (1 Timothy 5: 6, 13; 6:9, 17). Paul contrasts striving for eternal holiness with superficial materialistic priorities in women.

Some of the words in the KJV are archaic and can lead to misunderstandings throughout this difficult passage, but it is evident that the author wants Christian women to replace worldliness and self-promotion with selfless service. Starting with the KJV phrase “shamefacedness and sobriety,” a few twentieth century translations can help clarify 1 Timothy 2:9.

1 TIMOTHY 2:9

KJV	JB	NAS	RSV	WELCH-HALL
Shamefacedness	Quietly	Modestly	Modestly	In good taste,
And	And	And	And	In a manner
Sobriety	Modestly	Idscreeetly	Sensibly	That brings honorable respect

This must have been a concern to Paul because four times in the same letter, he cautions those who tried to impress others by their appearance (1 Timothy 5:6, 13; 6:9, 17). He contrasts eternal and superficial priorities.

1 Timothy 2:10 “but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God” It appears that the problem of women’s materialistic desires and prideful attitudes was only tangential to the larger problem of misplaced values and false teaching that infiltrated the church community (1 Timothy 6:3–5). His specific concern with women’s hair may stem from the multigenerational Jewish custom that required women to hide or cover their hair.⁹ Christian women had the freedom of going outside their homes without their hair covered. Some converts may have overreacted with their new freedom and concentrated more time and money on their hair adornments than on more worthwhile charitable activities. Or, perhaps part of the problem was that male Jewish-Christian leaders (possibly even the converted Pharisee Paul) found the women’s new freedom in dress and uncovered hair too startling. In either case, Paul hopes that women might be adorned in good works rather than spending their time and money on self-aggrandizement.

1 Timothy 2:11 “Let the woman learn . . .” Narrowing in on the first phrase of the verse, the text acknowledges that women *may learn religious topics*. This was a radical departure from the Pharisaic instruction.¹⁰ This was a positive cultural breakthrough.

“woman learn in silence with all subjection” The second phrase sounds like the pharisaical records that encourage women not to speak outside of their homes.¹¹ Christian women actively joining religious worship and offering opinions or asking questions was a drastic change. Many Jewish converts may not have been accustomed to this new practice.

Nonetheless, the verse contradicts Paul’s earlier encouragement: “every woman that prayeth and prophesieth...” (1 Corinthians 11:5), “Aged women . . . teach the young women” (Titus 2:3–4); and “There are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’” (1 Corinthians 12:20–21). In many letters Paul repeats that all are needed to serve and build the kingdom in different ways.

There are two words that need a closer look, silence and subjection. “Silence/*hésuchia*” means stillness or quietness, “implying calm; for the believer.”¹² “Subjection/*hupotagé*,” is from “submit/*hupotassó*” which was discussed in Ephesians 5:21–22 as a voluntary attitude of cooperation (or in a military setting, lining up behind the leader). Everyone will learn better when he or she has a humble or submissive attitude as a learner. The Spirit can teach or witness of truth when a seeker submits reverently to God.

1 TIMOTHY 2:11

KJV	NIV	NEB	JB	WELCH–HALL
Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection	A woman should learn in quietness and full of submission	A woman must be a learner listening quietly and with due submission	During instruction a woman should be quiet and respectful	Let women learn in serenity, with deference in peace of soul

The recurrence of words such as “quiet,” or “peace,” and “respectful” implies that irreverence may have been a problem in some church services. Allowing women to bring their children to worship services would have added to the problem of irreverence (or at least made sounds that the men were unaccustomed to hearing in that setting and may have found distracting). However, Paul does not single out women for this problem. An earlier letter reads: “We beseech you, brethren . . . study to be quiet, and to do your own business” (1 Thessalonians 4:10, 11). Similarly, in modern scripture, “Learn of me, and listen to my words; walk in the meekness of my Spirit, and you shall have peace in me” (D&C 19:23).¹³

Looking in latter-day revelation specifically to women we find even more encouragement: “[She] shall be ordained . . . to expound scriptures and to exhort the church” (D&C 25:7). President Spencer W. Kimball’s prophecy encouragement continues to be quoted regularly: “It will be . . . female exemplars of the Church [who] will be a *significant force* in both the numerical and the spiritual growth of the Church in the last days.”¹⁴ I am grateful for a living prophet to direct us when biblical passages no longer apply.

1 Timothy 2:12 “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence”

This verse echoes rabbinic statements from the late Second Temple era and beyond when women were not allowed to teach or speak in public, and sat separated from men in the synagogue, with no authority to testify.¹⁵ Recall how the Lord and His apostles called Christian women to witness and testify of Jesus as the Son of God.

Just a few chapters later, and in the other pastoral Epistles, Paul calls for both men and women to become committed teachers and he attacks all false teachers, not just the gender of the instructor:

- 1 Timothy 6:3, 5; “If any man [*ei tis/whoever, anyone,*” male or female] teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness . . . from such withdraw thyself” (KJV)
- 2 Timothy 2:2 “The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men [*anthropos/human, female or male*], who shall be able to teach others also.”
- Titus 2:3–4 “The aged women likewise, that *they be* in behaviour as becometh holiness . . . teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women . . .”

This was a vote of confidence in mature women that they had wisdom and were capable of teaching with the Spirit of God. By juxtaposing these examples of women teaching with his complaint of inappropriate teaching, it appears that Paul worried about falsehoods, not gender. By looking at all of Paul’s canonized Epistles, we find him inviting all to participate and teach, because “there is neither Jew nor Greek . . . male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). In this light, I assume that Paul referred to a specific problem. It sounds as though the real issue here is usurping authority. Women need to support their leaders who are called of God as leaders even now.

1 Timothy 2:13–14 “For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (NASB) The author concludes his argument by referencing the creation story from Genesis, with a punch at Eve’s transgression (Genesis 3:1–13). Many interpretations of Adam and Eve’s story over the centuries have become the rationale behind male and female relationships in Judaism. The tone of this verse fits into the thinking from the late Second Temple era where we find several derogatory statements about Eve.¹⁶ Instead of honoring Eve as the one who brought life, they emphasized: “through her we all die.”¹⁷ Josephus wrote that God cursed Adam in the Garden of Eden “because he weakly submitted to the counsel of his wife.”¹⁸ These facts make me wonder if the verse, as it stands, was written or even intended by Paul.

In contrast, most of the New Testament honors Adam and Eve as important pieces in the puzzle of earth life. Paul writes: “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). Luke traced Jesus’ genealogy through his adopted father Joseph’s lineage back to Adam.¹⁹ Nonetheless, these verses, 1 Timothy 2:13–14, do not seem to honor our first parents either. The text seems to force a cause and effect relationship between Eve partaking of the fruit and women not teaching or acting with authority.

The Catholic scholar Raymond Brown observed, “If the false teachers were making such women their targets, that would explain them seeking monetary gain (6:5). Possibly women who became spokespersons of the false teachings would be the object of Paul’s prohibitions against speaking in church. Women who did this were compared to Eve . . . to clarify the false teachings on marriage (4:3).”²⁰

This verse seems out of harmony with Paul’s other statements and those from our living prophets. Unlike most Christians, we honor Adam and Eve as a prophet and prophetess, among the noblest of all mortals. Modern apostles have called the fall of Adam and Eve one of the “pillars of eternity.”²¹ Unlike the rest of the world, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints honors Eve for making her choice, as the initiator of mortality.²²

1 Timothy 2:15 “Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety” Bearing a child does not bring salvation; as Paul drills, only Christ Jesus “hath saved us” (2 Timothy 1:9). God designed Adam and Eve in a way to create offspring, and to raise them in a family unit, “in faith and charity.”²³ Joseph Smith made a notable change from “she” to “they.” This gives both parents the responsibility and blessing of childbearing. Parents have the responsibility to obey all of God’s commandments, which include bringing children into the world, but this does not mean that one without children cannot be saved.²⁴

1 TIMOTHY 2:15 (EMPHASIS ADDED)

KJV

Notwithstanding *she* shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

JST

Nowwithstanding *they* shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

Akin to Joseph Smith’s emphasis on having both parents join in God’s work of redemption through childbearing, Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of The Twelve restates the mutual relationship of husbands’ and wives’ roles in both childbearing and priesthood power:

Men and women have different but equally valued roles. Just as a woman cannot conceive a child without a man, so a man cannot fully exercise the power of the priesthood to establish an eternal family without a woman. In other words, in the eternal perspective, *both the procreative power and the priesthood power are shared by husband and wife*. And as husband and wife, a man and a woman should strive to follow our Heavenly Father. The Christian virtues of love, humility, and patience should be their focus as they seek the blessings of the priesthood in their lives and for their family²⁵ (emphasis added).

Paul's message also speaks of women's special role in God's plan as co-creators. In this role, English translators emphasize two quite different interpretations for the offspring. There are many ways to interpret scripture correctly. A powerful understanding of our Savior and Redeemer as the infant child born as the Son of God, comes from the ISV description of "the Child."²⁶

1 TIMOTHY 2:15

WYC

But she shall be saved by generation of children, if she dwell perfectly in faith, and love and holiness, with sanctity with self-restraint.

NASB

But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and along with good judgment.

ISV

Even though she will be saved through the birth of the Child, if they continue in faith, love, and holiness soberness

The tenor of 1 Timothy 2:11–15 (KJV) is less respectful to women and is thus inconsistent with the Lord's example, apostolic writings, and words of modern apostles. Most of the New Testament speaks of women who valiantly served the Lord and dynamically helped build His church with the Apostles. Those sister saints were emancipated and empowered by the truth that set them free (John 8:32). When we come across these puzzling passages it helps to keep them in context and balanced with the majority of positive statements.²⁷

1 TIMOTHY 3

Bishops

1 Timothy 3:1–7

1 Timothy 3:1 "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" This verse has been adapted by those who have served as bishops to include, "he desireth a good work OUT."²⁸ Paul advocates strong central leadership, and gives Timothy a practical profile on how to select bishops for the growing church in Ephesus. The standards for a bishop become a moral measurement for church leaders and even members. Leaders and members were both expected to live up to the same standard as all volunteered to serve as needed. The Greek word is also translated, "bishop/*episkopé*/overseer/supervisor/a visiting judge."

1 Timothy 3:2–5 "A bishop then must be blameless . . ." The church organization grew under the apostles' direction. The apostles called local leaders, including Bishops. The qualifications to serve as bishop are beautiful (BSB translation, unless noted):

- Above reproach
- Husband of but one wife
- Temperate
- Self-controlled
- Respectable
- Hospitable
- Able to teach
- Not dependent on wine
- Not violent but gentle
- Peaceable
- Does not love money
- Manages his household
- Obedient and respectful children (CEV) or children in subjection with reverence (NHEB)
- Not a recent convert or prideful
- A good reputation with outsiders
- Will not fall into disgrace

Directing others starts with directing self. Controlling temper, liquor, greed—all areas of self-control are summed up in “sober” (KJV). Paul hoped that Bishops could be successful family leaders first.²⁹ Gently reaching out to his own children was a prerequisite of being trusted with a group of the Lord’s children.³⁰ In a society filled with wife and child abuse, the Christian ideal sets a new standard. Any abuse would disqualify a man from leadership in the Lord’s church. In restored scripture, we learn that Bishops are given the ability “to discern all those gifts” of the Spirit in order to organize the saints (1 Corinthians 12:7; D&C 46:27).

1 Timothy 3:5 “for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?” The Pastoral letters show the family as the first unit of ministering in the church. Even in early Christianity we see that leadership and teaching in the church back up leadership and teaching at home, but do not replace it.

Deacons

1 Timothy 3:8-15

1 Timothy 3:8–12 “In the same way, deacons are to be . . .” Paul is using two different words here that are both translated, “deacon” in these four verses. The Greek noun for male and female, “deacon/*diakonos*/servant/minister” is a word meaning a helper (also see Romans 13:4; 15:8; 16:1; etc.). Verse 10 uses it as a verb, “*diakoneó*/to actively serve,” or literally, “kicking up dust’ because one is ‘on the move.” This list of attributes is for male deacons:

- Worthy of respect
- Sincere
- Not indulging in much wine
- Not pursuing dishonest gain
- Keep hold of deep truths of faith
- A clear conscience
- Be tested
- Faithful to his wife
- Manage his children and household well

The list is similar, but shorter for a deacon than a bishop. Both were offices for older men. Likewise, Jewish priests did not begin their service until 30, and Levites at 25 years old (Numbers 4:3). Deacons were also older at the beginning of the Restoration. The age was lowered when the church became stable with regular supervision from priesthood leadership. These two offices are part of the same organization that both the primitive and restored church share (Article of Faith 6).

1 Timothy 3:11 “**In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything**” (NIV) The female equivalent of servants or ministers in the church have a shorter list; they are more general and cover broader topics. Different translations include “sober” for temperate. There is one unique qualification for female servants. Timothy needs to make sure there are no “malicious gossips” (NASB). In the Greek context, the word for “women,” may refer to either the deacons’ wives or women who were also women in leadership roles to “minister as servants” or “deaconesses,” such as was Phebe (Romans 16:1, KJV, ISV). This sounds similar to our female leadership roles in the restored church.

Reasons for Paul’s Instructions

1 Timothy 3:14-16

1 Timothy 3:14 “**Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know . . .**” Paul planned to come to Ephesus, so we assume this is an earlier imprisonment than in 2 Timothy. We also do not know if he ever made it back to Ephesus.

1 Timothy 3:16 “**The pillar and ground of the truth is . . . God was manifest in the flesh . . .**” (JST) The Prophet Joseph moved this phrase from the end of verse 15 to the beginning of 16 to act as the introduction to the poem or hymn that followed:

He appeared in the flesh,
 was vindicated by the Spirit,
 was seen by angels,

was preached among the nations,
was believed on in the world,
was taken up in glory (NIV).

1 TIMOTHY 4

Instructions Part 1: Dealing with False Doctrines

1 Timothy 4:1-6

1 Timothy 4:1-2 “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow **deceiving spirits . . . through hypocritical liars**” (NIV) The Spirit has warned Paul of the coming apostasy when Christians will follow “seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (KJV). The inspiration seems applicable to many periods of history. False teachers have deliberately lied so often that their consciences no longer bother them with their hypocrisy.

1 Timothy 4:3-5 “*men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared*” (NASB) The false teachers may have been Gnostics who taught that God’s people should not contaminate themselves with physical things (i.e. marriage, foods, creation, crucifixion, resurrection, etc.). Paul’s problem was not with the Jewish attitudes, but the Christian heresies that originated from the Jews.³¹ This is a good verse to add to the others on Paul’s positive support of marriage (i.e. 1 Corinthians 9:5; Philip 4:3; etc.)

The food restrictions were also of Jewish origin. Since the Jerusalem Council though, Christians had not kept the kosher food restrictions (except for food sacrificed to idols, and blood—including an animal that was strangled so that the blood remained within, Acts 15:29). The KJV, “meat,” is the general term for “foods” (RSV, JB, NAS). Paul wants Timothy to teach that “no food is to be rejected” (JB). As long as different food is received with thanksgiving, it is sanctified. This was a radical departure from the Jewish food laws.

Instructions for Godly Living

1 Timothy 4:6-10

1 Timothy 4:6 “If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus . . . and of the good teaching” (NIV) Timothy probably served in a role equivalent to a Stake President or regional authority. He edifies the local leaders with spiritually nourishing good words of faith and true doctrines. Paul opposes wasting time, arguing over foolish ideas—silly myths,” godless legends, and old wives’ tales (BSB). Instead, Paul hopes that disciples will discipline (NAS) or train (RSV) themselves in godliness. Likewise, living prophets have recently encouraged, “My prayer for today is that I may help you understand that greater happi-

ness comes from greater personal holiness so that you will act upon that belief;” and “Holiness of the Lord must pervade our being.”³²

1 Timothy 4:8–9 “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” Paul exposes the superficiality of the Greco-Roman priority of muscles and money (which resurfaces in our own world). He does not oppose taking care of our bodies but puts it in perspective. It is also helpful to remember how physically demanding daily life was in the ancient world—just fetching water, cooking, and heating one’s home required a daily workout. The problem was the Greco-Romans’ over attention to physical prowess that overshadowed more worthwhile pursuits.

1 Timothy 4:10 “That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God” (NIV) Part of being a disciple requires laboring for delayed gratification. Some of God’s promises are immediate, but most are to come. “Suffer reproach” (KJV), means: “especially strive, above all struggle, particularly battling.” Paul’s message is to trust in the Lord.

“the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe” (NIV) Is the atonement more efficacious to those who repent? (D&C 19:16–17). Immortality is a free gift to all mortals through Jesus’ Atonement, but those who deeply believe and “strive” will receive Eternal Life. In that sense, those who remain repentant and are valiant in their testimonies can receive more of the Savior’s atoning gifts (D&C 76). Those who humbly seek redemption can find it—and its accompanying joy and forgiveness—in this life or the next.

The Leader as An Example

1 Timothy 4:11–16

1 Timothy 4:11–12 “Command and teach these things. Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers . . .” (NIV) Timothy was old enough to join Paul as a companion on his second mission ten to fifteen years before this (around AD 49). He has been Paul’s companion for the better part of thirteen years. He was probably close to thirty at this time. That was still considered young. In the Jewish culture, thirty is the age of authority when a priest may begin working in the temple. Paul encourages him to put his energies into becoming an example of the believers regardless of his age. This includes a concise list of general commandments that Timothy needs to teach as part of the higher laws of Christ’s Gospel.

- in speech
- in conduct
- in love
- in faith
- in purity

1 Timothy 4:13 “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching” (NIV) English translations all mention something about publicly reading the scriptures. Scriptures usually referred to the Torah or Law (Genesis to Deuteronomy), the Prophets (Isaiah to Malachi), and the Writings (Judges, Psalms, etc.) at this time, but they may have added some form of Jesus’ sayings, and apostolic correspondence by then. They may have distributed apostolic letters and the sayings of Jesus, but the New Testament collection was not organized until decades later, and the canon of twenty-seven was not closed until AD 367.³³ As scriptures were an expensive and scarce gift, each community usually shared a few scrolls of Old Testament books depending on their size and wealth. Whole communities gathered to hear the scriptures, not only because they were scarce, but also because many of the poor were illiterate. This way all could learn.

1 Timothy 4:14 “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands” Timothy’s gift is often understood as his calling and ordination to serve in the priesthood leadership. If that is the case, then this verse shows that priesthood authority was delegated by the laying on of hands by the “presbytery” (which means “the council of elders,” RSV, or “body of elders, NIV). If that is the case, then this verse includes the two processes involved in callings—first inspiration or “prophecy,” then ordination (as we saw in Acts 13:1-3 when Barnabas and Paul were called as missionaries). In Acts 20:28 the Ephesian Elders were told “the Holy Ghost made you overseers.” We also see Paul’s two-step ordination of inspiration and the laying on of hands in Hebrews 7. Timothy’s gift may also have been a gift of the Spirit or ability that God gave Timothy through a blessing or setting apart—such as the gift of healing or administrations (see 1 Corinthians 12:5, 9). The gifts of the Spirit are only given to bless others, not for selfish desires (D&C 46:9).

1 Timothy 4:15 “Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all” As we meditate on our callings, blessings, and gifts of the Spirit we can receive inspiration on how to progress and use them to bless. Other translations have less to do with pondering and more to do with action. For example, “Practice these things” (HCSB), “Be diligent in these matters” (BSB), or “Take pains with these things” (NASB).

1 Timothy 4:16 “Pay close attention to your life and to your teaching. Persevere in these things, for by so doing you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (BSB) When Paul asks Timothy to “take heed” or “Watch your life” (NIV), he asks for the daily refining or purifying of repentance. When we live the doctrines of Christ, we also bless those within our sphere of influence.

1 TIMOTHY 5

Leaders Duties Concerning the Elderly and Widows

1 Timothy 5:1-16

1 Timothy 5:1-2 “Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity” (NIV) Paul instructed Timothy to lead with love, respect, and closeness. This counsel shares themes with what the Lord taught the Prophet Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail, “. . . only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned . . . showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reprov'd, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy” (D&C 122:41–43).

1 Timothy 5:3–4 “Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents . . .” These verses on widows are difficult to understand in the KJV, but with a little historical background they show the generosity and priorities of the church leaders. Paul dedicates thirteen sentences to their care. Caring for the widows was also a concern in the early Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1–7). The Old Testament was also full of direction to care for widows (“despise not thy mother when she is old” (Proverbs 23:22). Mosaic laws also called for the community to care for widows.³⁴

It sounds as if the local Christian churches provided for older widows who had no family connections but encouraged them to act responsibly by filling their days with service. The younger widows were to marry. As most women were not educated to earn a living (or even literate), so widowhood could lead to abject poverty. Culturally, women were allowed to work in some jobs, but the work earned only a meager income.³⁵ Also adding to the financial burden, Caesar Augustus implemented a law across the Roman Empire to encourage population growth. If a widow (or divorcee) could still bear children, and had not born three, she had two years to remarry or pay a higher tax.³⁶

1 Timothy 5:5–6 “The widow who is truly in need and left all alone puts her hope in God . . . But she who lives for pleasure is dead even while she is still alive” Paul refers to “widow indeed” (KJV) to mean one destitute without any family around to help. Those widows who are poor and alone should look to God and His church for help. However, if they are gossips and pleasure-seekers, they need to reform in order to find help from the church.

1 Timothy 5:7–8 “Give these instructions to the believers . . . If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” This Epistle is filled

with a call for productive labor, starting within the family (starting with Paul's own example). Greek philosophers idealized the contemplative life. But Christians, Paul taught, should spend their time serving God by serving their fellowmen.

1 Timothy 5:9–10 “No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds . . .” (NIV) Younger women were encouraged to remarry, but it sounds as though widows over sixty could “enroll” (BSB) to receive help from the church (if they were without family to provide for them). Earlier in Jerusalem the saints were living a form of the law of consecration (Acts 20). If that were also the case in Ephesus, this instruction reminds us that the law of consecration is as much about everyone working as it is sharing what we have.

1 Timothy 5:11–13 “As for younger widows . . . they want to marry . . . they get into the habit of being idle . . . busybodies who talk nonsense, saying things they ought not to” (NIV) Paul discourages the churches providing for more capable younger widows, who will use their free time inappropriately. It sounds like a typical case where attitudes and behaviors of those on the dole can be unhealthy and damaging, even to their faith (5:15.)

1 Timothy 5:14–15 “I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander” (NIV) Paul applauds the benefits of work and marriage for those who can. Christian women had many similar responsibilities to those of their Jewish peers: bearing children, serving one's family, loving one's husband, and serving those in need (also Titus 2:4). But the Lord made abrupt and fundamental changes to the priorities placed upon women. He never referred to women as possessions, nor did He dominate or try to control them (Matthew 9:22; 15:28; Mark 14:6; Luke 13:12; John 4:4–21; 8:10; etc.).

1 Timothy 5:16 “If any woman . . . has widows in her care, she should continue to help them and not let the church be burdened with them” (NIV) Paul knew of some devoted sister saints who took widowed women into their homes. Like Paul, Brigham Young taught a very practical religion that leads to salvation: “I am decidedly in favor of practical religion—of every day useful life . . . You know that it is one peculiarity of our faith and religion to never ask the Lord to do a thing without being willing to help him all that we are able, and then the Lord will do the rest.”³⁷

Leaders' Duties to Elders

1 Timothy 5:17–24

1 Timothy 5:17 “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine” The title, “Elders” in a Greek community was the “senior council” or “board of advisors” under executive direction. According to the Epistle of James, in the early church, Elders were to bless the sick, care for the widows and the poor. The early Church Fathers placed Elders beside the Bishops as helpers

and teachers. In Greek, “doctrine/*didaskalia*” refers to teaching or instructions.

1 Timothy 5:18 “For Scripture says . . . the worker deserves his wages” Paul quotes two scriptures as evidence that those who are working full time for the church may receive payment (Deuteronomy 25:4; Luke 10:7). Paul’s commitment to labor does not mean that those who serve God full time should not receive remuneration. His example of working when he could give context to this counsel.

1 Timothy 5:19–20 Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. But . . . reprove before everyone, so that the others may take warning” (NIV) Timothy will have to act as a “Judge in Israel.” Paul taught Timothy that he needed witnesses of accusations against a member. Public condemnation sounds harsh, but Paul hoped that it might dissuade others. We no longer practice this in the modern church of Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy 5:21 “I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality . . . Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands” (NIV) Impartiality is especially important as Timothy is in a leadership position that must keep judgments just. Paul invokes the dual witness of God and angels that is also used for ordinances, with which leaders would have been familiar.³⁸

1 Timothy 5:22 “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands” (NIV) In the context, “laying on of hands” in this scenario sounds as though Paul is talking about calling Bishops, ordaining the elders, or setting apart saints for specific callings or missions (1 Timothy 4:14; Acts 6:6; 8:18), rather than healings (i.e. Acts 28:8; Mark 6:5). The advice to take his time allows the leader to be careful and seek the gift of discernment. The Lord taught that we must “study it out in our mind and ask if it is right.” The answer may change if the question is different, so the wisdom to take the time to study before formulating questions and giving time to hear the Lord’s answers is especially important for church leaders. The verse continues, “Keep yourself pure,” which will enable to Spirit of revelation to inspire the leader (D&C 8:2–3).

1 Timothy 5:23 “Stop drinking only water and use a little wine instead, because of your stomach and your frequent ailments” (BSB) We do not know if Timothy had been living a Nazarene vow or why he chose to drink water without any purification, but in the ancient world, they purified their water with wine. Unclean water was the norm and lead to stomach cramping and diarrhea from diseases like giardia, dysentery, E. coli, and typhoid. As mentioned earlier, wine was most often diluted with ten parts water (and sometimes the dilution was twenty times water) to one-part wine.³⁹ All were healthier options than drinking from the water supply available then.

Most dispensations have their own health or dietary code for the conditions of that time, so this does not need to startle those who hold D&C 89 counsel against drinking alcoholic beverages. Paul has also just explained that

Bishops were not to not to be addicted to wine, and he also denounced drunkards (1 Corinthians 5:11; 1 Timothy 3:2–3; also, Titus 1:6–8).

1 Timothy 5:24–25 “The sins of some men are obvious . . . but the sins of others do not surface until later. In the same way, good deeds . . .” (BSB) All wickedness and goodness that has been hidden will be known by God. An omniscient God allows His judgement to be just. Jesus warned that even our thoughts will condemn us (Matthew 5:28; 15:19; etc.).

1 TIMOTHY 6

Duties of Slaves

1 Timothy 6:1–2a

1 Timothy 6:1 “All who are under the yoke as slaves should regard their own masters as worthy of all respect, so that God’s name and his teaching will not be blasphemed” (NIV) The text suggests that Paul asked Christian slaves to be respectful in their service to set a good example. Just as in the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, Paul encouraged fairness and honesty on both the slave-servants’ and masters’ part. To understand much of the New Testament, we need to understand the social order that stemmed from the servant-master relationship. In AD 47, the Roman census documented that one-third of the Empire was enslaved or worked as servants.⁴⁰ Yet, historians describe a slave service more like a feudal system and for a limited period of time (for more see the early commentary in Ephesians 6:5–6 and Colossians 4:1).

As discussed earlier in the Gospels, Jesus Himself took on the role of a slave and often identified Himself with servants (Mark 10:44; Isaiah 49–53). Yet, He also attacked the practice of a man selling his family members into slavery in one of His parables: “But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made” (Matthew 18:25). Then the parable tells how the master softened and “was moved with compassion,” and forgave the man’s gargantuan debt so that the debtor’s wife and children did not have to be sold into slavery (Matthew 18:27). Rather than denouncing servitude though, Jesus wanted to teach masters how to serve.

1 Timothy 6:2a “They that have believing masters . . . do *them* service, because they are faithful and beloved” Even if both the master and servant/slave are Christians, Paul encourages diligence in their labor. To help put this in perspective, in the ancient world, even teachers, accountants, scribes, and doctors were servants. Male slaves served in the Jewish world before being set free (Exodus 21:3–4), and in the Roman world until the age of thirty.⁴¹ The Law of Moses allowed servants and slaves the option of choosing to serve their masters for life in exchange for bed and board if the relationship was mutually positive (Leviticus 25:39–42; Deuteronomy 15:12).

Warning Against False Teachers and the Love of Money

1 Timothy 6:2b–10

1 Timothy 6:2b–5 “These are the things you are to teach and insist on. If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction . . . they are conceited and understand nothing . . .” (NIV) Paul moves onto warning Timothy about false teachers who have wicked and prideful motives. He is especially upset about those who use religion to make a profit, “who think that godliness is a means to financial gain” (NIV). This falsehood creeps into our generation as well.

1 Timothy 6:6–8 “Religion does make your life rich, by making you content with what you have . . . So we should be satisfied just to have food and clothes” (CEV) Religion teaches one to be good. So, if you want to be truly rich, be good—as eternal gain comes from goodness. The underlying attitude of the “contentment” (KJV) lies in being satisfied with what one has. When one feels the Savior’s love, it changes our hearts to such a degree that we can be content with that great gift alone. The underlying spirit of the law of consecration fosters contentment, because those who live it see life as fulfilling our stewardship to God.⁴² When one internalizes the truth that all things belong to God and we are His servants to do and share God’s goods, then there is no room for greed.

1 Timothy 6:9–10 “Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap . . . For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (NIV). There are at least three major problems with Satan’s temptation to get wealth. First, seeking riches changes one’s focus from serving God to seeking “filthy lucre” (Titus 1:11). Second, valuing monetary promotion, opens the door to seek wealth in wrong ways (i.e. getting rich quick schemes, getting something for nothing and the like, working on the Sabbath, or becoming angry over issues of money). Third, the desire for money and status can change one’s priorities and lead to pride. Pride comes in many forms—including selfishness and greed (this idea is repeated in 2 Corinthians 4:4–6, 14, 18; Revelation 22:3).

Unlike the KJV, which uses the singular, “the root,” the Greek text uses, “a root.” The love of money fosters pride, which “is the universal sin.”⁴³ President Benson taught that “Some prideful people are not so concerned as to whether their wages meet their needs as they are that their wages are more than someone else’s.”⁴⁴ Hugh Nibley taught that Satan’s first article of false faith is: “you can buy anything in this world with money.”⁴⁵

1 Timothy 6:11–12 “But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith” (NIV) Paul lists six qualities that disciples should seek more earnestly than riches. Paul admonishes disciples to take the same effort that they expend toward growing their careers, to work toward developing more faith, patience, and “charity/*agape*” so that they could “take hold of the eternal life.”

Paul inserts an athletic term that was well known from the competitive Greek games, “fight a good fight,” but then adds the key for a good fight, “*of faith.*”

1 Timothy 6:13–15a “I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time” (NIV) Paul “charges” Timothy, as strongly as a leader can—“In the sight of God . . . and before Christ”—to remain pure. Jesus stood spotless and before Pilate, and through Him, we may do the same when we come before the Lord. The timing of the Lord’s coming is referred to in a way that shows Paul’s faith in the wisdom of God’s timing.

Third Hymn or Prayer

1 Timothy 6:15b–16

1 Timothy 6:15b–16 “Who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, to whom be honor and power everlasting Whom no man hath seen, nor can see, unto whom no man can approach, only he who hath the light and the hope of immortality dwelling in him” (JST) The JST changes the order of two phrases in this prayer or hymn, which in turn, changes its meaning. In the standard English translations, it communicates that man cannot see God, but that is contrary to Paul’s own experience of seeing the Lord (which is repeated in the book of Acts three times, and also referred to in his Epistles), as well as Mary Magdalene and all the other five hundred who saw the resurrected Lord (John 20:18; 1 Corinthians 15:6). The JST’s reordering explains that all those saints with the “hope of immortality dwelling in,” may see God.

JST

“Who is the blessed and only Potentate,
the King of kings,
and Lord of lords,
to whom be honor and power everlasting.
Whom no man hath seen, nor can see,
Unto whom no man can approach,
Only he who hath the light and the hope
of immortality dwelling in him.

KJV

Who is the blessed and only Potentate
the King of kings,
and Lord of lords,
Who only hath immortality,
dwelling in the light
which no man can approach unto;
whom no man hath seen, nor can see:
to whom be power and honor everlasting.
Amen.

Jesus Himself also taught the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:8, “blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.” Similarly, He taught Joseph Smith “Every soul who foresaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and cc obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face

and know that I am” (D&C 93:1).

Charge to the Rich and Timothy

1 Timothy 6:17–21

1 Timothy 6:17–1 “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded . . . that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute . . . that they may lay hold on eternal life” Those who have plenty, who are “willing to share/*koinónikos*/ready to impart/communicate,” can avoid selfish greed, and follow the higher law of the gospel.⁴⁶

1 Timothy 6:20–21 “O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid irreverent, . . . opposing arguments of so-called ‘knowledge,’ . . . and thus swerved away from the faith” (BSB) Paul’s final plea to his beloved Timothy is applicable for all disciples of all generations. The adversary draws believers away through pride, distractions, and arguments of “knowledge.” (The KJV of “science” is translated, “knowledge” in all major English versions.)

2 TIMOTHY

Request for A Visit/Apostasy Of The Church/Endurance

Outline: 2 Timothy

1:1–5 Greeting and Thanksgiving

1:6–2:13 Mission Change to Visit Paul in Prison

- 1:6–12 Patience in Persecution
- 1:13–18 Disloyalty and Loyalty
- 2:1–13 Appeal for Endurance

2:14–4:5 Dealing with False Teachers

- 2:14–26 Teachings of Lord’s Servants
- 3:1–9 Evil in the Last Days
- 3:10–17 All Scripture Is God’s Word
- 4:1–8 Preach the Word

4:9–22 Conclusion

- 4:9–18 Personal Concerns
- 4:19–22 Final Greetings

Theme

Dark moments can be sustained by God’s Love.

This Epistle describes Paul’s grim imprisonment. Like Jesus on the eve of His passion, Paul gave counsel and lifted up the disciples closest to him. Timothy probably still served as a regional leader near Ephesus, but the letter gives Timothy’s transfer, “come to me quickly” (2 Timothy 4:9).

Background

Chronologically, this is the last letter we have from Paul. Although there is much debate on where and when the Epistle fits in, the NEW tESTAMENT at large suggests that Paul was released from his first Roman imprisonment and preached in Spain and the area around Greece, but then was imprisoned again sometime between AD 64 and 68 when he wrote this Epistle to his beloved younger companion. His earlier prison letters sound vastly different from this letter. He is lonely, cold, and his death is imminent.

We have historical evidence that the Caesar Nero ordered the killing of both Paul and Peter.⁴⁷ Even though the Christians were a relatively small sect at the time, Nero blamed the fire he instigated in Rome on them; it was not “for the public good, but to glut one man’s cruelty.”⁴⁸ Nero burned Rome to clear the area for a larger palace. He then arrested all Christians in Rome who would not reject Jesus.

We assume this is when Peter and Paul joined the martyrs. Some who were convicted were covered with skins of beasts, then torn by wild dogs until they died. Many, such as Peter, were crucified (But Peter refused to die as the Lord, so he was hung upside-down). As a Roman citizen, Paul was not tortured but beheaded.

2 TIMOTHY 1

Greetings and Thanksgiving

2 Timothy 1:1-5

2 Timothy 1:1-2 “Paul, an apostle . . . to Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, *and* peace, from God the Father and Christ . . .” Paul’s standard greeting and introduction includes the source of grace, mercy, and peace as being Heavenly Father and His Son. We also hear of Paul’s authority and calling as a special witness. Even while imprisoned, he continues to help build the kingdom through correspondence.

2 Timothy 1:3-4 “I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day . . . Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy” Paul’s time in prison is spent praying, night and day. He repeats this desire to see Timothy three times in the letter (1:4, 4:9, 21).

2 Timothy 1:5 “I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice” (NIV) The last portion of the thanks goes out to the women in Timothy’s early life. As mentioned in the introduction of 1 Timothy, Lois and Eunice had a significant impact on his faith and scriptural understanding.

Encouragement to be Patient in Persecution

2 Timothy 1:6-12

2 Timothy 1:6 “Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hand” (BSB) As in 1 Timothy, we are told that Timothy received a *gift* through the laying on of hands—priesthood possibly?

2 Timothy 1:7 “the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline” (NIV) God does not generate fear, but power and love. A “sound mind” is also translated, “self-control” (JB, RSV) or “self-discipline” (NIV, NEB).

2 Timothy 1:8-12 “So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner . . . [or] of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher . . . this is no cause for shame” (NIV) It sounds as though Paul’s imprisonment may have become a point of shame or embarrassment to some.

2 Timothy 1:13-14 “Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching you have heard from me, with the faith and love that are in Christ . . . with the help of the Holy Spirit” (BSB) By following the pattern that the apostles have set, the Spirit can testify of truth and keep disciples aligned on the path of the gospel. Teaching that is consistent with these two sources are consistent with this dispensation, “if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach” (D&C 42:14).

2 Timothy 1:15 “all who are in Asia turned away from me” It has only been a little over thirty years since the Lord’s resurrection and apostasy is already rampant. Doctrines have been altered, and Christians have turned against the cause, including the two names mentioned here (Phygellus is only mentioned here, and Hymenaeus was an apostate living in Ephesus, 1 Timothy 1:3, 20). Paul had prophesied of this ten-years earlier as recorded in Acts 20:29, “after my departing shall grievous wolves enter.”

2 Timothy 1:16-18 “Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains” Wealthy Onesiphorus from Ephesus, sought Paul out while he was imprisoned in Rome and comforted him. We are not told, but as Paul includes his name in this letter, perhaps Timothy sent him to help Paul.

2 TIMOTHY 2

Appeal for Endurance

2 Timothy 2:1-13

2 Timothy 2:1-2 “My son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ” Paul concentrates advice for Timothy in this

chapter. Paul asks Timothy to follow his good example as a disciple of Christ and teach others to do the same.

2 Timothy 2:3–7 “endure hardness as a good soldier . . . and also if anyone competes in athletics . . . [or] the hardworking farmer” (NKJV) Paul encourages Timothy to magnify his calling by giving him examples from three professions that have a reputation of working hard: the military, athletics, and farmers. The phrase, “*endure hardness*” is also translated, “share in suffering” (RSV) or “endure hardship with us” (NIV), or “put up with your share of difficulties” (JB). Paul wants Timothy to fight for the gospel, like a soldier. In verse 5, “Masteries” refers to sportive competitions for the victor’s crown. In verse six, a farmer (or “husbandman” in KJV) will eat his fruits—just as a servant of God will enjoy the fruit of his labors.

2 Timothy 2:8a “Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead” Paul specifically defends the issues that have been attacked—such as Jesus’ physical resurrection—by groups like the Gnostics (see 2 Timothy 2:18).

2 Timothy 2:8b–10 “This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect . . . in Christ” (NIV) Paul endured his persecutions for the hope that salvation would be spread, just as his Master Jesus Christ had.

2 Timothy 2:11–13 “If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself” (NIV) Paul quotes a lovely poem or hymn (portions of which are also found in Romans 6:5). This message must have been very poignant for those who watched their fellow Christians deny their faith to avoid persecution.

Teachings of the Lord’s Servants

2 Timothy 2:14–26

2 Timothy 2:14–17 “Keep reminding God’s people . . . against quarreling . . . Avoid godless chatter . . . their teaching will spread like gangrene” (NIV) The Ephesians must have had a problem with quarreling and “vain babblings” which “eat as doth a canker” (KNV), which “only ruins those who listen” (NIV). Paul’s solution was for Timothy to do his best to teach “the word of truth” (BSB).

2 Timothy 2:18 “They say that the resurrection has already occurred, and they undermine the faith of some” (BSB) The problem was with corrupt Gnostic teachers who said that the resurrection had already come, and the rest of the saints had missed it. There is also evidence that the Gnostics taught that Jesus had already come again, and that a physical resurrection was not going to happen at all; “They allegorized away the doctrine, and

turned all into figures and metaphors.”⁴⁹ The early Christian father, Irenæus, explained that these false teachers had developed false spirituality of invincible materialism that plausibly supported their disbelief in the physical resurrection of the body.⁵⁰ The Gnostics were more similar to the Jewish sects of Sadducees and Essenes who did not believe in a physical resurrection. To them, nothing material was truly eternal.⁵¹

2 Timothy 2:19–21 “The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” If disciples stand on God’s foundation, and take His name, then we receive a sure seal and will “depart from iniquity.” Paul quotes an Old Testament phrase, “The Lord knows those who are his” (Numbers 16:5).

2 Timothy 2:22 “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart” The mature Paul advises Timothy and all saints to seek the gifts of the Spirit. By mentioning the positive gifts in opposition to physical lusts, the text suggests that the same dynamic force that is associated with the negative lusts should be applied positively toward seeking spiritual gifts.

2 Timothy 2:23–24 “Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful” (NIV). As a leader, Timothy must have known the difference between teaching and debating—one is selfless, the other selfish. Contention was a problem in the early church and the Lord denounced it shortly after He arrived to visit the Nephites (3 Nephi 11:29). At the very beginning of our dispensation, before the translation of the Book of Mormon and the organization of the church, the Lord taught: “that I may establish my gospel, that there may not be so much contention; yea, Satan doth stir up the hearts of the people to contention concerning the points of my doctrine; and in these things they do err” (D&C 10:63).

2 TIMOTHY 3

Evil in the Last Days

2 Timothy 3:1–9

2 Timothy 3:1–5 “in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous . . . Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” Paul’s “latter-day prophecy” lists twenty signs of corruption. He abruptly stops his staccato litany of sins and turns to the present tense: “from such turn away.” Elsewhere the New Testament referred to his time as “last days” (Acts 2:17; 1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 1:2; James 5:3; etc.). Every one of them exists in our culture, did exist in the Greco-Roman culture, and exists whenever Satan’s influence dominates the earth. Some of the words need translations:

- “without natural affection” can describe abortion.
- “Incontinent/*akratés*” also means: “lacking self-control, inclined to excess” or addictions.
- “Heady, highminded” means “reckless” or “rash and conceited” (NIV)

2 Timothy 3:6 “They are the kind who worm their way into households and captivate vulnerable women weighed down with sins and led astray by various passions” (BSB) In the Greco-Roman culture there were many examples of rampant promiscuity. The temples to the fertility goddesses were nothing more than brothels. In addition, Paul describes an aggressive perpetrator who attempts to “creep” into people’s homes (KJV). The apostle has just stated “from such turn away.” He refers to “vulnerable women” or “foolish women” (ISV), “silly women,” (KJV), or “weak-minded women” (GWT), but I would also add that in my world, many of these women have been taken advantage of, manipulated or abused without their consent.

2 Timothy 3:7 “Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” A few translations include the subject from the previous verse, “these women always want to learn something new, but they never can discover the truth” (CSV, also ISV). The internet has brought the new problem of information bombardment. Now we must carefully choose our teachers, media, websites, etc. Truth can be found from heavenly sources, in nature, in prayer, and in all that is good. The prophet Moroni teaches that we must seek with sincerity and pray to know if things are true before the Spirit will witness (Moroni 10:4–5).

2 Timothy 3:8–9 Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses . . . and disqualified from the faith” This story from Moses’ time is lost. Yet Numbers 26:12 recorded the names (but spelled them differently).

All Scripture Is God’s Word

2 Timothy 3:10–17

2 Timothy 3:10–11 “You, however, have observed my teaching, my conduct, my purpose, my faith, my patience, my love, my endurance, my persecutions, and the sufferings . . . [in] Lystra . . . Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them” (BSB) Timothy knew the doctrines Paul taught. The word “patience” (KJV) is now more passive than it was at the time. Endure is a better translation. Paul lists a few of the afflictions he endured to refresh Timothy’s memory, including one from Timothy’s hometown of Lystra. Perhaps Paul included them to prepare Timothy for his future challenges.

2 Timothy 3:12–14 “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. For evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned” (JST) Paul’s sobering thought becomes his core message to Timothy: Followers of Christ will suffer persecution. Even though the JST only changed one word, “but” was changed to “for,” the meaning became causal. Persecution came as a result of evil.

2 Timothy 3:15–17 “from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. And all scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (JST) Timothy’s mother and grandmother began teaching him the Book of Moses or Psalms (the most available texts found in synagogues and house churches at the time) when he was still an “infant” (NIV). Most children have much natural faith and an aptitude for spiritual learning. Their following of “inspired” scripture becomes a disciple’s measuring rod of a good teacher.

2 TIMOTHY 4

Charge to Timothy: Preach Sound Doctrine

2 Timothy 4:1–8

2 Timothy 4:1–2 “I charge you . . . Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and encourage with every form of patient instruction” (BSB) Paul’s charge to Timothy has an urgency to carry on the work. While Paul is unable to do all he wishes from prison, it is as if he feels more need for others to carry on in his place. His message shares ideas with D&C 121:43, “Reproving betimes [immediately] with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterward an increase of love.”

2 Timothy 4: 3–4 “the time will come when men will not tolerate sound doctrine, but with itching ears they will gather around themselves teachers to suit their own desires” (BSB) Paul’s charge also sounds a little like Jeremiah’s jeremiad as he saw the apostasy of 600 BC, “the prophets prophesy falsely... and my people love to have it so” (Jerimiah 5:31). This prophecy seems especially applicable for Christians who leave their faith or “lose” the truth. The apostasy creeps in among the believers too in the form of “fables” or myths.

2 Timothy 4:5 “Be sober . . . do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (BSB) Paul asks Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist.” Most read this as missionary work, but it may include Joseph Smith’s definition of an evangelist as a patriarch.

2 Timothy 4:6 “For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand” The image of a Jewish temple sacrifice is touching, as Paul feels he is approaching death. He has offered himself to the Lord and the end is close. He suffered in many prisons and faced death many times, but now the Spirit whispered that his mission was drawing to a close.

2 Timothy 4:7–8 “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith . . . the crown of righteousness is laid up for me . . . [and] to all who crave His appearing” (BSB) In this last preserved letter,

Paul expresses satisfaction that he won his long difficult race. Paul's life is a study in priority. Clement of Rome, one of the early Church Fathers who may have known Paul, wrote of him, "Through jealousy and strife Paul showed the way to the prize of endurance. Seven times he was in bonds; he was exiled; he was stoned. He was a heralded both in the east and in the west; he gained the noble fame of his faith; he taught righteousness to all the world. And when he had reached the limits of the west, he gave his testimony before the rulers and thus passed from the world and was taken up into the holy place—the greatest example of endurance."⁵²

Personal Greetings and Benediction

2 Timothy 4:9–22

2 Timothy 4:9–12 "Make every effort to come to me quickly, because . . . only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you" Paul again asks Timothy to come soon (and then again even more urgently in verse 4:21). This is Paul's most pessimistic letter—just as *Peter's* last letter was his most pessimistic. Both are filled with evidence of the apostasy. He names six people who have turned from him and the faith and three who have remained committed: Luke, Mark and Tychicus. Paul's "beloved physician and companion" is the only friend with him in the prison. Mark was Paul's junior companion on his first mission (Acts 12:12, 25). This reunion speaks to the forgiveness on both sides. The book of Acts recorded their history when Paul was not willing to work with him, but those days are over, the rift is healed, and Paul seeks for his companionship now (Acts 15:37–39). Tychicus was returning to Ephesus with Paul's letter and possibly Onesiphorus (2 Timothy 1:17–18). Paul asks some of the brightest minds of the Church to come to Rome, so it must have been legal to be a Christian then.

2 Timothy 4:13 "When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments" (BSB) Paul had left personal things in Troas. Either he was arrested there, or he traveled through Troas to Rome. The winter was approaching as he asks for his coat (4:21). Most of all he wants the "parchments" which probably refers to his scriptures. He may have had Epistles or a collection of words from Jesus, or possibly his own copy of an Old Testament scroll or two (this is evidence of Paul's wealthy past).

The Lord Remains Faithful

2 Timothy 4:16–18 "At my first defense . . . everyone deserted me . . . But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me so that through me the message would be fully proclaimed, and all the Gentiles" (BSB) At Paul's defense, the Spirit allowed him to powerfully testify of the Lord as he told his story. He felt rescued by the Lord and trusts that he will be taken "into His heavenly kingdom."

Final Greetings

2 Timothy 4:19 "Greet Prisca and Aquila, as well as . . ." Paul includes nine names as well as the brethren. Two are his dear friends who were also tent makers. Paul consistently refers to her in his letters as Prisca, while Luke writes out Priscilla (Acts 18:2–3, 18–19, 24–26; Romans 16:3–5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19). They met

in Corinth on his second mission. They stand as ideal examples of a Christian couple unified in the Lord's work.

2 Timothy 4:21–22 “Do thy diligence to come before winter . . . Grace be with you. Amen” Paul's fourth request for Timothy now adds, “Do your utmost to come” before the weather changes and travel will be more difficult and Paul will be colder without his cloak (NKJV). He ends as he begins, referencing “grace” as a gift or blessing to man from Jesus Christ, or used sometimes as an expression of gratitude.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO PHILEMON⁵³

This sweet, short epistle is a private letter from Paul to his friend Philemon who was a member of the church in Colossae, a city near Ephesus.⁵⁴ Paul, while a prisoner in Rome, instructed a man named Onesimus who converted to the Gospel. At some point, Paul learns that this new convert is actually the runaway slave of his dear friend Philemon, back in Colossae. Paul writes to Philemon, letting him know that he has found Onesimus and that he is sending him back, yet he pleads for Philemon to receive *not* as an escaped slave—with the punishment and consequences that would entail—but as a fellow brother in Christ.

Two beautiful aspects of this epistle are: 1) Paul wrote it as a chiasmus, a form of poetry popular in ancient Greek, Latin and Hebrew; and 2) Paul uses his relationship with Onesimus as a symbol for Christ's relationship with mankind. Paul serves a symbol for Christ in the way that he acts as a mediator between Philemon and Onesimus, pleading Onesimus' case before his former owner. Onesimus represents all of us: unprofitable servants and slaves to sin unless we are converted to Christ, and always dependent on Christ to advocate for us. This metaphor is evident in many of the verses of this chapter (especially verses 10–12, 15, 17–19), but not necessarily in all of them.

Outline: Chiasmic Structure

the following chiasmus is taken directly from John W. Welch⁵⁵

Epistolary (–3)

B. Paul's prayers for Philemon (4)

C. Philemon's love, faith, and hospitality (5–7)

D. Paul could use his authority (8)

E. But prefers to make supplication (9–10)

F. Onesimus is a convert of Pauls (10)

G. Paul has made Onesimus profitable (11)

him to the Gospel. This idea of becoming a son/daughter of Christ as a result of conversion exists throughout the scriptures. John 1:12–13 “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Paul is accepting Onesimus as a “son” in the same way that Christ accepts all those who come unto Him as his “sons and daughters.” As King Benjamin states, “And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters.” (Mosiah 5:7) Paul “begat” Onesimus when he converted to Christ, in the same way that we are all “begotten” sons and daughters of Christ when we ally ourselves with Him through covenant making.

Philemon 1:11 “Which in time past was to thee unprofitable” According to King Benjamin, we, like Onesimus, are all unprofitable servants: “if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants.” (Mosiah 2:21). Matthew 17:10 describes how even the faithful are “unprofitable servants.” Like Onesimus when he intentionally left his master, we, through our sin, pride and negligence, often abandon Him whom we are supposed to serve. In an interesting play on words, Onesimus actually means “profitable,”⁵⁷ possibly implying that through his conversion to Christ, he is becoming “profitable” again.

Philemon 1:12 “Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels” In the NIV, this verse reads: “I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you.” Paul asks Philemon to take Onesimus back because he (Paul) loves him. This is reminiscent of when Christ visits the Nephites and invites people forward to be healed, and he said, “Behold, my *bowels* are filled with compassion towards you.” (3 Nephi 17:6 italics added) Christ also declared, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a many lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13). This love is what moves Paul to advocate for Onesimus and what moves Christ to advocate and sacrifice for us!

Philemon 1:14 “But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly” It is noteworthy that Paul honors and respects Philemon’s agency. The NIV translates it this way: “But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary.” In the next six verses, Paul gives a convincing argument for why he hopes Philemon chooses to forgive Onesimus and receive him as a saint, but he does not seek to compel him, as a master would to a slave. It’s almost as if Paul could have quoted him this passage from the Doctrine and Covenants: “Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many thing of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; for the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves.” (D&C 58:27–28)

Philemon 1:15 “For perhaps therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever.” This verse is significant because, together with verse 14, it forms the center of the chiasmus; the center is the home for the most important message of the text. This verse has a little poetic parallelism to it all of its own: You lost Onesimus *temporarily* as a slave so that you could have him back *eternally* as a fellow brother in Christ. For us, this has parallels to the plan of Salvation: Heavenly Father “loses” us to sin when we enter this fallen world, so that ultimately, we can be reunited with him eternally, as new creatures, born of Christ. If we apply this analogy to verse 14 as well, it would imply that Christ cannot compel Heavenly Father to “take us back,” but Christ gives Him every compelling reason why He can. This is the heart of the chiasmus and the heart of the Gospel: we can be changed from our temporary state as “servants to sin” to an eternally righteous state as followers of Christ.

Philemon 1:16 “Not now as a servant, but above a servant.” While in verse 13, Paul talks about wanting to keep Onesimus on as a missionary helper and assistant, here he advocates for him to be received back home as an equal.

Philemon 1:17 “If thou count me therefore a partner, received him as myself.” Paul is asking Philemon to receive Onesimus as if Philemon were receiving Paul himself. This hearkens to Christ’s teaching in Luke 9:48 “Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me” and Matthew 25:40 “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” Christ pleads for us to treat others as we would him, in the same way that Paul asks Philemon to treat Onesimus as he would treat the Apostle himself.

Philemon 1:18 “If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account.” Here Paul is saying that he will pay back to Philemon whatever Onesimus owes him, and he will also pay for any wrongs he has occurred: Paul is willing to take on this man’s debt. This willingness to pay someone else’s debt is similar to what the good Samaritan—representing Christ—did for the robbed and injured man left on the side of the road.⁵⁸ He left him at an inn and paid the innkeeper two pence and then said to him, “Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.” (Luke 10:35)

Elder Uchtdorf explained, “As a result [of sin], every man, woman, and child was shut out of [God’s] presence—that is until Jesus Christ, the Lamb without spot, offered His life as a ransom for our sins. Because Jesus owed no debt to justice, He could pay our debt and meet the demands of justice for every soul. And that includes you and me. Jesus Christ paid the price for our sins.”⁵⁹ If Onesimus returned to his former owner, he could face death as a consequence for his escape,⁶⁰ but Paul is willing to pay Onesimus’ debts so in order to save his life. Similarly, in order to safely return to the presence of the Father, we need Christ to save us from both spiritual and physical death by paying for the debt of our sins.

Philemon 1:19 “...albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.” Paul, somewhat playfully here, is gently reminding Philemon, “Don’t forget that you already owe me, bro, for saving *your* soul.” Like Philemon is to Paul, we are all spiritually in debt to the Savior, so when He asks us to forgive others, He can do so with authority because He has already forgiven us for more. (See the parable of the two debtors in Matthew 18:23–25.) As King Mosiah said, “...In the first place, he hath created you, and granted unto you your lives, for which ye are indebted unto him. ... and ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, forever and ever; therefore, of what have ye to boast?” (Mosiah 2:24) Paul reminds Philemon of his debt of gratitude in the same thing that King Benjamin reminds us of it here.

Philemon 1:20 “**Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord.**” The joy that comes from seeing someone you love live the Gospel and make righteous choices is also reflected in Alma 38:3 “I say unto you, my son, that I have had great joy in thee already, because of thy faithfulness and thy diligence, and thy patience and they long-suffering among the people of the Zoramites.”

Philemon 1:21–25 “**For I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.**” As shown in the outline of the chiasmus, Paul opens his letter talking about his prayers for Philemon in verse 4 (“I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers”) and then concludes with a request for prayers from Philemon on his behalf (verse 22).

Header Image: St. Paul in Prison by Rembrandt, 1627. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

1. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1.171, “. . . however, in harmony with the well-founded tradition that Ephesus was the scene of John’s later activity.”
2. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 317, 344, 371–373.
3. William Farmer, ed., *The International Bible Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 1733. “First Timothy could be entitled, ‘The Gospel of Paul in Conflict with False Teaching.’”
4. Strongs, #517, “*aoratos*,” <https://biblehub.com/greek/517.htm> (accessed 10–7–19)
5. Strongs, #2272, *hésuchio*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/2272.htm> (accessed 19–9–19).
6. Looking at whole Pauline sphere, references that show support of women teaching include: Romans 12:7; 16:1–2; 1 Corinthians 12:28–29; Galatians 6:5–6, “*hekastos*/everyone;” Ephesians 4:8, “*anthropos*/male or female,” 4:11, 29; Philippians 4:3, 2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 2:3–4; also see Acts 18:26). Modern critical biblical scholars question the Pauline authorship of the pastoral letters and others. Only seven Epistles are generally accepted as pure Pauline (Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon). However, in this book, I refer to the author as Paul of the entire traditional corpus (Romans through Hebrews), even though that is debated at present by scholars.
7. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 317. Anderson sees this letter “from the opening warning about rebuking false teachers to the closing language . . . [as a] sober warning against those reforming the revealed gospel.” A lack of respect for authority was a regular problem in other New Testament churches too—see 1 Corinthians 9:1–5; 16:11; Titus 2:15.
8. The churches under Timothy’s care in Ephesus were not the only ones with this problem. In the book of Revelation, John describes the great harlot and mother of abomination with similar ornaments: “the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls” (Revelation 17:4). Peter, too, disapproved of women who prioritized their worldly adornments over inner goodness: “Your beauty should reside, not in outward adornment—the braiding of the hair or jewelry, or dress—but in the inmost centre of your being, with its imperishable ornament, a gentle quiet spirit which is of high value in the sight of God” (1 Peter 3:3–4, NEB).
9. Steinberg, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics*, 954. The Talmud also lists several rules for men’s hair. “A groom during his seven days of wedding feasts is allowed to cut his hair. . . . A *Priest (Kohen)* may not let his hair grow wild but is obligated to cut it every thirty days, . . . A *High Priest* cuts his hair every Friday. A *king* cuts his hair every day. The men of the watch in the temple cut their hair on Thursdays in honor of the Sabbath.” Pharisaic Jews insisted that a woman veil herself head to toe when she left her home.
10. Mishnah, *Kiddushin* 30a. For many previous generations, Jewish women were kept from studying at all, but in Christianity, that prohibition is clearly lifted.
11. Wilson, *Christ’s Emancipation*, Chapter 1, “Communication.”
12. Strongs, #2271, *hésuchia*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/2271.htm> (10–9–19)
13. Also see D&C 32:1; 90:15; 97:1; 107:99–100; 136:32
14. Spencer W Kimball, *Ensign*, October 1979, 103–4.

15. Josephus, *Antiquities*, IV.8:15; *Mishnah, Shebuoth*, 4:1, only certain men could act as legal witnesses, “but not . . . women.” *Mishnah, Kiddushin* 4.13. Rabbi Eliezer taught: “[Women] may not teach young children.”
16. *Mishnah, Shebuoth*, 4:1; We find this type of scriptural interpretation in the *Mishnah*, which condemns women in general as liars, because Sarah lied (Genesis 18:5).
17. Ben Sira, *Ecclesiasticus*, 26:1, 12–17.
18. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, I.1.4.
19. Adam is the seventy–seventh name as Luke organized Joseph’s genealogy numerically. Luke honors the first parents not only as the lineage that brought the Savior, but also gave Adam the noble title “the son of God,” the only other person besides Jesus to share that name in the New Testament (Lk 3:38)
20. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 660–661.
21. Bruce R. McConkie, *Sermons and Writings of Bruce R. McConkie* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1989), 190. Elder McConkie gave this talk at a BYU Devotional on February 17, 1981 and referred to the three pillars as the creation, the fall, and the atonement.
22. The Greek word translated here as *transgression* literally is “to overstep.”
23. For example, Ephesians 6:4 reads, “fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,” and 1 Thessalonians 2:11: “As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children.” Also see Colossians 3:21; Ephesians 5:31; 1 Timothy 5:1; Hebrews 12:7, 9, etc.
24. I find it interesting that the Prophet Joseph Smith did not feel the need to change other verses in the chopater, only added the plural “they,” (and spelling of braided and to change “but” to “for” in verse 12). We do not know exactly when he made these changes—he may have done so during his initial editing in 1830–31 or when he returned to the text afterwards. However, by the time Joseph asked the Church to publish his translation of the Bible, he had already called women to preside in the Relief Society, had empowered women to offer healing blessings, had called women to teach in worship services, and had ordained women.
25. Elder M. Russell Ballard, *Ensign* (May 2012): 19. Elder Ballard confirms the unified work of spouses in Christ’s restored Church: the power of God is seen in both procreation and priesthood powers (1 Corinthians 4:20).
26. Focusing on another word in 1 Timothy 2:15 also helps our understanding of this verse. Adam and Eve must join in the process of salvation, in being “saved/*sozo/rescued*,” by populating the earth and developing “faith . . . charity and holiness” (1 Timothy 2:15, KJV). The New Testament uses “saved/*sozo*” to teach humanity what they must contribute to their salvation by building on their belief with faith, prayer, baptism, hope, example, works, and obedience as found in other verses that use “saved/*sozo*” as shown below.
 - 1) “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 1:21)
 - 2) “Call on the Lord [to] be saved” (Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13)
 - 3) “Baptism doth also now save us” (1 Peter 3:21; also Acts 2:40–41)
 - 4) “We are saved by hope” (Romans 8:24)
 - 5) “For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?” (1 Corinthians 7:16)

- 6) “For by grace are ye saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8)
- 7) “Received . . . the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:10)
- 8) “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Timothy 4:16).
- 9) “To save him . . . shew thee my faith by my works” (James 2:14–18; also Matthew 9:22; 14:30; 19:25; 27:42, 49; Mark 5:23, 28; 6:56; Luke 8:36; 13:23; 23:39; John 11:12).
- 10) “He which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (James 5:20).
27. 1 Timothy 2:11–15 contain lingering baggage from the unhealthy culture of the time. This inconsistency may be the possible result of a different author, editorial changes, a misunderstanding, or even the author’s mood on a given day. Rather than accepting them blindly, students of the Scriptures are responsible to seek the spirit of revelation and to confirm truth through one’s own mind and heart (D&C 8:2–3). In contrast, Jesus set in motion a restoration of relationships. The cultural “that fettered the perception of women was not easily removed. After centuries of wallowing in unhealthy thought patterns, practices, and relationships, early Christians had the daunting task of changing their thinking and behavior.” Wilson, *Emancipation*.
28. Kelly Ogden.
29. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Anchor Bible: The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ, 2001), 214. The message emphasizes that the man is free from the appearance of immorality.
30. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 329.
31. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 321.
32. President Henry B. Eyring, “Holiness and the Plan of Happiness,” General Conference October 2019. Elder Jeffery R. Holland, “The Message, the Meaning, and the Multitude,” General Conference October 2019.
33. Carter Lindberg, *A Brief History of Christianity* (Oxford, England: Blackwell, 2006).
34. Deuteronomy 5:16; “. . . the widow(s), which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee” (also see Deuteronomy 14:29; also 24:17–22; 26:12–13; Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 22:3; Exodus 20:12; etc.)
35. *Mishnah, Ketuboth*, 4.4. In the Jewish world, a woman was allowed to work as a cook, baker, spinner, weaver, laundress, inn-keeper, female hairdresser, midwife, or mourner.
36. Witherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*, 23; Jackson J. Spielvogel, *Western Civilization 7th ed.* (Belmont, CA: Thomson & Wadsworth, 2009), volume 1, 152; “Augustus also revised the **tax** laws to penalize bachelors, **widowers**, and **married** persons who had fewer than three children.”
37. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 5:3–4. 293.
38. Ehat and Cook: *Words of Joseph Smith*, 10; also 9, 42, 110, 210, 327–331 “Paul . . . knew . . . all the ordinances, and blessings were in the Church.”
39. Richard N. Holzapfel, Thomas A. Wayment, Eric D. Huntsman, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* (SLC, UT: Deseret, 2006). John MacArthur, ed. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: IL: Moody Press,

- 1985), ch 18, Ephesians 5:18. A “stong drink” at that time meant two-parts wine, one-part water. Also, Ezekiel 44:21, explained the priests’ dietary restrictions from wine: “. . . Neither shall any priest drink wine, when they enter into the inner court.”
40. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Bartchy, “Servant” 4.420. Timothy G. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins, 2003), 183. Some large cities had higher percentages, including Jerusalem, which recorded that fifty percent of the population were servants or slaves. To fully appreciate how many slaves there were, a normal middle-class Roman citizen owned eight slaves. Across the Roman Empire, at different times, estimates range between six and sixty million people were slaves. Junius P. Rodriguez, *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABD-CLI, 1997), 7.548.
 41. Campbell, *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, 135. Bromiley, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4.545. Some sources record a release at age thirty, others thirty-five or forty. The process releasing a slave was known as manumission
 42. Steven C. Harper, “The Law: D&C 42,” in Matthew McBride and James Goldberg, eds., *Revelations in Context: The Stories behind the Sections of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), 93–98. Stewardship, accountability, and agency are the three points Harper emphasizes.
 43. Ezra T. Benson, “Beware of Pride,” General Conference April 1989. “Yes, pride is the universal sin, the great vice. The antidote for pride is humility—meekness, submissiveness. (See Alma 7:23.)”
 44. *Ibid.*, “When pride has a hold on our hearts, we lose our independence of the world and deliver our freedoms to the bondage of men’s judgment. The world shouts louder than the whisperings of the Holy Ghost. The reasoning of men overrides the revelations of God, and the proud let go of the iron rod. (See 1 Nephi 8:18–28; 11:25; 15: 23–24.) Pride is a sin that can readily be seen in others but is rarely admitted in ourselves.”
 45. Hugh Nibley.
 46. Strongs, #2843. *Koinónikos*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/2843.htm> (accessed 10–10–19)
 47. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 364. Around AD 200, the historian Tertulian wrote, “At Rome Nero was the first who stained with blood the rising faith” (*ibid.* 362). Tertulian named Peter and Paul as Nero’s victims. Clement the Bishop in Rome in AD 96 linked the apostles’ courage with Neronian persecution: “The greatest and most righteous pillars. . . [were] persecuted and contended unto death.”
 48. *Ibid.*, 363. “In July AD 64 a fire broke out in the huddled shops near the great circus. A fateful wind projected the flames down the length of the circus, through narrow streets, and over the hills, sparing nothing and no one. Fleeing refugees stared at escape routes cut off by sudden fiery walls. The only defense was to destroy lines of buildings that otherwise would have been bridges for the blaze. After five days of chaos, only four of the city’s fourteen districts were untouched.”
 49. Ellicott, *Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*, 2 Timothy 2:18.
 50. Irenæus, *Haer.* ii. 31, 2; cf. Tertullians. *de Resurr.* 19. https://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_Timothy/2-18.htm (accessed 10–10–19).
 51. Ellicott, *Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*, 2 Timothy 2:18.
 52. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 383. “Life is not long enough to reach many goals, and Paul reached his because he

devoted his life to it” (378).

53. Commentary by Jen Nuckols Bromley.
54. David J Ridges, *Your Study of the New Testament Made Easier, Part 2 Acts through Revelation*, (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2007), 319.
55. John Welch and John Hall, *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: 2002). <https://byustudies.byu.edu/system/files/pdfs/Charts/NT/15-20.pdf>
56. Paul Nolan Hyde, *A Comprehensive Commentary of the Epistle of Paul to Philemon*, (Orem, UT: Parrish Press, 2009;2015), 10.
57. Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of Women*, 255.
58. John W. Welch, “The Good Samaritan: Forgotten Symbols,” *Ensign*, February 2007, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2007/02/the-good-samaritan-forgotten-symbols?lang=eng>
59. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Behold, The Man!,” *Ensign*, May 2018, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2018/04/behold-the-man?lang=eng>
60. David J Ridges, *Your Study of the New Testament Made Easier, Part 2 Acts through Revelation*, (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2007), 319.



HEBREWS 1–6

UNDERSTANDING THE SUPERIORITY OF GOD'S SON

CA. AD 50–60

Authorship and Audience

The author never identifies himself in the Epistle to the Romans; as a result, the authorship of the Epistle has been debated for centuries. The letter itself gives us only a few internal clues to help us identify authorship, such as:

Referring to Timothy as a “brother,” (Hebrews 13:23)

- The use of “bonds” (Hebrews 10:34 and 13:3)
- Pauline phrasing, theology, and conclusion
- Extensive citations from the Old Testament (Greek Septuagint or LXX)
- The author expects his audience to honor the Old Testament as the word of God
- Habakkuk 2:4 is cited in Hebrews 10:38, Galatians 3:11 and Romans 1:17

- Jewish liturgy and priesthood rites are described
- Stylometry studies of the non-contextual words and patterns appear consistent with Paul's authentic Epistles.

In addition to textual clues, we find historical clues about the letter's authorship. In AD 96 the letter known as 1 Clement, the oldest Greek New Testament collection from ca. AD 175, placed Hebrews right after Romans.¹ It claimed Hebrews was written by Paul from Rome during his first imprisonment (Hebrews 13:24).² The early historian, Eusebius wrote his opinion two centuries later:

The Epistle to the Hebrews . . . it is indeed Paul's, but that it was written for Hebrews in the Hebrew tongue, and that Luke, having carefully translated it, published it for the Greek. Hence, as a result of this translation, the same complexion of style is found in this epistle and in the Acts . . . Now, as the blessed elder used to say, since the Lord, being the apostle of the Almighty, was sent to the Hebrews; so through modesty Paul, knowing that he had been sent to the Gentiles, does not describe himself as an apostle of the Hebrews, both to give due deference to the Lord, and because he wrote to the Hebrews out of his abundance, being a preacher and apostle of the Gentiles.³

Again, in the late fourth and early fifth century canonical lists, Hebrews is included within the fourteen Pauline letters.⁴ However, Origen (AD 185–253) left the letter anonymous, even though he acknowledged that historically it had been assumed to be Pauline. Tertullian attributed it to Barnabas, others to Luke, Clement, and Apollos. Some purport that Hebrews was a missionary tract as it contains the longest running argument in the New Testament that Jesus is the most superior being ever known. Even though the debate continues about authorship, in this commentary, I will refer to the author as Paul.

Background

The book of Hebrews is “strong meat” (Hebrews 5:12, 14). The book can be divided into two main ideas: The promise of the temple and the price of that promise.⁵ An understanding of Old Testament priesthood ritual and the JST helps us see the temple symbolism. A prominent Catholic scholar wrote, “By all standards this is one of the most impressive works in the New Testament . . . written in quality Greek and passionately appreciative of Christ.”⁶

Outline of Hebrews 1–6

- 1:1–3 The Supremacy of the Son
- 1:4–14 Superiority of Son over Angels
- 2:1–4 The Role of Christ in Salvation
- 2:5–9 Jesus Made Human
- 2:10–18 Christ the High Priest
- 3:1–6 Jesus' Superiority to Moses

- 3:7–19 Warning against Unbelief
- 4:1–13 Enter the Rest of the Lord
- 4:14–5:10 Jesus: Suffering High Priest
- 5:11–6:8 Warning against Apostasy
- 6:9–12 True Believers Encouraged
- 6:13–17 The Certainty of God’s Promise

However, Hebrews is tagged as the most neglected book in the New Testament, because it “is a difficult book. It is to the New Testament what Leviticus is to the Old: Leviticus announces the Mosaic system, while Hebrews explains it. In it, Paul shows how the gospel grew out of the soil of the Levitical order. By the light of the gospel restored in his day, he shows how the Levitical system was intended as a bridge by which those in the wilderness of carnality could cross over to the rest of the Lord.”⁷ Hebrews is certainly the most Christ-centered book among Paul’s Epistles.

HEBREWS 1

The Supremacy of the Son

Hebrews 1:1–3

Hebrews 1:1–2 “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets . . . but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (NIV) The Epistle opens right into the importance of revelation. It skips Paul’s standard Greek greeting and thanksgiving and compares past prophets with God’s Son in their time. As we find in seven Epistles, “last days” is used most often for Paul’s own time. The KJV, “sundry times and divers manners” means, “many times and various ways” (NIV). The restored gospel offers a second witness to this reference of other worlds (Moses 1:33; 7:30). Jesus is identified as God’s heir and the Creator of the “worlds” (KJV) or “universe” (NIV, BSB). Each of Paul’s fourteen letters begins with a definition of a separate Father and Son in the Godhead.

Hebrews 1:3 “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (NIV) We learn more details about the Son of God. The Father and His Son look alike. The “express image” (KJV) is from the Greek word, used only once in the New Testament, which means an image made by engraving tools: “*charaktér*/properly, an engraving; (figuratively) an exact impression (likeness) which also reflects inner *character*.” It is also translated “stamped” (NEB), “nature” (RSV), or “is like him in every way” (CSV).

We also learn that the Son upholds “all things by His powerful word” (BSB). And after He cleansed all sin or “provided purification” (NIV) or “purged our sins” (KJV), He “sat down on the right hand of” God the Father. Paul identifies Jesus on the right hand of God a half dozen times, just as Jesus, Stephen and Joseph Smith did (Matthew 26:67; Acts 7:56, D&C 76:20, etc.).

Superiority of God's Son over Angels

Hebrews 1:4-2:18

Hebrews 1:4 “**He became as far superior to the angels . . .**” (BSB) A detailed discussion begins showing that Jesus is more exalted than the angels. The Old Testament speaks of angels as highly exalted beings involved in the Garden of Eden and giving the law at Sinai (see Genesis 3:24; Deuteronomy 33:2; Psalm 68:17). But Paul teaches that Jesus has a greater inheritance than angels. This sounds as if some Jews’ believed that God assigned angels a higher status than the Messiah.

Hebrews 1:5–13 “**For unto which of the angels said he at any time . . .**” Paul supports his thesis with seven Old Testament citations to illustrate the heavenly hierarchy in the next eight verses. Christians combed through the Old Testament to find how Jesus fulfilled prophecies of the Messiah (which means “anointed one” as highlighted in v. 9). It was the Father who anointed His Son Jesus with oil as our promised “Anointed One/Messiah/Christ.”

1. “Thou art my Son today I have become your Father” (Hebrews 1:5; Psalm 2:7).
2. “I will be His Father and He will be My Son” (BSB, Hebrews 1:5; 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chronicles 17:13)
3. “Let all the angels of God worship him” (Hebrews 1:6; Deuteronomy 32:43)
4. “Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire” (Hebrews 1:7; Psalm 104:4)
5. “Thy God has set thee above thy fellows, by anointing with the oil of exultation” (NEB, Hebrews 1:8–9; Psalm 45:6–7).
6. “In the beginning, O Lord, You laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain . . .” (Hebrews 1:10–12; Psalm 102:25–27)
7. “Sit on my right hand . . .” (Hebrews 1:13; Psalm 110:1)

Hebrews 1:6–7 “. . . Let all the angels of God worship him, who maketh his ministers as a flame of fire. And of the angels he saith, Angels are ministering spirits” (JST) Joseph Smith’s inspired version deviates from the Old Testament quote in order to define an angel as a ministering spirit. The restored scriptures are filled with this definition and other details on ministering angles. For example, “by the ministering of angels . . . men began to exercise faith in Christ” (Moroni 7:25); and “the Aaronic priesthood holds the keys of ministering angels” (D&C 13:1; also, JS-H 1:15; D&C 7:6; etc.).

Hebrews 1:14 “**Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation**” The KJV phrase “heirs of Salvation” received a special meaning in the Restoration. It became a title for those who have been sealed to exaltation but who still dwell in the telestial world (D&C 7:6; 76:88; 77:11; 138:59). Paul and other prophets use several different phrases to state this meaning including:

- “Calling and election sure (2 Pe 1:10; D&C 53:1)
- “Obtained a good report” (Hebrews 11:39)⁸
- “Enter into His rest” (Hebrews 3:18; 4:1–11; Helaman 4:1–10; Alma 13:12, 16; 16:17; 60:13; etc.)⁹
- “Go on unto perfection” (Hebrews 6:1)
- “Enter into the holiest” (Hebrews 10:19)
- “Made a high priest forever” (Hebrews 6:20)
- “More sure word of prophecy” (2 Pe 1:19; D&C 131:5)
- The sure sealing of the “Holy Spirit of Promise” (Ep 1:13; D&C 124:124; 132:7, 19; etc.)
- “Full assurance of hope” (Hebrews 6:11)
- “The heirs of promise” (Hebrews 6:17)

Christians and Jews developed detailed theologies about angels. To clarify the truth, the Prophet Joseph Smith felt inspired to clarify what angels are and what they are not. Some angles, such as Moroni, are resurrected beings. Others such as Moses, Elijah, and John the Baptist, who needed to deliver keys, were translated beings (D&C 110). Joseph also defend the difference between angels and ministering spirits.¹⁰

HEBREWS 2

The Role of Christ in Salvation

Hebrews 2:1–9

Hebrews 2:1 “We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away” (NIV) Paul moves into a moral section as he urges his audience to heed Christ’s teachings to stay close to the truth.

Hebrews 2:2–3 “If the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation” (NKJV) The Jews had a tradition of angels acting “as God’s intermediaries at Sinai.”¹¹ Building on that, Paul argues that if the presence of angels made the Law great, then a message from God’s Son must be honored even more. Paul basically asked, if in the Old Testament, you honor angelic-issued directions, punishments, and rewards, then why not give more attention to the teachings of Christ who issued His gospel of salvation. Paul learned of Jesus through visions of the Lord Himself, as well as through other witnesses such as Ananias, Peter, and Barnabas; each taught him much about the Lord.

Hebrews 2:4 “God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit” (NIV) God’s approval of the message is evident through miracles and the outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12, D&C 46). The same authenticity can be used to test all who claim to be servants of God. All



W. H. ...

disciples can discern for themselves which teachers or teachings are from God by observing if they transmit or foster the gifts of the Spirit

Jesus Made Human

Hebrews 2:5-9

Hebrews 2:5-9 “He [God] has not put the world to come . . . in subjection to angels. But one testified in a certain place, saying, ‘What is man . . . or the son of man . . . You have crowned him with glory and honor’” (NKJV) Again Paul quotes the Old Testament to testify that Jesus fulfills the scriptures as the “Son of Man.” Psalm 8:4-6, discusses the relationship between angels and the Son of Man in Hebrews 2:6b-8a. This verse from Psalms describes mortals who have to die, as “lower than that angels.” Yet Jesus had to suffer death like a human, in order to have all things in subjection. In verse nine Paul explains that Christ descended below all in order to lift all, or “might taste death for everyone” (NIV). The Psalm prophecies that because it was required of the Son of Man. Most Greek manuscripts do not have the phrase “And set him over the works of Your hands.

Christ the High Priest

Hebrews 2:10-18

Hebrews 2:10 “In bringing many sons and daughters to glory . . . salvation [was made] perfect through what he [Jesus] suffered” There is a profound message in the Christ being made perfect through sufferings. The “Suffering Servant” or Suffering Savior was prophesied in Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12. Jesus became perfect through His sufferings, thus allowing us to be perfect through His at-one-ment. The Jews were upset at the thought that their God would be killed as a criminal and not reign with glory and honor as king. (It is the old confusion between prophecies of the Lord’s first and second comings.) Though, how could anyone have confidence in divine mercy unless the Lord personally knew the terrible realities of life?

Hebrews 2:11 “Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family” (NIV) This is a beautiful description of how we become one through the at-one-ment thus allowing us to be on a level where our Lord, King, and Master, can call us his family, or “brethren” (KJV). To make something or someone holy is also to “consecrate, sanctify/*hagiazó*.” Jesus is the one who has the power to make humans holy or to “sanctifieth” (KJV).

Hebrews 2:12-13 “I will put My trust in Him.” And again: “Here am I and the children whom God has given Me” (NKJV) In this Epistle, nearly every statement is backed up by Old Testament references. In verse 12, Paul confirms Jesus’ sanctifying power by quoting God in Psalm 22:22, “I will declare thy name.” (The *church* in the Old Testament refers to an assembly or congregation.) In verse 13 he cites Isaiah 8:17-18.

Left: *The Consecration of Eleazar as High Priest* by William Hole, 1925.

Hebrews 2:14–15 “By his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (NIV) Because of Jesus’ death, He was able to destroy the devil’s power over our spiritual death. Jesus overcame physical and spiritual death. We can overcome our bondage by releasing our fears, including our fear of death, through trusting in the Savior. When we join as partakers of His flesh and blood, we help His work.

Hebrews 2:16–17 “not angels . . . but he helps the offspring of Abraham. He had to be made like His brothers in every way, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest . . . to make atonement for the sins of the people” (BSB) Paul continues to argue that Jesus is superior to angels, and that he came to do a higher work. God, in His wisdom, sent Jesus as a mortal and as a descendant of Abraham, not as a glorious angel from the heavens. Jesus shares a bond of brotherhood with the people of Abraham, and those adopted as covenant people. Through the priesthood that Abraham held (Melchizedek, not Aaronic), Jesus became the ultimate High Priest. Using a form of the words “priestly sacrifice” in Romans 3:25, Paul pictures Jesus as the High Priest making “propitiation for the sins of the people” (NKJV). He will develop this idea in the next chapters.

Paul testifies of Jesus’ atonement and never moves far from that subject. Jewish converts needed the powerful message of forgiveness through Christ instead of purification rites of animal sacrifice. Jews expected a triumphal Messiah (Luke 24:20–1), so Hebrews probes the need for the suffering mission of the Messiah, too. The “reconciliation” (KJV) or expiation (RSV) is the “atonement” (NIV). The Hebrew word for reconciliation is *kapparah* which comes from “atone/*kippur*/cover” as in the “Day of Atonement” or Yom Kippur (Leviticus 16).

Hebrews 2:18 “Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted” (BSB) Jesus’ suffering became a double gift for us. In addition to mediating our sins, He understands our pain and weaknesses, and can heal us. We can trust our Lord because He has endured that with which we struggle. He can give us perfect counsel. He knows personally the terrible realities of life.

HEBREWS 3

Jesus’ Superiority to Moses

Hebrews 3:1–6

Hebrews 3:1 “Holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest” (NIV) Paul refers to Jesus as not only the High Priest but also Apostle (which in Greek means, “one sent”). The “holy brethren” (KJV) are fellow covenanters (of both genders as the NIV points out above) who are set apart to “heavenly callings.” God calls many, but only those who obey are chosen and will enter into God’s presence (Romans 11:29; 1 Corinthians 1:26; D&C 121: 34–40).

Hebrews 3:2–5 “Moses was faithful in serving . . . But Jesus deserves more honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house deserves more honor than the house . . . and God is really the one who built everything” (CEV) In the household of God, Moses was a “faithful servant” who helped establish the House of God. But, Paul points out that the actual builder was Jesus, and it all came from the Great Architect of the whole plan, God. Paul often refers to God as Jesus’ Father, but the Old Testament usually uses God for Jehovah, who became Jesus, so I’m not sure if this refers to the Elohim or not. From the KJV, “This man,” refers to Jesus.

Hebrews 3:6 “We are His house, if we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope” (BSB) If we can uphold our testimonies and confidence in Jesus, then as heirs of God’s house, we join Jesus in His House or kingdom. The word “confidence/*parrésia*” is mentioned often in the New Testament for “freedom of speech, openness.” We see the word used when Jesus “spoke openly” (Mark 8:32; John 7:14), or when they asked him to speak “plainly” (John 10:14; 11:24). Most often Paul used it for “boldness” (2 Corinthians 7:4; Php 1:20; 1 Tim 3:13; etc.). The word speaks of courageously sharing one’s testimony, or sharing our confidence in God and His plan.

Warning against Israelites’ Unbelief

Hebrews 3:7–19

Hebrews 3:7–11 “As the Holy Ghost saith . . .” Paul credits the Spirit as the source of their hymn, Psalm 95:7–11. The quote extends from verses 7 to 11 summarizing the Children of Israel’s apostasy in the wilderness. He uses it as a warning to the early Christians against falling into the same place and forfeiting their chance to have the higher law rather than the lower law. It is the higher law that allows one to enter into the presence of the Lord rather than being content with only the administering of angles. .

Hebrews 3:8–9 “Do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness . . . for forty years” (NIV) Paul quotes this Psalm as a warning the Hebrew-Christians not to follow the bad example of the exiled Israelites. The “provocation” refers to their rebellion (RSV, NIV) near Sinai. They were tempted during their trial or testing period and failed because they hardened their hearts to the promptings of the Spirit.

Hebrews 3:10–11 “I was angry with that generation and I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray . . . They shall never enter My rest’” (BSB) The Psalmist alludes to the Exodus accounts when the God through Moses, invited the Israelites to climb Mt. Sinai and enter into His presence. But the smoking mountain and thunder frightened the Israelites. They told Moses to go for them; “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die” (Exodus 20:19, NIV). Moses tried to encourage them to receive this opportunity, “Do not be afraid . . . God has come to test you, so that the fear of Him may be before you, to keep you from sinning” (Exodus 20:20, BSB). Sadly, “the people stood afar off,” and Moses went alone up the mountain to see God (Exodus 20:21).

We learn in restored scripture that Israel rejected the higher priesthood and so the Lord gave them the lower law, including the administration of angels (D&C 84:23). The result was they had to wander for forty years. This was unnecessary. If they had accepted the Lord's invitation and higher law, they could have gone at once to inherit their promised land as well as received the gospel rather than the Law of Moses (JST Exodus 33).

The Lord defines the phrase "My rest" in modern revelation as the "fullness of his glory" (D&C 84:24; see also 84:6–26). Hebrews repeats this specific word eight times, "*katapausis/rest*" (The word is found only one other time in the New Testament, by Stephen in Acts 7:49). Paul first quotes it from Psalms, and then builds on it seven other times in chapters three and four (The other uses of "rest" in KJV come from approximately a dozen different Greek words).

Hebrews 3:12–14 "See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart . . . But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called 'Today' . . . hold our original conviction firmly" (NIV) Paul finishes quoting Psalm 95, and likens the frightened Israelites' experience to the new Christians. God has again given them an opportunity to live His higher law and enter into His Presence. He warns them that their unbelief will destroy their chances of entering into God's presence. He encourages them to exhort each another to stay free from the deceptions of sin.

The word "Today" has multiple meanings. In this context it sounds similar to Paul's quotation of Isaiah 49:8, "Now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Later Paul uses "Today" to last until the day of judgement (Hebrews 10:25). This is the same definition the Lord taught the elders of the restored church in D&C 64:23, "Behold, now it is called today until the coming of the Son of Man, and verily it is a day of sacrifice, and a day for the tithing of my people; for he that is tithed shall not be burned at his coming."

Hebrews 3:15 "while it is said: Today . . ." Paul again quotes two of the verses he just cited from Psalm 95:7 and 8 for emphasis. He tries to help them see the unique opportunity that God is giving them once again to prepare for the day of salvation.

Hebrews 3:16–19 "Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? . . ." (NIV) Paul reviews the Exodus story with three parallel questions and answers to drive home his message. He concludes with the sad summary: "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." Moses had tried to give them the higher law, but they refused it and were unable to enter into the presence of the Lord as a people.

Paul includes a different spin with his retelling of the story. Unlike our Old Testament account, Paul points to what we know as temple promises. They were given the lesser priesthood of the administering of angels. In other words, neither the Israelites—nor their priests—were allowed to enter through the veil of their Tabernacle. Only

the one high priest, on one day of the year communed with God in the Holiest Place (Leviticus 16). The tragic realization is that it was not necessary for them to travel in the wilderness—nor is it for us. If we keep the commandments and make covenants with God, we can move beyond the administration of angels and teachings of the lower law to enter into His Presence. Paul’s audience (including us!) are given the same invitation in chapter four. The prophet Joseph taught:

HEBREWS 4

Enter the Rest of the Lord

Hebrews 4:1-13

Hebrews 4:1 “Since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it” (NIV) Paul invites his audience as children of Israel to likewise enter into the same “rest” of the Lord. The understanding that “the Lord’s rest is fullness of his glory,” fits into other New Testament accounts that speak of striving for their “calling and election” to be made sure (D&C 84:24; 2 Pe 1:10). This same encouragement is given to our dispensation. Although very few couples receive this temple ordinance by ordained prophets, all are encouraged to strive for it (Moroni 7:3; D&C 93:1; 132:18–20; 49; etc.).

Hebrews 4:2–5 “For unto us was the *rest* preached, as well as unto them . . . If they harden not their hearts, they shall enter into my rest” (JST *italicized*) The JST adds this important conditional. Just as the early children of Israel had in their wilderness, the opportunity to receive the fullness of the gospel is being offered to Paul’s audience again. He pleads with them to have the faith to believe and strive to keep their covenants in order to enter into the “rest of the Lord.”

Hebrews 4:6–7 “God again set a certain day, calling it ‘Today’” (NIV) Paul continues to give commentary on Psalm 95:7, 8. Since Moses’ people did not accept the promises offered to them (“they” in v. 6), God set a time in the future for a second chance, calling it “today.” (v. 7).

Hebrews 4:8–10 “if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day” (KJV) “For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day” (BSB) This is referring to the prophet *Joshua* (in Greek his name is Jesus) who did not give the children of Israel “spiritual rest” once they entered into the promise land, because they had rejected the higher law. The Israelites only received the law of resting on the Sabbath not the higher form of “God’s rest.”

Hebrews 4:11 “Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience” (NIV) Paul’s comparison of different uses of “sabbath rest” and “Eternal Rest”

identifies the enteral nature of his plea to “labor” in order to return to the presence of God. The Old Testament also occasionally uses a special definition of “rest” as exaltation (Isaiah 11:10; Psalm 95:11; etc.).

Hebrews 4:12–13 “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword . . . Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight” (NIV) Paul uses the image of a double-edged sword to describe God as a powerful judge of our thoughts and desires. In the Old Testament, a two-edged sword was only about 18 inches long (Judges 3:16). In the Roman Empire, soldiers carried these double-edged swords.¹²

Jesus is The Suffering High Priest

Hebrews 4:14–5:10

Hebrews 4:14 “since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess” (NIV) During His mortal ministry, Jesus of Nazareth never acted as the High Priest at Herod’s Temple to offer sacrifice on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16), nor presided over the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:27), although He was the Greatest High Priest that all others were to point toward. Jesus went through the veil and opened it for all “his children” (Hebrews 12:5, 7). Paul understood the higher priesthood promises and symbols. Most of the twenty-four references to the “high priest,” in Hebrews, refer to Christ.

Hebrews 4:15 “we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” In the Old Testament the priest (*kohen*) acted as a mediator between man and God. All priests were to typify the Savior as they acted as a mediator between God and man. The Hebrew roots of the word “priest” also go back to the idea of “ministering.” The same word in Latin is, “*sacerdos*” or sacred. Leviticus 21:10–13 outlines the high priests’ duties. They also had the responsibility to watch over and guard the covenant, to teach the law of God, and to make the ritual offerings required by the law.¹³ There was only one high priest to oversee all priesthood functions in the Law of Moses. (The other priesthood offices were chief priest, priests descended from Aaron, and all the other Levites.) In the Book of Mormon, the high priest was not descended from Aaron, but functioned under the “holy order of God,” or the Melchizedek Priesthood (2 Nephi 6:2; Alma 4:4, 4:18; 13:1).

The most sacred duties of the high priest included: entering through the veil of the Temple into the Holy of Holies on the day of Atonement where he would sprinkle the blood of a sin offering on the mercy seat to seek forgiveness for the people’s sins (Leviticus 16:3); mediating with God for his people (Exodus 28:29); bearing the sins of his people (Exodus 28:38); offering incense—symbolically, Israel’s prayers ascending to heaven (Leviticus 16:12–13); making an atonement (Leviticus 16:32); judging uncleanness in deciding who can enter into the presence of the Lord (Leviticus 13:2); blessing the people (Numbers 6:23); receiving the mind and the will of the Lord for the Israelites through the Urim and Thummim (“lights and perfections”). In Jesus Christ, Israel was to see



Christ Before the High Priest by Gerard von Honthorst, ca. 1617. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Replica of the Ark of the Covenant in the Royal Arch Room of the George Washington Masonic National Memorial. Photo by Ben Schumin on December 27, 2006. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

their faithful and spotless Mediator and High Priest. Paul explains that Jesus' mortality taught Him how we feel in order to be the perfect mediator and comforter.

Hebrews 4:16 “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy” It was the initial desire of the Lord that all of Israel would become a “kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.” (Exodus 19:6). It was Israel's earlier refusal that led to the higher priesthood being taken from them. Now Paul states the challenge again. “Come boldly” (KJV) or “with confidence” (BSB), up the mount all the way to the throne of God. Their disciples receive the Lord's mercy as they make sacred covenants to obey and serve God.

HEBREWS 5

Hebrews 5:1–3 “Every high priest is selected from among the people . . . to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with those . . . going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness” (NIV) Paul defines the high priest, as one who made sacrifices for others, referring to the Temple and beyond. The calling of the high priest included acting as judge and counselor to act with compassion in behalf of his people.

Hebrews 5:4 “no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron” The “*honour*” refers back to the office of high priest in verse one. Paul references Moses ordaining Aaron as the high priest, which suggests he saw it as relevant to the Christian priesthood, too.

The New Testament examples of selecting another apostle through prayerful revelation, the laying on of hands, and receiving common consent, became the pattern for priesthood callings in the early Christian church (Acts 6:5–6). At the organization of the restored church, those with priesthood authority were “called of God” (D&C 20:2–3). Rather than just one high priest though, in this dispensation God's servants have the right to inspira-

tion from Him to call saints to serve, including men to the priesthood, and women to become priestess in the Temple.¹⁴

Hebrews 5:5 “Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father’” (NIV) Again Paul quotes Psalm 2:7 just as he did in Hebrews 1:5.

Hebrews 5:6 “He saith also in another *place*, Thou *art* a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” Paul cites his twenty-fifth Old Testament scripture from Psalm 110:4. The word, “*Melchizedek*” is made up of two words in Hebrew: *Melek* (or as it was written, *MLK* or *MLCH*) is “king,” and “*zedek*” is “righteousness.” (In Hebrews 7:2, the author spells out this definition.)

These root words have two connections with restored scripture. First, some have speculated that “Shem, the Great High Priest,” was also called Melchizedek, as a title (D&C 138:41).¹⁵ Second, the group of people in the Book of Mormon who bring the King’s son from Jerusalem called him, “Mulek,” or as it would have been written at the time, “MLK,” a perfect name for the baby “king.” He was “the son of King Zedekiah who came out of Jerusalem with them . . . and the land north was called Mulek” (Helaman 6:10). We refer to these people as the Mulekites.

Joseph Smith learned that in order to not overuse the name of the Lord, the higher priesthood was also called “order of Enoch” or “Melchizedek.” But it is actually “The Priesthood After the Order of the Son of God” (D&C 107:3–4; also see 76:57).

Hebrews 5:7–8 “Jesus . . . offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears . . . and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered” (NIV) Being willing to suffer anything necessary in order to come up to the full measure of obedience is part of what is required to be “made perfect” (v. 9). The teachings of Spencer Kimball enlighten this, “to each person is given a pattern—obedience through suffering, and perfection through obedience.”¹⁶ Times of suffering are often the times when we draw closest to God. They are times of refining. In the end, those who become more Christlike through suffering are grateful for the experience to grow. I am one of those.

Hebrews 5:9–10 “. . . having been perfected, He became *the* author of eternal salvation to all those obeying Him . . . designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (BLB) Christ alone become the “author of eternal salvation” for all who obey Him. This is one of the glorious truths of the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ: we have an impartial God who welcomes all who will obey to receive eternal salvation.

Warning against Apostasy after a Sure Witness

Hebrews 5:11–6:3

Hebrews 5:11–13 “It is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!” (NIV) Paul perceived that his flock were “babes” spiritually and could not digest the full truths about the Melchizedek priesthood power. They were only able to handle the “milk” of the first principles. It is as if Paul observes that his fellow Christians, like the Israelites, have tarried too long in the foot hills of immature spiritual experience, but he wants them to climb the mountain of deeper faith.

Hebrews 5:14 “But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil” (NASB) However, “strong meat” (KJV) is available and good for those who have matured spiritually by discerning “good and evil.” This comes from attuning one’s heart to the Spirit’s promptings. Learning the language of the Spirit’s inspiration develops the gift of discernment (1 Corinthians 12:10; D&C 46:23).

HEBREWS 6

Hebrews 6:1–2 “*Not leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection . . .*” (JST *italics*) Paul wants those in his audience who are spiritually strong enough to climb the mount and receive the “strong meat” of the gospel. The one-word addition in the JST adds the crucial reminder that moving onto higher principles, does not mean that we leave behind the doctrine of Christ. Instead, rooted disciples build on “repentance . . . faith . . . baptisms . . . laying on of hands . . . resurrection . . . and of eternal judgment.” Paul wants to discuss how to attain spiritual “maturity” (BSB) or “perfection” (KJV) in the Lord’s sense.

Hebrews 6:3 “*And we will go unto perfection if God permits*” (JST in *italics*). Paul wants to move on if God directs him as he hopes. For the next five chapters, he discusses requirements of deepening one’s faith to receive the covenants that provide exaltation. We know these in our dispensation from the temple endowment.

Hebrews 6:4–6 “*He hath made it impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift . . . if they shall fall away, to be renewed again unto repentance; seeing they crucify unto themselves the Son of God afresh*” (JST) Paul’s only concern with moving onto a higher level to discuss perfection is that his audience will be accountable now. Special knowledge requires special obligations. (The same doctrine is taught in 1 John 5:16, “sin unto death.”) If a saint enjoys the Holy Ghost, to the extent of receiving the “other comforter” in a vision, then he or she will be held accountable (D&C 88:3–4). It helps to know what Paul is talking about, though. Joseph Smith defined the “other comforter” in a sermon in Nauvoo:

There are two Comforters spoken of. One is the Holy Ghost . . . When the Lord has thoroughly proved him, and finds that the man is determined to serve Him at all hazards, then the man will find his calling and his election made sure, then it will be his privilege to receive the other Comforter.¹⁷

If one falls away after one has had the calling and election has been made sure, then Paul's warning that they will not be forgiven is applicable.¹⁸

In this dispensation, modern saints who fear that they are beyond forgiveness can be assured by the prophet Joseph's words: "All sins shall be forgiven except the sin against the Holy Ghost: after a man has sinned against the Holy Ghost there is no repentance for him, he has got to say that the sun does not shine, while he sees it, he has got to deny Jesus Christ when the heavens were open to him"¹⁹ Most saints will received this promise of exaltation or their "calling and election made sure," on the other side of the veil.²⁰ Yet the prophet has the keys to administer the sure seal to a few, in this life, through an additional temple ordinance in the Holy of Holies.²¹

Hebrews 6:7–8 "*The day cometh that the earth which drinketh in the rain . . . who now receiveth blessing from God, shall be cleansed with fire. For that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected . . . therefore, they who bring not forth good fruits, shall be cast into the fire, for their end is to burned*" (JST in *italics*) God's gift of rain brings vegetation to bless those who cultivate it. But, if God's gift bears harmful thorns and thistles—symbols for sins—then they will be burned at their divine judgment. In the Old Testament, we find the judgment described as the Law of the Harvest (Hosea 6:11).

True Believers Encouraged

Hebrews 6:9–12

Hebrews 6:9 "**Beloved, we are persuaded better things of you**" Paul is optimistic that his dear friends are capable of a righteousness salvation, not cursing and punishment.

Hebrews 6:10–11 "**God is not unrighteous, therefore he will not forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints . . . And we desire that every one of you do the same**" (JST in *italics*) The Christian saints had shown good labors of love in their ministering to one another. Love is an action verb. It is work, not just a fleeting emotion. Paul encourages the Hebrew saints to work with the same diligence for a "full assurance of hope" for God to make their exaltation sure.

Hebrews 6:12 "**We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised**" We cannot be spiritually lazy—in our prayers, charity, dress, self-control, sabbath and temple worship. The key for receiving exhalation is in being "valiant" in our testimony of Jesus Christ and keeping our covenants (D&C 76:69). We must develop patience and faith in order to "inherit the promises"

(KJV). In modern scripture we find similar discussions of this same promise (D&C 88:3, 4, 68, 69; 124:124; etc.).

The Certainty of God's Promise

Hebrews 6:13–20

Hebrews 6:13–15 “When God made a promise to Abraham . . . ‘Surely I will bless you and multiply you.’ And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise” (ESV) The same blessings Paul refers to were received by Abraham after he “patiently endured.” A few of Abraham’s challenges included: suffering childlessness for decades, multiple foreign moves, marital strife, and the emotional pain of being asked to sacrifice his beloved Isaac. His valiant nature during the suffering allowed him to receive the highest blessings of God, “by whom the promises remain” (D&C 27:10; also see 101:4; 110:12; 132:29–37; 133:55).

Hebrews 6:16–17 “God, desiring to show more abundantly the unchangeableness of His purpose to the heirs of the promise, guaranteed *it* by an oath” (BLB) Oaths were a part of Israelite religious life (Genesis 24; Numbers 30:2; 1 Nephi 4:32; etc.) “The heirs of the promise” are those same saints that he hopes to encourage to join with those that have their exaltation made sure. The oath God promises them is Eternal Life. When Joseph Smith addressed this chapter, he repeated the same encouragement: “Make your calling and election sure go on from grace to grace untill [*sic*] you obtain a promise from God for yourselves that you shall have eternal life. This is eternal life to know God and his son Jesus Christ.”²²

Hebrews 6:18–19 “hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil” (NKJV) Disciples are to “hope” for this great blessing as an anchor of our souls. If we grasp steadfastly, it will allow us saints to enter through “the veil” to meet the Lord. This hope is Christian’s inheritance as children of God’s Promise, as those adopted into Abraham’s seed and members of the Church of the Firstborn. Paul asks his audience to seek for these things. At the time of Jesus only the High Priest entered through the veil once a year. But, Jesus’ death opened the veil to God’s throne and to a whole kingdom of High Priests and Priestesses.

Hebrews 6:20 “Our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek” (NIV) Our example is always Jesus. He showed us what was required and how to enter into the “rest” of the Lord (Hebrews 4:1, 3, 4, 5, etc.) We must sacrifice all the Lord asks of us. We must obey the Lord and do the will of the Father at all times. This combination of obedience through sacrifice will lead to sanctification, which is rewarded either in this our second estate, or in our third estate.

Header Image: Moses and Joshua in the Tabernacle by James Tissot, 1904.

ENDNOTES

1. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 197.
2. *Beatty Papyrus II (P46)*. The only time we know Paul was in Italy, as the verse mentions, was in conjunction with his imprisonments in Rome.
3. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 201.
4. Welch, Hall, *Charting the New Testament*, 18–5.
5. Donald Parry, ed., *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1994), chapter 17.
6. Raymond Brown, *intro?* 683.
7. Millet, *Studies in Scripture*, 6:192.
8. Joseph Smith, “History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834],” p. 388, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed October 13, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/394>.
9. Joseph Smith, “Times and Seasons, 15 February 1842,” p. 689, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed October 13, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-15-february-1842/3> “The Lord, the King of Israel, shall be in the midst of them, and that he will rest in the arms of his love, and joy over them with singing. Surely, this will be a *rest* for the people of God in earnest, and this will be the time that the House of Israel will enjoy that *rest*, so often spoken of in the bible
10. Kent P. Jackson, ed., *Joseph Smith Commentary on the Bible*, 201. The prophet Joseph taught: “[There is] a difference between an angel and a ministering spirit. The one [has] a resurrected or translated body with its spirit, ministering to embodied spirits, The other [is] a disembodied spirit, visiting and ministering to disembodied spirits. Jesus Christ became a ministering spirit, while his body lay in the sepulcher. To the spirits in prison, to fulfill an important part of his mission without which he could not have perfected his work or entered in to his rest.” Also see: Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1938), 191, 168.
11. Craig R. Koester, *The Anchor Yale Bible: Hebrews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 205.
12. Koester, *Hebrews*, 274.
13. Numbers 6:22–27; 21:10; 35:25,28; Joshua 20:6; 2 Kings 22:8; Levite duties: Deuteronomy 10:8; 21:5; etc.
14. Russel M. Nelson, “Spiritual Treasures,” General Conference October 2019.
15. Alma, E. Gygi, “Is it possible that Shem and Melchizedek are the same person?” *Ensign* November 1973. Gygi offers seven evidences that support this claim: “1. The inheritance given to Shem included the land of Salem. Melchizedek appears in scripture as the king of Salem, who reigns over this area. 2. Shem, according to later revelation, reigned in righteousness and the priesthood came through him. Melchizedek appears on the scene with a title that means ‘king of righteousness.’3. Shem was the great high priest of his day. Abraham honored the high priest Melchizedek by seeking a blessing at his hands and paying him tithes. 4. Abraham stands next to Shem in the patriarchal order of the priesthood and would surely have received the priesthood from Shem; but D&C 84:5–17 says Abraham received the priesthood

- from Melchizedek. 5. Jewish tradition identifies Shem as Melchizedek. 6. President Joseph F. Smith's remarkable vision names Shem among the great patriarchs, but no mention is made of Melchizedek. 7. *Times and Seasons* (vol. 6, p. 746) speaks of "Shem, who was Melchizedek. ..."
16. Edward L. Kimball, ed., *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed., (SLC, UT: Bookcraft, 1982), 168.
 17. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:380. "The other Comforter spoken of is a subject of great interest, and perhaps understood by few of this generation. After a person has faith in Christ, repents of his sins, and is baptized for the remission of his sins and receives the Holy Ghost, (by the laying on of hands), which is the first Comforter, then let him continue to humble himself before God, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and living by every word of God, and the Lord will soon say unto him, Son, thou shalt be exalted. When the Lord has thoroughly proved him, and finds that the man is determined to serve Him at all hazards, then the man will find his calling and his election made sure, then it will be his privilege to receive the other Comforter, which the Lord hath promised the Saints, as is recorded in the testimony of St. John, in the 14th chapter, from the 12th to the 27th verses."
 18. *Ibid.* 6:314–315. The Prophet Joseph Smith spoke on this at the April 7, 1844 General Conference of the Church. The account was recorded in Wilford Woodruff's diary. It is known as the King Follett Funeral Sermon. "All sins shall be forgiven, except the sin against the Holy Ghost; for Jesus will save all except the sons of perdition. What must a man do to commit the unpardonable sin? He must receive the Holy Ghost, have the heavens opened unto him, and know God, and then sin against him. After a man has sinned against the Holy Ghost, there is no repentance." For a comparison of scribal texts of the same sermon, see Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 340–361.
 19. Joseph Smith, "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by *Times and Seasons*," 616. *The Joseph Smith Papers* (accessed October 17, 2019) <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-7-april-1844-as-reported-by-times-and-seasons/5>.
 20. Joseph Smith, "History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842] [addenda]," p. 9 [addenda], *The Joseph Smith Papers*, (accessed October 17, 2019) <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/544>
 21. Daniel H. Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (NYC, NY: Macmillan, 1992), 248.
 22. Joseph Smith, "Discourse, 10 March 1844, as Reported by James Burgess," [19], *The Joseph Smith Papers* (accessed October 17, 2019), <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-10-march-1844-as-reported-by-james-burgess/5>



HEBREWS 7–13

THE PRICE AND PROMISE OF THE TEMPLE

For introduction, see previous chapter Hebrews 1–6

The second half of Hebrews is spiritual “meat” and dives deeper in the comparisons between the superiority of Jesus to all other prophets, priests, and rituals that came before. Paul elaborates on many foreshadowings of Christ, including Melchizedek and animal sacrifices for sin. He expects his audience to be familiar with the Old Testament. As evidence to support his argument throughout the Epistle, Paul uses forty-five Old Testament quotations and several other references to Old Testament stories. He especially expected an understanding of the first five books of Moses or Torah (If you are unfamiliar with the stories, reading the context of the Old Testament is very helpful). He encourages the saints to accept God’s invitation to come boldly to the throne of God and strive to enter His presence—even if it requires suffering, chastening, and greater faith.

HEBREWS 7

Superiority of Melchizedek Priesthood

Hebrews 7:1-10

Hebrews 7:1a “For this Melchisedec [sic], king of Salem, priest of the most high God” In approximately 2000 BC, Melchizedek was the King of Salem (in Hebrew, “*shalem*/peaceful”). Records have been found from 1400 BC that reference “*Uru-Salem*/City of Peace.” As mentioned in Hebrews 5:6, Melchizedek means “*Mlkzdk*/King of righteous.” The Jewish-Roman historian Josephus recorded, “Melchizedek the Righteous King, for such he really was; on which account he was [there], and called the city Jerusalem, which was formerly called Salem.”¹ When King David conquered the Jebusite city, he made it his capital and “city of David.”²

2000 BC

Melchizedek’s City of Salem→

Jebusites, Jeru-Salem→

1,000 BC

Jerusalem “City of David”

The Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 14 adds sixteen more verses regarding Melchizedek (Genesis 14:25–40, LDS Bible appendix). We learn that as a child, Melchizedek stopped the mouths of lions and quenched fires. He and his righteous city were allowed to join the translated city of Enoch. Joseph Smith later taught that Melchizedek was a King after the order of heaven.³ This adds new meaning to Abraham 1:1–4 when Abram “sought for the blessing of the fathers and for appointment unto the priesthood.” The “blessings of the fathers” stemmed from Adam to Enoch, and all those afterward who received the hope of exaltation through the priesthood covenants. Just as Enoch prepared a people of righteousness, so did Melchizedek. And just as Noah and his wife were left behind to start anew as righteous parents, so were Abraham and Sarah asked to remain on earth, to bless the earth, and to raise a righteous posterity.

We learn more about Melchizedek in the Book of Mormon in Alma 13:1–19. Melchizedek’s people “waxed strong in iniquity . . . but Melchizedek having exercised mighty faith, and received the office of the priesthood according to the holy order of God, did preach repentance unto his people . . . and Melchizedek did establish peace in the land . . . therefore, he was called the prince of peace . . . and he did reign under his father” (Alma 13:18–19; also see D&C 84:6–26 and 107:1–4). In Hebrews 5:6, I looked at the possibility of Shem “the great high priest,” referring to Melchizedek, too (D&C 138:41).

Hebrews 7:1b–2 “who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all” The Old Testament introduces Melchizedek in the story of Abraham’s slaughter of the kings. Four Assyrian kings conquered Sodom and Gomorrah, and took many captive including

Abram's nephew, Lot, and his household.⁴ When Abram heard, he took his community of 318 men and pursued them for five days and nights.⁵ To free his nephew and family Genesis describes Abraham's men as slaying some of the Assyrians and driving the rest in a body to Damascus. Abram brought back "all the goods" and then paid tithing on the booty to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:16).

Hebrews 7:3 *"For this Melchizedek was ordained a priest after the order of the Son of God, which order was without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; And all those who are ordained unto this priesthood are made like unto the Son of God; abiding priest continually"* (JST) This section of Hebrews is confusing for other Christians to understand—was Melchizedek born without parents? The JST additions separate the man from the priesthood. We are so blessed to have the clarification of the JST. We understand that it is the power of the priesthood that is without beginning or end.

Hebrews 7:4 *"Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils"* Paul highlights three aspects of Melchizedek's greatness, and then contrasts him with Jesus to show the latter's superiority.

- Received tithes from Abram (Hebrews 7:4–5)
- Blessed Abram with the priesthood promises (Hebrews 7:6)
- Lives on beyond mortality (Hebrews 7:8)

Hebrews 7:7 *"Indisputably, the lesser is blessed by the greater"* (BSB) The lesser refers to Abraham who was blessed by the greater, Melchizedek. The blessing comes through the power of the priesthood. Throughout this discussion Paul refers to three priesthoods: Levitical, Abrahamic (patriarchal, including eternal marriage) and Melchizedek. The following comparison is from John W. Welch's research.⁶

See figure on following page.

Hebrews 7:8 *"mortal men collect the tenth; but in the case of Melchizedek, it is affirmed that he lives on"* (BSB) Levites receive tithes and die, but there is one that lives on beyond mortality who received tithes. This verse is understood in light of the JST to refer to the translation of Melchizedek and his city. It gives additional meaning to the new Jerusalem as well (Revelation 21:2).

Hebrews 7:9–10 *"For when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the loins of his ancestor"* (BSB) Paul speaks figuratively, since Levi's seed came from his Grandfather Abraham, then Levi in a sense paid tithes to Melchizedek, too. The whole argument is to show that the Levitical priesthood is lower or secondary to the Melchizedek priesthood.

Levitical and Melchizedek Priesthoods As Compared in Hebrews 7

LEVITICAL	MELCHIZEDEK
Begins and ends	"Without beginning of days nor end of life" (7:3)
Mortal	"Immortal, made like unto the Son of God" (3)
Revocable	"Abideth a priest continually" (3)
Hereditary	"Without father, without mother" (3)
Limited to the tribe of Levi	Open to those outside the tribe of Levi (14)
Commanded according to the law	Blessed according to righteousness (1-2)
Takes tithing from their brethren	Receives tithing with a blessing (6)
In Abraham	Over Abraham (4, 6, 10)
Receives blessings through Abraham	Gave blessings to Abraham (6)
Not the final priesthood	Another priest beyond the Levitical (11, 15)
Governs the lower law	Governs the higher law (11-12)
After the law of carnal commandments	After the power of endless life (16)
Cannot make perfect	Brings in a better hope (19)
Made priests without an oath	Made priests with an oath (20-21, 28)
Law administered without an oath	Law administered with oaths (21, JST)
Temporal	Eternal, "for ever" (21, 28)
Old testament	Surety of a better testament (22)
Many priests needed because they die	Based on Jesus who will not die (23)
Changeable	Unchangeable (24)
Limited reconciliation of God and man	Able to intercede to the uttermost (25)
Highest Priest in this order is fallible	Highest Priest in this order is holy, undefiled (26)
Offers sacrifices to heaven for his own sins	Highest Priest higher than the heavens (27)
Daily sacrifices required	One sacrifice for all time (27)
With infirmity	"Consecrated for evermore" (28)

Jesus Superior to Melchizedek

Hebrews 7:11-28

Hebrews 7:11 “Now if perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood . . . why was there still need for another priest to appear—one in the order of Melchizedek” (BSB) The clincher of Paul’s argument comes together with the point that the Levitical priesthood does not have to power to save us. Jesus was not from Aaron but was a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Perfection can only come from the connection with God through His ordinances of highest priesthood, not from the lesser priesthood of the administering of angels.

Hebrews 7:12 “when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also” (NIV). When Moses’ Israelites refused to receive the higher law and ascend the mount to see God, they also refused the higher priesthood. Instead, they asked Moses to be an intermediary for them. They settled on the preparatory or Levitical priesthood with the administering of angels (or messengers) rather than taking full responsibility themselves. As the law was changed so, too, was the power available from their shared priesthood. The lower law of burnt offerings and cleansings were to prepare them for later entering into the Lord’s presence. Paul’s premise is based on the need for a saving power greater than sacrificial rites as explained in the following chapter.

Hebrews 7:14 “Our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood” The promises of another high priest had nothing to do with the tribe of Levi, but rather the tribe of Judah. Hence, the promised Messiah would not hold the Levitical priesthood as a son of David.

Hebrews 7:15-16 “this point is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears . . . by the power of an indestructible life” (BSB) The priesthood of Melchizedek was not the carnal laws (Mosaic laws), but had the “power of Endless [God’s] life.” (KJV)

Hebrews 7:17 “Thou *art* a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec [*sic*]” Paul quotes Psalm 110:4 here and in verse 21. This was known as a Messianic verse.

Hebrews 7:18-19a “the former commandment is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect)” (BSB)) The former, Mosaic rituals which were performed by the lineage of Levitical priesthood holders, must now be set aside for a better option.

Hebrews 7:19-21 “For the law *was administered without an oath and made nothing perfect, but was only the bringing in of a better hope; by the which we draw nigh unto God. Inasmuch as *this high priest was not without an oath . . .**” (JST) The better hope is introduced that will lead us to perfection. The JST explains that “the law” was “only” to bring the Israelites to the truth, while the oath and covenant came from the perfect High

Priest, Jesus. The word “oath” is used four times in the New Testament, all in the last part of this chapter. It refers to the oath and covenant of the higher priesthood. The word, “*horkómosia/oath*” means an affirmation on the oath or taking of an oath. It gains even more importance in that it was offered “by the One who said to Him, ‘You are a priest forever’” (Psalm 110:4). It is an oath from the Father. The restoration refers to God the Father’s offer as the “oath and covenant” of the Melchizedek priesthood (D&C 84:39, 40). From the time of King David, the Israelites knew the prophecy that the Messiah was a priest forever. Jesus fulfilled the promise of a better covenant.

Hebrews 7:22 “Jesus made *the* surety of a better testament” (JST) The word *testament* in Greek is also translated “covenant.” The two words are almost synonymous. Jesus became the new covenant—and through Him there are many priests in heaven because the promises of the priesthood lives on eternally.

Hebrews 7:23–25 “because Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent priesthood . . . He is able to save completely . . . He always lives to intercede for them” (BSB) The Greek can be translated, “*permanent, perpetual, or unchangeable.*” The same idea is repeated in verse 28. Some Christians have misunderstood “*unchangeable*” because they do not understand priesthood (and have used it against us). Jesus makes an “*intercession*” refers to a Roman/Hebrew practice for the legal appealing to another for aid, and therefore there must be two separate beings referred to (clarification of a separate Godhead again). Paul teaches that Jesus will be our intercessor with God the Father if we climb up the mount and to receive their promises.

Hebrews 7:26–27 “For such an high priest became us, *who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made ruler over the heavens; And not as those as those high priests, who offer up sacrifice daily, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people: for he needed not to offer sacrifice for his own sins, for he knew no sins; but for the sins of the people. And this he did once*” (JST) Jesus is the holy, “innocent” (BSB) One, the only undefiled High Priest. The changes clarify that Jesus did not need to make daily sacrifices in the Temple as the Aaronic High Priest did on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). Furthermore, He only needed to offer Himself once as the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Hebrews 7:28 “the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever” The “oath and covenant of the Melchizedek priesthood was available to certain individuals from the time of Adam (i.e. D&C 107:41; 2 Nephi 6:2; Alma 4:20; etc.), but after Jesus, the oath and covenant became available to Christian disciples. In the Restoration all worthy of making temple covenants are able to be clothed and anointed with the oath and covenant. Paul summarizes the promises of the Father to Jesus for his qualifications: through an oath His Son was *consecrated* forever.

HEBREWS 8

Superiority of The New Covenant

Hebrews 8:1-13

Hebrews 8:1-3 “We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of . . . the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched . . . also to offer . . .” All other High Priests were types of Jesus—walking through the veil to the Holy of Holies and offering sacrificial blood for the sins of the people. The Holiest Place represented Jesus’ throne room. The mercy seat appeared like Jesus’ empty tomb, with two angels on either end of the throne where God dwelt. Moses’ tabernacle was a type of God’s sanctuary where the Lord will serve as our High Priest. Jesus offered the greatest gift and sacrifice, His life.

Hebrews 8:4 “*Therefore while he was on earth, he offered for a sacrifice his own life for the sins of the people. Now every priest under the law, must needs, offer gifts, or sacrifices, according to the law*” (JST) The KJV explains that Jesus did not follow the pattern of the Aaronic reigning priest. The JST adds that Jesus followed the heavenly pattern of sacrifice. His gift was not an animal, but his sinless life.

Hebrews 8:5 “**They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things ‘ . . . make everything according to the pattern’**” (ESV) The tabernacle and ordinances were patterned after the heavenly order shown to Moses on Sinai. This was understood hundreds of years before Paul as we read in the Book of Mormon. As taught by King Benjamin, “many signs, and wonders, and types, and shadows showed he unto them, concerning his coming; and also holy prophets spake unto them concerning his coming; and yet they hardened their hearts, and understood not that the law of Moses availeth nothing except it were through the atonement of his blood” (Mosiah 3:15). Abinadi explained that the sacrificial rituals, Aaronic priesthood ordinances, and “all these things were types of things to come” (Mosiah 13:31).

Hebrews 8:6 “**the ministry Jesus has received is . . . superior . . . the covenant of which he is mediator is superior . . . the new covenant is established on better promises**” (NIV) Another title and role of Jesus is our “Mediator/*mesités*/an arbitrator, intermediary, a go-between, or agent of something good”⁷ Because of His atoning sacrifice and gift of redemption, Jesus could be The Mediator or middleman who brought harmony between our perfect God the Father and fallen humanity. The fact that God has a Mediator, speaks of separate beings in the Godhead.

Need for a New Covenant

Hebrews 8:7-13

Hebrews 8:7 “**If that first covenant had been without fault, no place would have been sought for a second**”

(BSB) Paul shows that even Jeremiah understood that they needed a new covenant because even in the past, over generations, the Children of Israel did not live their covenants with God. Verses 8–12 cite Jeremiah 31:13–34, in which he prophesies that the new covenant will be part of God’s disciples’ hearts and minds.

JEREMIAH 31:13–34

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

HEBREWS 8:8–12

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

Hebrews 8:13 “In saying, ‘new,’ He has made obsolete the first; and that which is growing old and aging is near vanishing” (BLB) Paul concludes by defending the new covenant. God has made the old one obsolete. The people of God will find forgiveness, but in order to receive the greatest blessings, they must make and live new covenants. At the fulfillment of the new covenant, all on earth will know the Lord (Hebrews 8:11).

HEBREWS 9

Mosaic Ordinances Prefigured Christ's Ministry

Hebrews 9:1-28

Hebrews 9:1-5 “the first *covenant* had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made . . . candlestick . . . table . . . shewbread . . . second veil . . .” Paul reviews Moses’ tabernacle with each sacred piece foreshadowing their Messiah. (We find Moses’ directions in Exodus 25-27.). The sizes below are for Moses’ Tabernacle (the later temples were larger). A cubit was approximately 18 inches (from elbow to fingertip, ranging from 17-20 inches).⁸

TABERNACLE DETAILS

SYMBOLISM

SCRIPTURES

Holy Place—first sanctuary room covered in gold, 30’x 15’x 15’ (20x10 cubits)

Sacred space for holiness and preparing to enter into the presence of the Lord with the three furnishing symbolizing prayer, bread and wine, and light

Hebrews 9:2; Exodus 26:33; 28:29; Leviticus 10:18

Lampstand/Candlestick/ Menorah
Six branches extending from central trunk.

Tree of life and light, leading the way back to the presence of God

Hebrews 9:2; Exodus 25:14, 31-40; Leviticus 24:1-4; 1 Kings 7:49

Table of Incense—18”x18”x36” square wood, covered in gold (in the tabernacle this was in front of the veil, in Hebrews it is after)

Incense was lit before sunrise at and 3:00 p.m. The smoke, like prayers, ascending to heaven

Hebrews 9:2; Exodus 30:1-10; Psalm 141:2; Luke 1:9

Table of Shewbread—wooden table covered with gold. 36” x 18,” and 27” high. for 12 shewbread/ unleavened cakes, in two piles with frankincense on each row and a pitcher of wine. Eaten by the priest every Sabbath

The 12 shewbread and 12 Israelite tribes were perpetually presented before God as an offering and service. Christians interpret this as sacrament symbols, or the Bread of Life.

Hebrews 9:2;
Exodus 26:36; 39:36;
40:23; Leviticus
24:5–9; Numbers 4:7;
Matthew 26:26–27;
Mark 14:22–23;
Luke 22:17–19

Most Holy Place—Holy of Holies, square room behind the veil, 15’x15’x15’ (exterior measurements 10x10x10 cubits), covered in gold.

God’s throne room, the most sacred space of all.

Hebrews 9:3; Exodus
26:33–34; 30:8–10;
40:3; Leviticus 16:2–3,
12–34

Ark of the Covenant—a wooden box, 45” x 27” x 27” overlaid with gold, containing:

1. Manna in a gold jar
2. Aaron’s staff that budded
3. Stone tablets of covenant

Above the lid or “mercy seat” were two angels with wings touching

A golden box or ark with signs of God’s authority, power, covenant, and mercy. The box represented His throne. The lid acted as the seat of the throne and was called the mercy seat. Mercy was the foundation of His reign. The two angels pointed their wings and faces toward the middle. This shares a similar image of Jesus’ empty tomb on resurrection morning. Mary Magdalene sees two angels sitting on either end of the site where Jesus laid and was resurrected.

Hebrews 9:4–5;
Exodus 16:32–34;
25:10–22; 26:33–34;
30:6; 34:27–28; 37:6,9;
Numbers 17:1–11;
Deuteronomy 9:10–
11; 10:1–5;
John 20:12

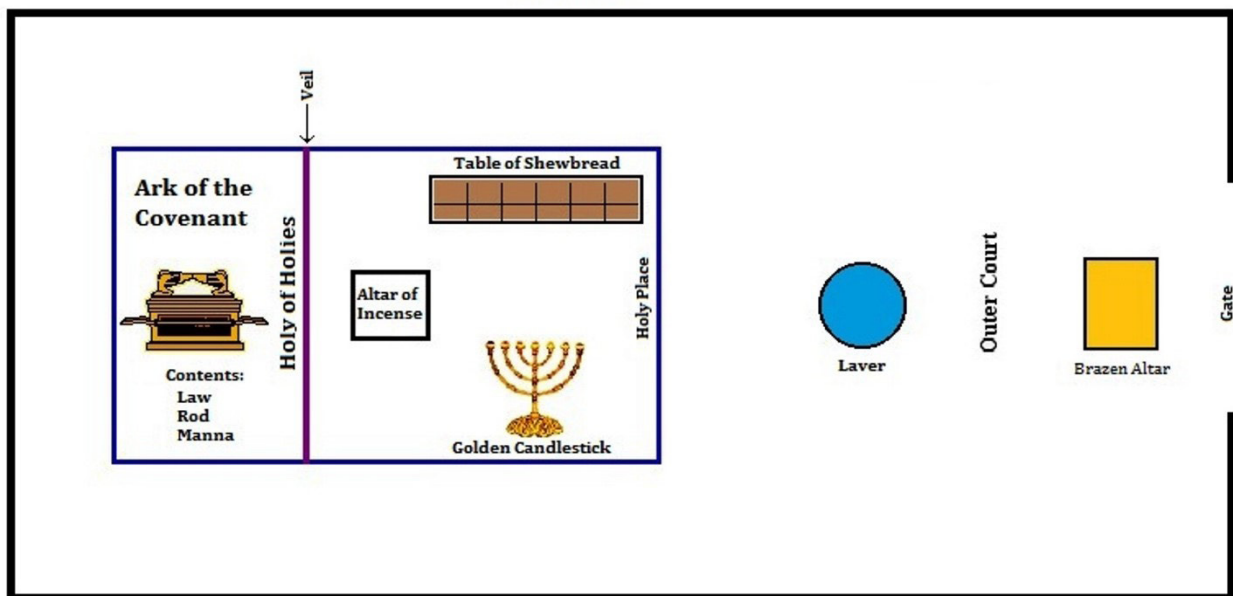
Hebrews 9:6–7 “the priests entered regularly into the first room to perform their sacred duties. But only the high priest entered the second room . . . once a year, and never without blood” (BSB) A few select priests were allowed to go into the Holy Place every morning before sunrise, and in the afternoon at the hour of prayer (or 3:00 p.m.). Their turn was chosen by “lots” and their assignments were either to light the candlestick or, incense, or to help with removing old ashes, bread, and the like.⁹ We read of this as a once in a life time experience for Zachariah when the angel Gabriel visited him (Luke 1).

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest had the sacred opportunity to make sacrifices for himself and his people before sprinkling the veil with blood, speaking with God at the veil, and then entering through the veil into the Holy of Holies (Lev 16).

Hebrews 9:8–10 “the Holy Spirit was showing that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed . . . because the gifts and sacrifices being offered were unable to cleanse the conscience of the worshiper” (BSB) The symbols witnessed to Paul that the high priest’s annual service was only in preparation of the real thing which occurred when Jesus acted as our Passover lamb, carried our sins and opened the way for humanity to return into the presence of God. The Jewish temple service only dealt with the symbols of meat and washings as an elementary preparation. They pointed to the time of the Messiah, as “an illustration for the present time” (BSB).

Moses' Tabernacle

Exodus 25



Hebrews 9:11 “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands” Jesus’ kingdom was not temporal or housed in an earthly building, but is a heavenly eternal kingdom. Christ, as the great High Priest, opened the veil for a whole kingdom of High Priests and Priestesses. Symbolically this happened as the veil was torn (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45).

This fulfillment was echoed in the Book of Mormon by many voices including Alma 25:15–16: “But notwithstanding the law of Moses, they did look forward to the coming of Christ, considering that the law of Moses

was a type of his coming, and believing that they must keep those outward performances until the time that he should be revealed unto them. Now they did not suppose that salvation came by the Law of Moses; but the Law of Moses did serve to strengthen their faith in Christ; and thus they did retain a hope through faith, unto eternal salvation, relying upon the spirit of prophecy, which spake of those things to come.” (Also, see Mosiah 13:29–30; 2 Nephi 25:24–27; etc.)

Hebrews 9:12–14 **Neither by the blood of goats or of calves, but by his own blood . . . the blood of Christ, who by the Holy Ghost offered himself unspotted unto God, cleanse our conscience from dead works, to serve the living God?”** (DRB) Paul touches on the Jewish temple rituals to show step-by-step how they were only a shadow of things to come—each testifying of Jesus’ offering. We see Jesus as the symbol from the blood of unblemished first-born male animals to no broken legs. All represented Christ.

Hebrews 9:15 **“Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed”** (NIV) This verse is a beautiful description of the atoning role of our Redeemer. Each of the next six uses of “*testament*” are changed in the JST and NIV, RSV, etc. In Greek, “*diathéké*/testament/covenant between two parties,” can also mean a legal document or a “will.” This is how the word is used in verses 16 and 17.

Hebrews 9:18–21 **“The first covenant was not put into effect without blood. For when Moses . . . took the blood of calves and . . . saying, ‘This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep’”** (BSB) Moses’ testament/covenant was also sealed with animal blood that typified Christ’s atonement. He sprinkled the people and tabernacle with blood to sanctify it, symbolizing the future power of purification through Jesus’ blood and body. Paul’s citation is from Exodus 24:8. The Jews erred in seeking salvation wholly through the symbolic blood of animals.

Hebrews 9:22 **“without shedding of blood is no remission”** The Israelite’s sacrifices were made for the remission or cleansing of the sins. Forgiveness comes through the sacrifice and blood of the Lamb of God.

Hebrews 9:23–26 **“. . . patterns of things in the heavens . . . For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands . . . Nor yet that he should offer himself often . . . but now once in the *meridian of time*”** (JST *italicized*) Earthly types and shadows are only “*patterns*” of things to come. Christ fulfilled the law by a single sacrifice of His precious perfect blood (a symbol of his mortality). In the KJV or verse 26, Paul refers to his time as “the end of the world,” but the JST changed it to our understanding of time (see above).

Hebrews 9:27–28 **“People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time . . . to bring salvation”** (NIV) Paul

understood that after we live and die our judgment comes where we will be accountable for our thoughts and actions. Jesus as the Christ/Messiah is the end and answer to the Law of Moses. Paul promises his audience that look forward to the second coming of the Lord that they will see Him when He comes the second time unto “*salvation*.” A similar promise is found in D&C 93:1, “Verily, thus saith the Lord: It shall come to pass that every soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am.” Whether this promise is received in this life or the next does not matter as long as it is received.

HEBREWS 10

Christ’s Sacrifice Once and for All

Hebrews 10:1-18

Hebrews 10:1-2a “**The law is only a shadow of the good things to come, not the realities themselves . . . If it could, would not the offerings have ceased?**” (BSB) This is the Paul’s concluding argument. After debating the same subject over three chapters, he concludes that Jesus is superior to all Levitical and other High Priests. For the fourth time, Paul explains to the Jewish-Christians that the animal sacrifices were only a pattern, type, or shadow and could never take away any sins (also see Colossians 2:17).

Paul’s audience needed to understand what Amulek explained in the Book of Mormon:

It is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice, and then shall there be, or it is expedient there should be, a stop to the shedding of blood; then shall the law of Moses be fulfilled; yea, it shall be all fulfilled, every jot and tittle, and none shall have passed away. And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, every white pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal (Alma 34:13-14).

Hebrews 10:2b “**worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins**” (NIV) In most English translations, this phrase may communicate that mortals need not feel guilt or need to repent more than once. This is a misunderstanding of “guilt” (BSB) that can actually lead one to repentance and ultimately, forgiveness. With each new fracturing of God’s laws, the Spirit may prompt us to be “conscience of sins” (KJV). If guilt is received as a motivating force to lead to repentance, it is a blessing. The reminder to change or refine our mortal ways can become a helpful step along the path toward the great gift of forgiveness. Repentance is a gift of love. However, if we exaggerate our guilt after repentance and forgiveness, then we have misused God’s plan.

Hebrews 10:3 “those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins” (BSB) The annual experience probably refers to the High Priest’s offerings and the “scapegoat” ritual on the Day of Atonement. Leviticus 16:5–22 explains that once a year, the sins of the whole congregation of Israel were placed on the head of the goat, “to make an atonement” (Leviticus 16:10). Aaron (or the subsequent High Priest) placed both his hands on the head of the goat and “confess[ed] over him all the iniquities of the Children of Israel and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat” (Leviticus 16: 21). Then the goat was sent off into the wilderness. Another goat and bull were offered as a sin offering. Then Aaron took the blood from the slain animal and sprinkled it on the veil before entering into the Holy of Holies. I believe that this is symbolic that Jesus was the “Anointed One,” anointed by His Father to carry our sins as redeeming gift.

Hebrews 10:5–9 “When Christ came into the world, he said . . . ‘I have come to do your will, my God.’” (NIV) This idea of sacrifices extending beyond animals to our hearts and efforts was not new to the Jews, as Paul quotes Psalm 40:6–8 (LXX). The “body thou hast prepared me” (10:5, KJV) may have multiple levels of meaning—including our Savior’s body, and the gift of our resurrected bodies. It might also mean something about a listening ear as the RSV translation reads: “thou hast given me an open ear” (RSV). Paul explains that the will of the Father can change. God needs us to do different things at different times.

Hebrews 10:10 “we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (NIV) All who accept Jesus’ redemption through repentance are made holy through His great and last sacrifice, which was the will of the Father. When we are “made holy,” we are “sanctified” (KJV), or “*hagiazó*/consecrated/set apart as holy, hallowed, purified.”¹⁰

Hebrews 10:11–14 “And every priest standeth daily ministering . . . But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice . . . perfected for ever them that are sanctified” This “*man*” (KJV), or “priest” (BSB), is Christ (RSV). Paul’s summary pulls his long argument: Day-after-day animal sacrifices could not save anyone but pointed to Jesus’ sacrificial death. Jesus’ enemies are Satan and his devils. They will have no power over death or anything else when Christ makes them completely subservient to Him (the imagery of “footstool”). Whether or not all mankind will desire Eternal Life, Jesus has made it possible for all to be perfected if they really have it as their hearts’ desire.

Hebrews 10:15–18 “I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds . . . Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more” Paul teaches the Hebrews by quoting another of their beloved prophets: Jeremiah 31:33–34. Once the Lord’s law is in our hearts and minds, then we are on the road to perfection. The power of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice obliterated the need for another blood sacrifice and left the weight on our individual hearts feel the need to sacrifice our sins and repent. Complete repentance washes away and cleanses our past sins (D&C 58:42).

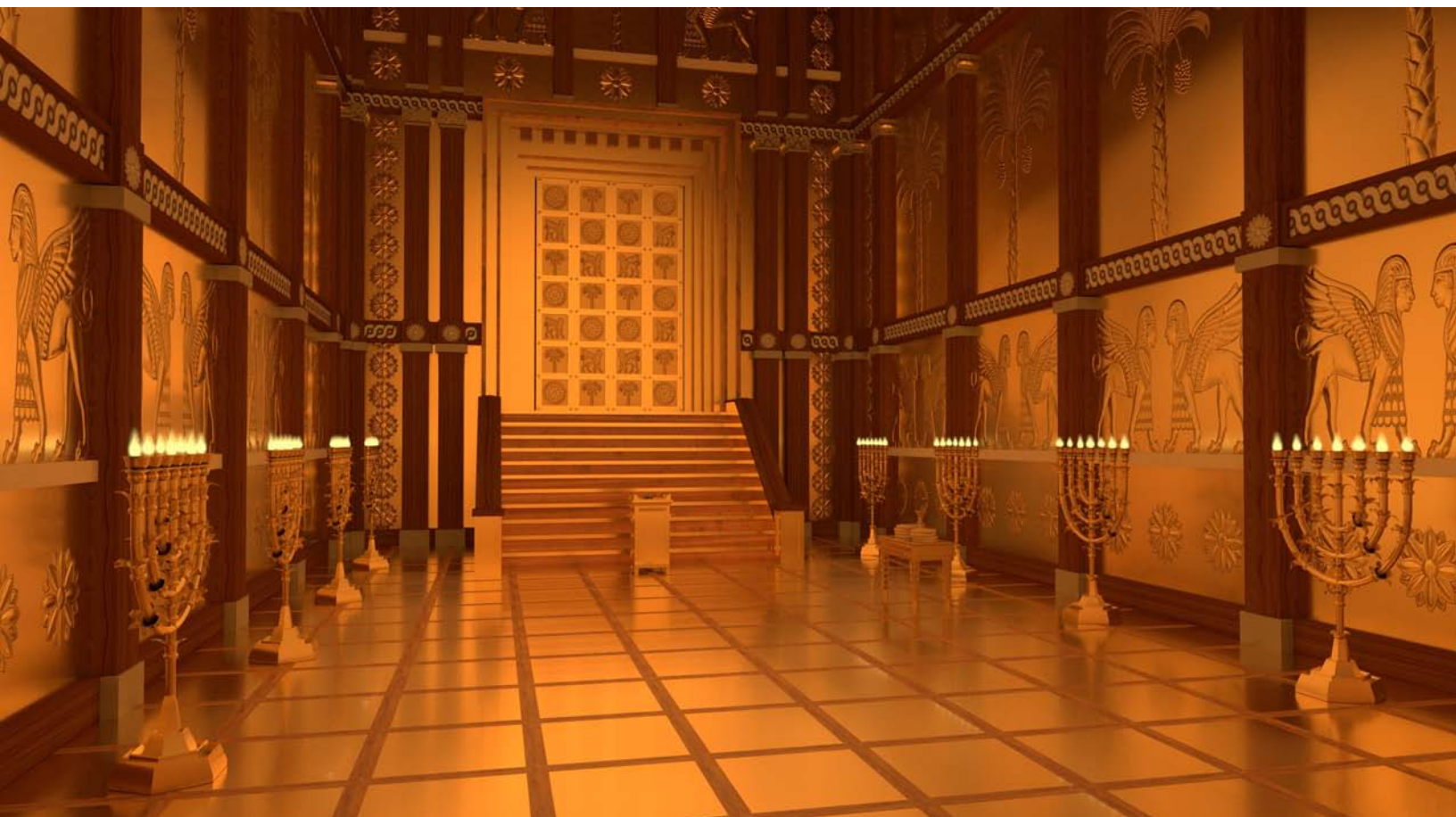
A Call to Persevere: An Appeal to Hold Firm

Hebrews 10:19-31

Hebrews 10:19-20 “we have boldness in the entrance of the holy place by the blood of Yeshua. And the way of The Life who made us new is now within the veil which is his flesh” (ABPE) This Aramaic translation retains the name Yeshua which is what Jesus would have been called by his peers. The veil has multiple meanings. In the Israelite tabernacle, it separates priests from God. At Jesus’ death the temple veil was rent, just as His own flesh was torn for us. The veil symbolizes Jesus’ body, as it becomes the means for humanity to enter into the presence of God. Paul’s order and imagery speaks of repenting, making covenants, and taking on the name, blood, and signs of Christ through receiving His redeeming atonement, in order to pass into the Most Holy Place to commune with God.

Hebrews 10:22-23 “Let us approach [the veil] with a true heart and the confidence of faith . . . having bathed our bodies in pure water, And let us grasp firmly . . . for he who has promised us is faithful” (ABPE) Continuing at the point of the veil, Paul admonishes the saints who have been washed, and spiritually cleansed to “draw near” (KJV) to those promises. Paul offers all worthy Christian saints the opportunity to walk the path that only the one anointed high priest did once a year in Judaism. He invites all washed and “purified/sprinkled” (JB200/KJV) saints to “hold fast” through faith in His name to pass through the veil to the Most Holy Place, and commune with God. We can trust in God’s promises.

3D rendering of The Holy Place, facing the entrance to the Holy of Holies. in Solomon’s Temple Image via Brian Olsen, Photogent.com.



Hebrews 10:24–25 “Spur one another on to love and good deeds. Let us not neglect meeting together . . . all the more as you see the Day approaching” (BSB) Much of the gospel of Jesus Christ is about helping our fellow pilgrims progress. We must “consider one another” with love. That can be done when we meet together—our Sabbath worship, ministering, seminary, institute, etc. President Nelson did just that in General Conference when he warned, “Do the spiritual work to find out for yourselves, and please do it now. Time is running out.”¹¹

Hebrews 10:26–29 “If we deliberately go on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no further sacrifice for sins remains . . . one deserves to be punished who has trampled on the Son of God” (BSB) Paul emphatically warns those who have made sacred covenants and then deliberately sin that they will have to suffer. The consequences of leaving the higher law are eternal. He also warns that those who break higher covenants will have more dire consequences than if they broke the Law of Moses. However, Paul’s ultimatum is not quite complete—repentance is available if the sinner stops sinning and completely submits to God’s will again through repentance. The Lord added this important qualification when he stressed this same point in a revelation through Joseph Smith, “if they would not repent they must suffer even as I” (D&C 19:17). Repentance is the saving grace and gift of mercy.

Hebrews 10:30–31 “. . .The Lord will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” Paul quotes two phrases on God’s judgment (Deuteronomy 32:35–36; Psalm 135:14). A righteous and thorough judgment is part of God’s plan. The Prophet Joseph learned through revelation that: “the mystery of godliness, how great is it! For, behold, I am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hand is endless . . . Endless punishment is God’s punishment” (D&C 19:10–12).

Hebrews 10:32–33 “Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering” (NIV) Once the Jews were converted to Christianity, they endured persecution so that they were “made a gazingstock” (KJV), or “public spectacle (NAS) and “publicly exposed to abuse” (RSV).

Hebrews 10:34 “You sympathized with the prisoners and cheerfully submitted to the violent seizure of your property, because you know that you have a better and more permanent possession” (ISV) In the KJV, it sounds as if the Hebrew saints helped Paul in prison, “ye had compassion of me in my bonds.” However, most other major English translations change this verse from first person to third person. If it refers to Paul, it helps us date the experience probably to Caesarea where he was imprisoned for two years (Acts 24:22–23).

Hebrews 10:35–36 “Do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward” (NKJV) Seeking the promises of the Lord requires “patience” (KJV), “perseverance” (NIV), and “endurance” (NASB) not only because it is a narrow and difficult (or “strait”) path, but also because of Satan’s minion’s working against the saints. If we can maintain our trust in God’s plan, He will implement the training required to perfect the saints.

Hebrews 10:37–39 “He who is coming will come and will not delay . . . But we do not belong to those who shrink back . . . but to those who have faith and are saved” (NIV) Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:3–4 (also, cited in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11). Many translations of verse 38, use the singular, “My righteous one” (BLB), and others use the plural, “the just shall live by faith” (JST). The whole assembly of righteous will follow the “Righteous One.” The message is that Paul trusts his audience will not “draw back” but will live by faith.

HEBREWS 11

The greatest discourse on faith in the Bible

Faith Defined as Action

Hebrews 11:1–3

Hebrews 11:1 “Now faith is the *assurance* of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (JST *italicized*) The only word changed in the JST was the KJV “substance” for *assurance*. Interestingly, decades later, many modern English translations also changed to that same word. This adds powerful clarity to the definition.

Hebrews 11:2–3 “This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command” (NIV) The Creation heads the list of the results from faith. The KJV includes the plural, “worlds were prepared” rather than “universe.” That Creation took place under the direction of the Godhead and Michael the archangel. President Joseph Fielding Smith included, “Noah, Abraham, Moses, Peter, James, and John, Joseph Smith and many other ‘noble and great ones’ played a part in the great creative enterprise.”¹² This opens the doorway for many others, possibly including us. The *Lectures on Faith* begin: “with faith as the first principle in revealed religion, and the foundation of all righteousness; faith is ... the principle of action in all intelligent beings.”¹³

Faith of the Early Patriarchs

Hebrews 11:4–7

Hebrews 11:4 “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous” (ESV) Paul adds the crucial element of faith to this Genesis story that adds to our understanding of both sacrifice and the level of Abel’s faith. Joseph Smith explained further:

By faith in this atonement or plan of redemption, Abel offered to God a sacrifice that was accepted, which was the firstlings of the flock. Cain offered of the fruit of the ground, and was not accepted, because he could not do it in faith, he could have no faith [in Jesus Christ], or could not exercise faith contrary to the plan of heaven. It must be shedding the blood of the Only Begotten to atone for a man; for this was the plan of redemption; and without the shedding of blood was no remission . . . consequently Cain

could have no faith; and whatsoever is not of faith is sin. But Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God Himself testifying of his gifts. Certainly, the shedding of the blood of a beast could be beneficial to no man, except it was done in imitation, or as a type, or explanation of what was to be offered through the gift of God Himself; and this performance done with an eye looking forward in faith on the power of that great Sacrifice for a remission of sins.¹⁴

Hebrews 11:5 “By faith Enoch was translated . . . God . . . is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him”

Enoch was the seventh prophet from Adam, the son of Jared, father of Methuselah (Genesis 5:18–24). In the New Testament Jude 1:14 also mentions him. The Bible has extraordinarily little information on him, but we are blessed to have much more in D&C 107:48–57 and Moses 6–7. We learn he felt inadequate, “slow of speech” (Moses 6:31). Moses also suffered from this weakness, but while Moses used Aaron, Enoch overcame his weakness and became one of the “preachers of righteousness” (Moses 6:23). The Lord taught him to “open thy mouth, and it shall be filled, and I will give thee utterance, for all flesh is in my hands, and I will do as seemeth me good. Say unto this people: Choose ye this day, to serve the Lord” (Moses 6:32–33).

After approximately 400 years of preaching, Enoch and his people in the city of Zion were righteous enough to be translated.¹⁵ We read in Moses 7:69, “Zion was not, for God received it up into his own bosom; and from thence went forth the saying, ZION IS FLED.”¹⁶ Enoch and Zion were rewarded because of their diligence in seeking the Lord. Their faith led them to live the law of consecration and receive their salvation.

Hebrews 11:7 “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in godly fear built an ark to save his family . . . and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith” (BSB) Noah (who is also the angel Gabriel) was not translated with the other righteous of Melchizedek’s city, but remained on earth to continue a righteous lineage. Through his great faith he became an “heir of righteousness,” or the promise of exaltation.

Faith of Abraham and his Children

Hebrews 11:8–22

Hebrews 11:8–9 “By faith Abraham, when he was called . . . went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise” Abraham and Sarah left the civilization in Mesopotamia to follow God’s mission call to establish a community of at least 320 converts (Genesis 12:5; 14:14). Like Bedouins, they, their son, grandsons, and greatgrandchildren, traveled along the crossroads of the east—the land at the eastern boarder of the Mediterranean Sea—in “*tabernacles*” or “*tents*” (BSB). They traveled because they trusted God, not knowing where they would end up, but had strong faith as did the early pioneers, Lehi’s family, the Jaredites, etc. Abraham proved his faith by obeying. God then rewarded him with the blessings he sought, an heir “of the same promise,” sealed to Eternal Life (see D&C 7:6; 76:88; 137:7 and Abraham 1:2). Likewise, we prove

our faith when we follow the Spirit's promptings and God's commandments.

Hebrews 11:10 “he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God”

As mentioned in Hebrews 7:1a, Abraham wanted to join Enoch's translated city of Zion, with Melchizedek and his city of righteousness heirs (others also sought for this according to verse 16). The D&C also talks of the city of “Enoch . . . which was sought for by all holy men, and they found it not because of wickedness and abominations; and confessed they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth; but obtained a promise that they should find it and see it in their flesh” (D&C 45:11–14).

Hebrews 11:11 “By faith Sarah, even though she was barren and beyond the proper age, was enabled to conceive a child because she considered Him faithful” (BSB).

Sarah continued to believe when she was at least ninety—but people lived longer then, and she did not die until 127 (Genesis 23:1).

Sarai Overhearing the Renewal of the Promise by William Hole, 1925.



Hebrews 11:13 “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off . . . and embraced *them*, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” The great patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel died believing that God’s promises were waiting for them, through faith in Christ.

Hebrews 11:14–16 “ they seek a country . . . a better *country*, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” Seeking a “*patris/country/fatherland*” meant they were seeking for a heavenly city or kingdom.

Hebrews 11:17–19 “By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice . . . even though God had said to him, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned’” (NIV) Abraham’s promise was obtained with complete faith and trust sustained through his family’s long suffering. His life’s choices spoke of his faith. In the KJV, Isaac is introduced as “his only begotten son,” to foreshadow Jesus. Interestingly, in the Book of Mormon, Jacob also gives this title to both Jesus and Isaac, “It was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his *Only Begotten Son*” (Jacob 4:5, italics added) In the case of Abraham, though, he fathered seven other sons, but only one through Sarah, his queen (Genesis 16:11; 25:1–2).

Hebrews 11:20–21 “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning the future . . . By faith Jacob . . . blessed each of Joseph’s sons . . . By faith Joseph . . . spoke about the exodus” (BSB) Father’s blessings are inspired through faith and love. Paul traces the line of the leading patriarchs through Joseph, not Ruben or Judah, or another of the older brothers. This is because Joseph was the first born of the queen wife (just as with Isaac). When Joseph was near dying, he instructed his posterity to bury his bones near his father, back in the promised land in Shechem (Genesis 50:25; Joshua 24:32).

Faith of Moses

Hebrews 11:23–29

Hebrews 11:23–29 “By faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months . . . when he was grown, he chose to suffer oppression with God’s people . . . By faith he kept the Passover and . . . passed through the Red Sea as on dry land” (BSB) Of all the stories about Moses and his forty years leading the Children of Israel, Paul chose to highlight two events that shared parallels with Jesus’ mission: First, Jesus became the pascal lamb of God, and, second, the crossing through the Red Sea was a type of baptism and new life (also see 1 Corinthians 5:7; 10:1–6).

Faith of the Israelites and Rahab

Hebrews 11:30–35

Hebrews 11:30 “By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days” (BSB) The battle of Jericho is one of the best examples of nothing but the power of faith at work (Joshua 6).

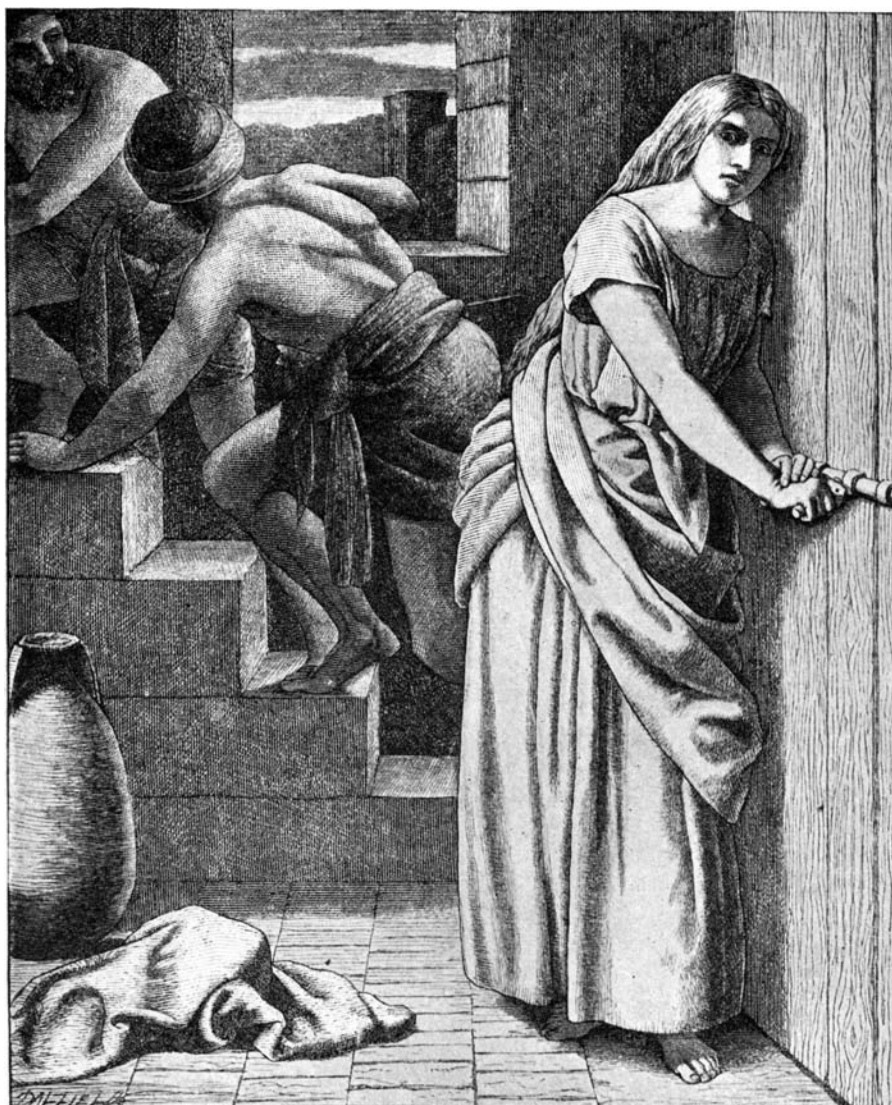
The stone walled city was just over the Jordan river, the lowest city on earth, 800 feet below sea level (Joshua 3:16; 6). As soon as Israelites crossed into the promise land, the oasis of Jericho, was the first place they were instructed to conquer. The priest's carried the ark and the covenant as they circled the city once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day. Then seven priests blew their shofars, or ram's horns, and the people shouted, thick stone walls fell "down flat" (Joshua 6:6, 20).

Later, Jericho became the territory of Benjamin (Joshua 18:12, 21). In the New Testament, Jesus visited it before His final weeks in Jerusalem (Mark 10:46; Luke 18:35; 19:1)

Hebrews 11:31 "By faith the harlot Rahab, perished not with them that believed not"

Rahab was the prostitute (Hebrew: *zonal*/ prostitute) or possibly an innkeeper, who helped the Israelite spies in their reconnaissance for the siege of Jericho (Joshua 2:1; James 2:25). Because she protected the Israelite spies in peace, she and her "father's household" and all of their possessions were saved (Joshua 6:17, 23). Her earlier kindness to Joshua was not forgotten, and the Lord instructed Joshua to reward her family. Whatever her profession had been previously, her family joined the Israelites at that point and adopted an Israelite lifestyle (Joshua 6:25).

Hebrews 11:32–35 "What shall I say more? . . . Gedeon . . . Barak . . . Samson . . . David . . . Samuel . . . wrought righteousness, obtained promises, . . . that they might obtain *the first resurrection*" (JST *italics*) Paul could have elaborated on many more Old Testament judges and prophets (some of whom we do not hold as honorable, such as Samson and Jephthae, but he saw them as examples of faith). The JST clarified that these great Israelites, or at least the women in verse 35, might obtain the "first resurrection" (Mosiah 15:22; 18:8; D&C 45:54; 76:64; Revelation 20:25; etc.).



Rahab Helping the Two Israelite Spies. Illustration by Frederick Richard Pickersgill, from the 1897 Bible Pictures and What They Teach Us by Charles Foster. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Faith of Judges and Prophets

Hebrews 11:37–38 “They were stoned, they were sawed in two . . . went around in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, oppressed, and mistreated . . . hid in caves . . .” (BSB) Tradition records that Isaiah was killed by King Manasseh of Judah by being “sawn.”¹⁷ Paul is still referring to Old Testament stories or traditions, so wearing goatskin and hiding in caves may refer to Elijah.

Hebrews 11:39 “These were all commended for their faith, yet they did not receive what was promised” (BSB) This verse is puzzling. I think this verse is saying that none of these Old Testament prophets were translated with the cities of Enoch and Melchizedek but stayed below to prepare for a heavenly reward. However, Elijah was translated, too. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that all the prophets had had the Melchizedek priesthood endowment and so the promises of exaltation would have been given to them, conditioned on their faithfulness. Abraham, Moses, Ezekiel, and Isaiah each record their throne theophany, which suggests they had received the surer word of prophesy. Perhaps Paul referred to the fact that all these great Israelite leaders lived the old law of sacrifice and did not receive the higher law of their Promised Messiah?

Hebrews 11:40 “God having provided some better things for *them through their sufferings, for without sufferings they could not be made perfect*” (JST *italics*) These changes add a startling importance to the power of suffering. The great and noble ones needed to learn more about God and perfecting their faith through suffering. No one will approach perfection without suffering. Jesus’ example as “the suffering servant” is our best example of enduring our trials and suffering valiantly (Isaiah 53:1–12).

Hebrews 12:1 “We are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders . . . And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (NIV) Paul summarizes his beautiful discourse on faith by referring to these great men and women’s examples as a “cloud of witnesses.” The encouragement to run with “patience” (KJV) may sound ironic, but other translations emphasize “endurance” (BSB) or “steadily” (JB), or “resolutions” (NEB). In order to run this race, we must rid ourselves of all excess baggage. Paul uses the apt image of sins as “entangling” our lives. Sins weigh us down physically and spiritually.

Hebrews 12:2 “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross . . .” To run a steady, faith-filled, pace requires focusing our minds and hearts on the Lord’s will, hoping to see Him at the end of the race. Jesus is the “*author and finisher*” of our faith (KJV), or the “pioneer and perfecter” (RSV, NIV), or the one “who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection” (JB). A “*finisher*” in Greek is one who completes or perfects something. It may also refer to the leader, founder or originator. Jesus becomes the One who perfects us as we draw near to Him.

To fulfill His Father’s plan, Jesus relied on His love for and faith in His Father. To give Him the strength to endure the pain and suffering of death—which was the redemption of our souls (D&C 19:18–19)—He looked forward to the future joy of humanity.

The “cross” was a sign of extreme *shame*. To the Jews and Romans, a crucified person was far from being chosen, anointed, or sent by God, but rather was cursed by God. One of the church fathers explained the cultural confusion: “They say that our madness consists in the fact that we put a crucified man in second place after the unchangeable and eternal God.”¹⁸

Hebrews 12:3 “Consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (BSB) This is very humbling. Jesus’ endurance not only allows Him to empathize with us, but it also sets an example for us. When we feel emotionally and spiritual exhausted from the trials of life, “consider” that Jesus endured what He did for us so that we would not “faint.”

HEBREWS 12

God Disciplines His Sons—Warning against Refusing God

Hebrews 12:4–11

Hebrews 12:4 “In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood” (NIV) Repentance can be the hardest thing we do, yet it pales in comparison to what the Lord endured to give us the opportunity to repent. Jesus is the ultimate sufferer. Remembering this helps us keep our problems in perspective and gives us strength to abandon our sins.

Hebrews 12:5–6 “My son, do not take lightly the discipline of the Lord, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you. For the Lord disciplines the one He loves . . .” (BSB) Paul quotes Proverbs 3:11–12, to remind the saints to be submissive to God’s corrections. Our Heavenly Father’s plan includes correction, as loving instruction. From an eternal perspective, divine “chastisement” is vital to our eternal growth. If we can submit to God’s direction without becoming resentful, “all these things will give us experience and be for our good” (D&C 122:7).

Hebrews 12:7–9 “Endure suffering as discipline” (BSB) or “chastening” (KJV), or “hardship” (NIV) This also requires great faith. But, if disciples can voluntarily cooperate with the hardships of life and trust the Eternal Father’s teaching methods, then those disciples become legitimate heirs of the Father, “the father of our spirits” (Hebrews 12:9). This is a beautiful clear statement on our relationship with God in the premortal existence.

Hebrews 12:10 “God disciplines us for our good, so that we may share in His holiness” (BSB) Paul compares God’s wise actions with the need for earthly parents to teach and disciple their children. We are reminded of our goal of “holiness” every time we see the doorway to a temple. Holiness is the process of sanctification. We are assured that everything God does for us is for our own good, “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of [humanity]” (Moses 1:39).

Hebrews 12:11 “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (NIV) If we do not learn from our Divine tutorials, we have not benefited from the hardship. It takes a very meek and humble person to not feel defensive or prideful during a reprimand. Yet when the Lord provides correction, it is often encouraging at the same time. Saints walk by faith asking, “what can I learn from this pain and correction?” Like a broken horse, humans can be trained to respond to the promptings of our Master.

Hebrews 12:12–13 “Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees . . . so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed” (NIV) Paul cites Proverbs 4:26, to encourage those who suffer. He asks his audience to reach out in service to those in need. His context is spiritual or emotional trials, even though his example is a physical handicap. By giving aid, we make our paths straight and then those that follow have a clear path. When the saints endure God’s correction, they are in a position to help heal those in need along their daily paths of life.

An Appeal for Holiness

Hebrews 12:14–29

Hebrews 12:14–15 “Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up” (NIV) Paul commends the saints to spread peace and live in holiness in order to “see the Lord.” The purpose of the Lord’s chastening in the previous section is to purify one for this experience. Yet the adversary thwarts holiness with bitterness. When bitterness takes hold of one’s heart, the Spirit leaves and charity is lost. Bitterness also affects all those who interact with us. Bitterness and hatred act like a force that spirals downward into the grasp of Satan.

Hebrews 12:16–17 “See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau . . . Afterward, . . . when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected” (NIV) Esau is identified as a “profane” (KJV) person for not appreciating God’s priesthood. When we do not honor or value sacred gifts, we are profane too. The tragedy of Esau was that he missed the opportunity even though later he regretted it “with tears.” His birthright was the priesthood, but he traded it for a bowl of lentil soup. In this life, we must live with the consequences of earlier choices. I’m sure things will be different in the next life, but the timing of repentance does not necessarily change earthly consequences.

Hebrews 12:18–22 “You have not come to a mountain . . . But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly” (NIV) Paul returns to comparing Moses’ invitation to the early Children of Israel to ascend the mountain, with the early Christian’s opportunity. The mountain that Paul describes for the saints is not the scary experience that the Children of Israel feared (Paul quotes Exodus 19:12, 13, and Deuteronomy 9:19). The Christian invitation is to enter the glorious city of God. It still requires figuratively climbing the mountain (enduring trials, chastening, and striving for holiness) to see the heavenly throne of God with a Host of Angels. The “innumerable company of angels” (KJV) includes the millions of people who will be exalted according to Daniel 7:10 and Revelation 5:11.

Hebrews 12:23 “The church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect” (NIV) The church of the “*first born*,” is not reserved for first-born children, but refers to those who have been sanctified through Jesus’ atonement, “the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven” (RSV). Joseph Smith also added further commentary on verses 22 and 23:

Cain and Abel by Anton Robert Leinweber, 1910.



The Hebrew church came unto the Spirit of just men made perfect . . . to angels . . . to God and to Jesus Christ . . . what did they learn by coming to the spirits of just men made perfect? Is it written? No! The spirits of just men are made ministering servants to those who are sealed unto life eternal. And it is through them that the sealing power comes down.¹⁹

The object gained by this communication with the spirits of the just was the established order of the kingdom of God—the keys of power and knowledge were with them (the angels) to communicate to the saints.²⁰

Hebrews 12:24 “to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (BSB) When we think of Jesus as our Mediator, we see the Godhead as separate beings with distinct roles. The JST of Genesis 17:4–7 explains the apostate doctrine about the sprinkling of Abel’s blood. (See the appendix in the LDS Bible.)

Hebrews 12:25–27 “See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks . . . he has promised, ‘Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens’” (NIV) The promise is a quote from Haggai 2:6, about earthly upsets preceding the Second Coming. Paul’s commentary on the phrase, “yet once more,” emphasizes that created things can be moved, but there are things that will remain. Verse 25 also refers back to the Children of Israel’s earthly messenger who was Moses. But, if we refuse to listen to God, there is eternal danger at stake. Likewise, we must not refuse the counsel, commandments, and covenants of our Lord and God who speaks through His Apostles.

Hebrews 12:28 “Since we are receiving an unshakable kingdom, let us be filled with gratitude, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe” (BSB?) While the earth will shake, God’s kingdom will remain stable. In that kingdom, a grateful heart is a worshipful heart. Those who are reverent and acceptable before God, are included in the church of the firstborn, and city of Zion (Hebrews 12:2–23).

Hebrews 12:29 “For our God is a consuming fire” This idea is found in several Old Testament verses including Exodus 24:17; Deuteronomy 4:24; 2 Samuel 22:9; etc. Joseph Smith similarly taught that “God Almighty Himself dwells in eternal fire.”²¹ Section 133 describes the “consuming fire” of the Second Coming as “The presence of the Lord shall be as the melting fire that burneth and as the fire which causeth the waters to boil . . . the mountains shall flow down at thy presence...so great shall be the glory of his presence that the sun shall hide his face in shame” (D&C 133:41, 44, 49 also see D&C 101:25; Isaiah 64:2; and Joseph Smith—History 1:37). Section 76 describes the presence of the Savior, as comparable to the glory of the sun (D&C 76:70).

HEBREWS 13

After a long discourse on striving to enter into the presence of the Lord, Paul now gives a list of requirements. Striving for a life of holiness through sanctification requires obedience to these seven or eight points (one is duplicated). His list shares similarities with the points on a modern temple recommend.

General Christian Obligations

Hebrews 13:1-20

1. SERVE GOD BY LOVING AND SHOW KINDNESS TO OTHERS

Hebrews 13:1-3 “Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters . . . show hospitality to strangers . . . remember those in prison . . . and those who are mistreated” (NIV) One of the best ways to “serve God” is to love each other (Hebrews 12:28). In the reference to strangers who are actually angels, Paul may have referred to Abraham’s kindness to three angels (Genesis 18:1-8), or Lot, who did the same (Genesis 19:1). Joseph Smith taught that all angels who visit this earth have or will live on the earth as mortals. In asking us to remember those who are in prison or are mistreated, Paul acknowledges his personal appreciation for kindnesses shown to him. His message is one of compassion, to feel with others.

2. LAW OF CHASTITY

Hebrews 13:4 “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral” (NIV) This is another example of Paul’s many positive statements that support marriage. The law of chastity has eternal significance.

3. FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Hebrews 13:5 “Don’t love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, “I will never fail you . . . The Lord is my helper” (NIV) The combination of the KJV words, “conversations/*tropos*/a way, manner of life, character,” and “not covetousness/*aphilarguros*,” are most often translated to avoid a love of money, or to be satisfied with what you have. For example: “Put greed out of your lives” (JB), “Do not live for money” (NEB), and “Let your manner of life be without covetousness” (BLB). As disciples, we can be satisfied with whatever station we are in knowing that God will supply for our needs. As evidence for his argument, Paul quotes two Old Testament passages: Deuteronomy 31:6 and Psalm 118:6, 7. Both are filled with hope that we can trust in the Lord to provide for our needs. The same promise was repeated in the restoration in conjunction with the Law of Consecration in D&C 119:3-5.

4. SUSTAIN YOUR LEADERS

Hebrews 13:7 “Remember your leaders . . . and imitate their faith” (NIV) Paul’s encouragement to the Hebrews

to remember their church leaders goes beyond prayers and offerings: it extends to seeking similar faith, beliefs and conduct in life. We also need to “remember what kind of lives they lived and try to” do the same (CEV). In modern temple recommends, we asked to “sustain” church leaders. Terryl Givens addressed this subject:

The word sustain only appears in [modern] scriptures once . . . D&C 134.5, admonishes us to “sustain and uphold” the respective governments in which we reside. . . . I take “sustain” in that case to mean we support the general framework, share its common purposes, and work for its betterment. To sustain the elected leaders of a government would similarly mean to recognize their legitimately derived authority, and not work to undermine that authority, even if we voted for the other guy (or woman). So, adapting this scriptural usage to the sustaining of our own leaders, I take the same cues.²²

Hebrews 13:8 “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever [sic]” The real leader and example of the church is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one we can completely follow as His nature is eternally good.

5. AVOID APOSTATE TEACHINGS

Hebrews 13:9 “Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings . . . which is of no benefit to those who do so” (NIV) The specific type of false teachings that Paul includes here deal with dietary laws (which probably referred to the strict Jewish kosher habits that Christians stopped practicing after the Jerusalem Council, Acts 15:19–21). Paul encouraged the saints to follow their leaders in order to gauge what is true—as well as a means to identify false leaders.

Hebrews 13:10–14 “Although the high priest brings the blood of animals into the Holy Place as a sacrifice for sin . . . Jesus also suffered . . . by His own blood” (BSB) This is a theological tangent. Many of the Mosaic dietary codes were based on an avoidance of blood. So, Paul acknowledges the underlying sacred practices from the Jewish temple, but highlights that it was all done out of reverence for blood of the Redeemer. The symbols all pointed to the promised Messiah who was crucified as the greatest martyr out of the city wall, to the north of the altar (Leviticus 1:11). And if disciples follow his example, they can receive a greater city. The city is heavenly Zion or even Enoch’s city.

6. LIVE THE NEW LAW OF SACRIFICE

Hebrews 13:15 “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise . . . confess His name. And do not neglect to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (BSB) Rather than animals, Christians offer personal sacrifices as we praise God, express gratitude, confess Him, do good, and help others. We can “share” (or in the KJV, “communicate”) what we have spiritually, emotionally, physically, financially, and educationally.

7. OBEY AND SUPPORT LEADERS

Hebrews 13:17 “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you . . . Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden” (NIV) Paul speaks not only for himself, but for all church leaders when he says, “they” watch over your souls and must be accountable to God for us. Many translations start this verse with “obey” your leaders. Yet even when it is difficult to follow, respecting and submitting to them is one way we respect and submit to God. Nonetheless, this does not mean to obey blindly. Disciples can receive their own inspired confirmation of the leaders and their council.

8. PRAY FOR LEADERS

Hebrews 13:18–19 “Pray for us; we . . . desire to live honorably in every way. And I especially urge you to pray that I may be restored to you soon” (BSB). Paul tries to live honorably in everything he does. The second sentence provides evidence that this was written while Paul was in prison and hopes to see them soon.

Blessing

Hebrews 13:20–21

Hebrews 13:20–21 “Now the God of peace . . . Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ . . . Amen” Paul concludes with a beautiful prayer or blessing. When speaking of the Lord, he emphasizes the sacrificial nature of His Godhood, “through the blood of the everlasting covenant” (KJV). God’s peace comes from following Him as a shepherd into this eternal covenant. The word “perfect/*katartizō*” also means “to complete, prepare” and is used to “fit (join) together” and “prepare, perfect, for his (its) full destination or use, bring into its proper condition (whether for the first time, or after a lapse).”²³ In the temple context, it speaks of the preparing the initiate to enter in to the presence of the Lord. As we equip ourselves with the Lord’s will we are becoming “perfect” or our initiation becomes “complete.”

Conclusion

Hebrews 13:22 “Brothers and sisters, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for in fact I have written to you quite briefly” (NIV) Paul asks the saints to humbly and meekly accept his teachings and correction. His reference to “brief,” may refer to his short, personalized note from verses 22–25. It does not fit his long theological treatise of thirteen chapters.

Hebrews 13:23–25 “Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you . . . Those from Italy send you their greetings. Grace be with you all” (NIV) Timothy may have been imprisoned or possibly released from his mission or church responsibilities. Paul hopes for the two of them to travel together to visit the Hebrew saints. The greeting from the Italian saints suggests the author is in prison, which is consistent with the historical sources that reported Paul wrote the letter from his Roman imprisonment. The last words are often typeset in a different script, are not part of the Epistle, were added by later copyist, and are often inaccurate.

Header Image: 3D rendering of The Holy Place, facing the entrance to the Holy of Holies. in Solomon's Temple Image via Brian Olsen, Photogent.com.

ENDNOTES

1. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, VI.10:1.
2. As mentioned in Matthew 2 and Luke 1, the “City of David” in the New Testament refers to Bethlehem, but that was not the case in the Old Testament where Jerusalem received that title.
3. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 246.
4. These Assyrian Kings included: Chedorlaomer, Tidal, Amraphel, and Aroch
5. Genesis 14:14 refers to Abram’s “trained servants” which probably refer to the male converts that traveled with Abraham’s household as described in Genesis 12:5, “all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran.” Elsewhere his “herdsmen” may refer to the same community.
6. Welch and Hall, *Charting the New Testament*, 12–7.
7. Strong’s, #3316 “mesités.”
8. Koester, *Anchor Bible: Hebrews*, 400–402; measurement came from an 18-inch cubit.
9. Edersheim, *Temple*, etc.
10. Strong’s, #37, “hagiazó.” <https://biblehub.com/greek/37.htm> (accessed 10-23-19).
11. Russel M. Nelson, “Come Follow Me,” General Conference April 2019.
12. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:74–75.
13. Joseph Smith, Sydney Rigdon, etc., *Lectures on Faith* (Liberty Mo: Zion’s Camp Books, 1988), chapter 1.
14. Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 58.
15. Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (NYC, NY: Macmillan Publishing, 1992), Vol 4, 1485–1486. “Translated beings are not resurrected beings, though all translated beings either have since been or yet will be resurrected . . . (3 Ne. 28:8). . . . During the periods from Adam to Melchizedek, many faithful persons were translated. . . . Translated beings are assigned special ministries, some to remain among mortals . . .” For more, see Moses 7:18–21, 31, 63, 69; D&C 38:4; 45:11–14; 84:99–100; Genesis 5:22–24; and JST Genesis 14:32–34.
16. D&C 107:48–49, “Enoch was twenty-five years old when he was ordained under the hand of Adam; and he was sixty-five and Adam blessed him . . . four hundred and thirty years old when he was translated.”
17. *The Ascension of Isaiah*, possibly written during the first century AD.
18. Markus Bochkmuehl, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Press, 2001), 90.
19. Ehat and Cook, *Words of the Joseph Smith*, 254; D&C 77:11.
20. Donald Parry, ed., *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1994), chapter 17.

21. Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 367.
22. Terryl Givens, as quoted by Marc Bohn in Feb 2016, TimesandSeasons.org (accessed 10-23-19).
23. Strong's # 2675, *katartizó*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/2675.htm> (accessed 10-23-19).



JAMES

APPLYING THE LAW OF THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL

Authorship of James

Traditionally the author of this book is James, the brother of our Lord. As with all biblical books, scholars question this traditional view. James' Epistle was not listed as one of the canonized New Testament writings in AD 140, or 170, but was included by AD 367. In 1522 Martin Luther referred to it as a "right strawy epistle."¹

It is written in very good Greek—which does not seem consistent with the education available to a poor family in the small Jewish town of Nazareth, with a population of just a few hundred. However, a knowledgeable scribe may have translated the letter into Greek. The Epistle includes Jewish motifs suggesting a Jewish author (i.e. James 1:1 and James 2:2; etc.).²

Several later apocrypha were also given the name "James" (i.e. *Protoevangelium of James*, *Apocryphon of James*, etc.). Later writers may have "borrowed" the name of James as a sign of authority. Regardless of the authorship,

we hold this Epistle as sacred scripture. In the Restoration, we have a special affinity for this great book (Joseph Smith—History 1:11).

Audience

This is the first “General Epistle” in the New Testament written to “the twelve tribes . . . scattered abroad.”³ The New Testament includes disciples from at least four tribes of Israel.⁴ The primary audience seems to be Israelite converts who struggled with adversity and patience in waiting for the Lord’s return. It does not sound like a missionary track, but is written to disciples striving to live the Savior’s higher law.

James included several references from the Law of Moses and Writings and Prophets, suggesting that these Christians were familiar with much in our Old Testament scripture.⁵ However, one can understand the content without a deep understanding of Old Testament scripture. It was probably a circular letter to be read by Palestinian Christianity and several churches within the Roman Empire where Jewish-Christians lived.

Who’s Who among the Jameses?

The name “James/*Jakobos*” (Greek) comes from the Hebrew name “Jacob.” (The most famous Jacob in the Old Testament was the grandson of Abraham, whose name was changed to Israel.)

There are three James mentioned in the New Testament:

1. The Apostle James, the son of Zebedee and Salome, also known as a “son of thunder.” He was present with Peter and his brother John on the Mount of Transfiguration, the raising Jairus’ daughter from the dead, etc. He was killed by Herod in the early 40’s (Acts 12:2). He returned to earth with Peter and John to give the keys of the Melchizedek Priesthood to Joseph Smith (Joseph Smith—History 1:72).
2. James, son of Alphaeus and Mary, also a member of Jesus’ original twelve apostles, sometimes known as “James the less” (Mark 15:40; also see Matthew 10:3; 27:56; Luke 6:15; 24:10; etc.).
3. James, the half-brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55) who identifies himself as a “servant of God.” During Jesus’ life, he did not believe that his half-brother was the Son of God (John 7:2–5). He was probably the “James” referred to in 1 Corinthians 15:7 when the resurrection accounts are listed, “after that, he was seen of *James* then of all the apostles.” He became a leader in the Apostolic church, possibly a Bishop, area authority, or an apostle (Galatians 1:19).⁶ Paul refers to him in Galatians as one of the “pillars” of the church (Galatians 2:9). According to the Jewish historian Josephus he was stoned by the Sanhedrin in AD 62. Ananus “assembled the Sanhedrin of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others . . . he delivered them to be stoned.”⁷

Structure

The Epistle opens with a modified introduction, not the formal Greek introduction and personal greeting of Paul’s Epistles. Its form is a collection of exhortations as we see in Proverbs or Ecclesiastes.⁸ The author argues over twenty points by comparing and contrasting many ideas (with some expansions on some earlier points). The Epistle is known as “the most socially conscious writing in the New Testament.”⁹ The first chapter briefly touches on ten themes (patience, prayer, faith, wealth, temptation, good gifts, communication, sin, doers of the word, generosity), and then develops these themes in the remainder of the Epistle. Each section stands on its own as self-contained counsel, connected only with catch-words. Jesus’ teachings are repeated regularly. The one theme that consistently runs throughout the Epistle is to apply Christ’s Gospel.

Outline

- 1:1 Greetings
- 1:2–4 View Trials and Patience Eternally
- 1:5–8 God Gives Wisdom to All Who Ask in Faith
- 1:9–11 Believers Have Cause to Rejoice
- 1:12–18 Resisting Sin Brings a Crown
- 1:19–27 Pure Religion is Listen, Love, Repent, Do
- 2:1–9 Avoid Partiality toward the Rich
- 2:10–11 Keep the Law of the Gospel
- 2:12–13 Show Mercy
- 2:14–26 Faith Without Works is Dead
- 3:1–12 Talk is Cheap and Dangerous
- 3:13–16 Avoid Contention
- 3:17–18 Be Truly Wise
- 4:1–5 Worldliness is the Enemy of God
- 4:6–10 Submit Your Will to God’s Will
- 4:11–12 Judge Not
- 4:13–17 Do Good in God and Boast Not
- 5:1–6 Warning to the Corrupt Rich
- 5:7–13 Patience through Suffering
- 5:14–16 Elders Heal the Sick-Laying on of Hands
- 5:17–20 Confession and [Re]Conversion



JAMES 1

Introduction

James 1:1

James 1:1 “James, a servant of God . . . to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting” Jesus called all of His disciples to be servants to God as the Lord Jesus Christ served and submitted to God in and all things.¹⁰ The author refers to himself as a “servant of God,” as did Abraham, Moses and David, to name a few. In Revelation 1:1, all Christian believers receive this title. It stems from Christ’s teachings for all disciples to serve one another (Matthew 23:8–12). In Christianity, “the twelve tribes” may include those adopted into Israel as well as those born from of the dispersion—not one group specifically. As Jesus taught, all who apply this counsel become children of Israel (Matthew 5:45; John 8:33–47). This is to all those spiritually of Israel.

View Trials and Patience Eternally

James 1:2–4

James 1:2–4 “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance . . .” (NIV) The JST changes the KJV “divers temptations” to “many afflictions.” This is closer to the original Greek, and very doctrinally different. Most other English translations change “temptation” to “trials.” This is a very important principle of the gospel. In order to “mature” as disciples, our faith must be tried. As we endure trials by focusing on God, we can learn patience and faith in the right things. The natural laws of nature testify of the same truth. As discussed previously, we cannot be perfected without tribulations (Hebrews 10:40 JST).

God Answers Faith-Filled Prayers with Wisdom

James 1:5–8

James 1:5–6 “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God . . . ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed” The impact of these verses is phenomenal. Just think of what this verse started across Christianity, let alone in the Restoration. In the Smith home, Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith led family devotionals every morning and night where they read from the Bible and prayed.¹¹ Lucy reported that her son Joseph began “seriously searching the scriptures” between the ages of twelve and fifteen on his own.¹² Additionally, a local Methodist minister used the text from James 1:5–6 that may have been heard by Joseph.¹³

How do we ask in faith? Belief breeds faith. Faith grows with truth and reflection. Faith also grows with finding the Lord’s hand in the world. Faith is also wanting to increase our faith but not knowing how. I love the example in Mark, “Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief” (Mark 9:24). One of the greatest gifts God has given us is the ability



to ask our questions in prayer with the promise that He—the Creator of the Universe—will answer them. James adds another qualification in addition to patience from v. 3; we must have “no trace of doubts” (JB) or “wavering” (KJV) in our faith. James likens doubts to the shifting winds and waves. Hearing God’s answers requires a belief, patience, and fervent faith built on trust. There are other qualifications that James does not mention, including “if it is right,” remembering back on past promptings, and having an honest heart (D&C 9:7; 6:22; 8:1).¹⁴

James 1:7–8 “That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord . . . double-minded and unstable” (NIV) We are double minded when we vacillate between wanting to please the Lord and please our appetites. We are double minded when we have not firmly committed to love the Lord more than everything else (i.e. our Sabbath activities, choice of reading material, past times, etc.). Our culture suffers from double-mindedness as we do not keep our word, marriage covenants and promises are broken, and we change our minds often.

Believers Have Cause to Rejoice

James 1:9–11

James 1:9–11 Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower” (NIV) We see life differently when we look at it from an eternal view, and prioritize different experiences. The humility learned from one’s station is a blessing. And, a preoccupation with wealth will be damning. For three verses James emphasizes the worthlessness of earthy riches. He uses the imagery of grass’ “*beauty of its appearance*” (NAS) which only lasts a few weeks without rain, and then dies.

Resisting Sin Brings a Crown

James 1:12–18

James 1:12 “Blessed is the man that resisteth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life” (JST) Only one word was changed, “endureth” to “*resisteth*.” Doctrinally, this is a powerful difference. We should avoid temptations not endure them! This section turns to encouraging the reader to persevere against tribulations. The beginning sounds like a beatitude (i.e. “blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” Matthew 5:10). Paul also shares this theme in 1 Corinthians 9:25; 2 Timothy 2:5; Romans 8:28; and 1 Peter in 5:4. It is clear that these ideas are very Christian—our current trials can prepare us for an eternal reward.

James 1:13–15 “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me’ . . . But each one is tempted when by his own evil desires he is lured away and enticed” (BSB) Satan is the tempter, not God. Yet, many biblical verses read, “God tempted . . .” because the Jewish practice was to give God all credit for everything. However, in the Hebrew translation of Genesis 22:1 it reads, “God tested Abraham.” This is doctrinally correct and is repeated in D&C 101:4, “they must be chastened and tried, even as Abraham.”

If we do not bridle our appetites and tendencies of the natural man, Satan can build on them to lead us to sin. In hunting wild game, the animal is “lured” or “drawn away” (KJV) out of the safety of the thicket into an area set with snares. Satan wants us to catch his bait. President M. Russell Ballard described temptation like fishing bait: “The use of artificial lures to fool and catch a fish is an example of the way Lucifer often tempts, deceives, and tries to ensnare us.”¹⁵

James 1:16–17 “Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above” (NIV) This is the way to judge wisely, or is a key in making daily choices—if it good it is of God. Mormon elaborated more the same principle, “All things which are good cometh from God . . . everything which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God” (Moroni 7:12–13). This means that all our good thoughts are from God. In our daily life this allows us to distinguish which thoughts are inspired by the Spirit and which ones are not.¹⁶ It also allows us to make righteous judgements as we see all goodness from God.

James 1:18 “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we would be a kind of firstfruits of His creation” (BSB) We are born again through Jesus Christ as we accept Him as our spiritual Father and Master. The “first fruits” is a well-known reference to Deuteronomy 26:1–11, about the sacrifice of the first fruits. The Lord required the best and first so that His people could learn to sacrifice, delay gratification, and prioritize the things of God. This signifies that those who are the first fruits stand above others and present themselves to God as an offering to him to serve him with our whole souls.

Pure Religion is Listen, Love, Repent and Do

James 1:19–27

James 1:19–20 “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry . . . get rid of all moral filth and the evil . . . and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you” (NIV) The old Byzantine manuscripts use the linking word, “consequently.” It is because of our commitment to join the Lord and sacrifice for Him that we try to live the higher laws of the gospel. Everyone ought to be ready to listen to God’s word—whenever it is proclaimed. And, eagerly listen to others more than talk. James also emphasizes the need for internal controls—and to put away anger and bad habits (or in the KJV, “all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness”). In its place, we should “implant the word” (v. 21).

James 1:22 “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” To be a Christian disciple requires more than a verbal confession. Disciples assume responsibility as servants of God. We must sacrifice whatever is needed to fulfill God’s will in our lives. James explains this by describing the fleeting reflection in a mirror. James asks converts for lasting commitment and action.

James 1:25 “one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom, and continues to do so—not being a forgetful hearer, but an effective doer—he will be blessed in what he does” (BSB) The “law of liberty” emphasizes the difference between Christ’s higher law and the Mosaic Law. Just like Paul, James teaches that keeping Jesus’ commandments is what truly brings us freedom.

James 1:26 **If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain**” We cannot pretend to be religious while attacking others or speaking unkindly. The Spirit departs and knows hypocrisy. The gospel is a law of love.

James 1:27 **Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from vices of the world**” (JST italicized) The children and widows also received Jesus’ attention and blessings during His ministry. The Apostolic Church is following after His example. This is at the root of the latter-day Church’s ministering. Pure religion is defined here as manifesting one’s actions in love.

JAMES 2

Avoid Partiality toward the Rich

James 2:1-9

James 2:1-5 “My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring . . .” (NIV) There must have been a problem with the rich and well-dressed getting better treatment than the poor. This was especially inappropriate in the “synagogue” setting where Jesus Christ, as our exemplar, went out of His way to meet the needs of the poor, sick, and under-recognized classes. (The word choice of “*sunagógé/synagogue*,” suggests that the author or audience had a Jewish background.) Currying favor with important people in any assembly is not a problem unique to that culture. We, too, live in a culture where one “dresses for success” and opportunities are limited depending on one’s clothing and wealth.

The author specifically mentions a “gold ring.” This would indicate that the man was either a Roman nobleman or of senatorial rank.¹⁷ The next phrase adds that he dressed in “good apparel” (KJV) In Greek this is, “splendid apparel” (BLB), probably signifying the white wool toga of Roman citizenship. It may even suggest that he is seeking support for a political office. In any case, he was representing the aristocracy, in opposition to the poor.¹⁸

The Christians’ eagerness to please the aristocracy may have come from their need for political protection and a hope for freedom to practice their religion. (Judaism was one of the ten free foreign religions practiced at

the time, and Christianity, initially, piggy-backed along as the followers were fellow Israelites.) Such behavior produces dissension in the congregation. Unity cannot thrive if we do not treat each other with respect and love. But, regardless of the status, James pleads with the early saints to not show favoritism. True disciples of Christ should look within to cleanse any form of prejudice—economic, race, opportunities for learning, exclusive groups, mental health, disabilities, etc. (See also 2 Nephi 26:33; Alma 32:5; 3 Nephi 6:12; etc.).

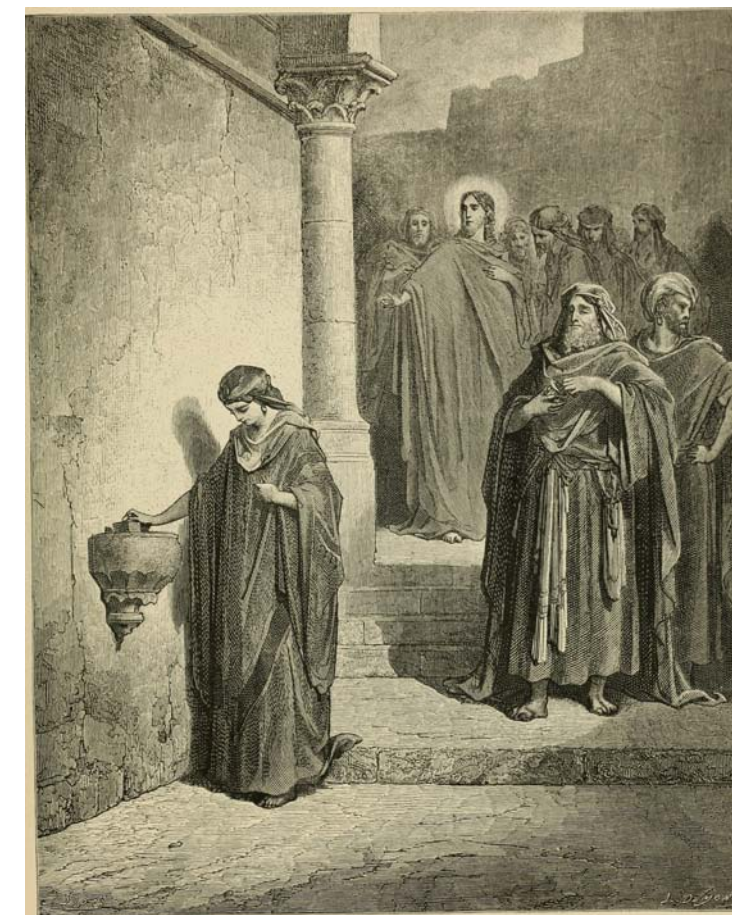
God uses a higher standard of judging His children, which Christians should follow. The humble, meek followers of God are the most valuable. This is why His prophets (and even His Son) are often chosen from the common man. It is often the poor who have the richest faith. It is their great faith that allows them to receive the promises of the Kingdom of God.

James 2:6 “Ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?”

This is a common New Testament theme mentioned by Paul as well (Romans 15:26; 1 Corinthians 11:22; 13:3). Jesus also taught an opposition to those who love their riches (Matthew 6:2-3; 19:21; Mark 12:43-44). There may have been some problem with factions because of social rank in the church. Their society was fractured with class distinctions. An Empire wide census from AD 47 showed a third of the population worked as slaves or servants.¹⁹ Class distinctions are the antithesis of a Zion society living the Law of Consecration.

James 2:7 “Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?”

The political and equestrian rank of society denounced the Lord Jesus as a common criminal. This verse can also be understood in another sense—when Christians show favoritism, they blaspheme, too. Those who have taken on Christ’s name at baptism and deliberately sin, are in a sense flaunting the name of God. In the Old Testament, God’s chosen people are referred to as, those “on whom the Lord’s name is called” (Deuteronomy 28:10; Amos 9:12). Another interpretation of the text is that the preferred rich leave the church assembly and then slanderously revile the name of Christ afterwards.²⁰



The Poor Widow Casts into the Treasury all the Living She Has. Illustration from *The Bible Panorama, or The Holy Scriptures in picture and story*, 1891. Image via Flickr.

James 2:8 “If you really keep the royal law stated in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well” (BSB) Finally, James comes to the underlying principle or doctrine behind all this unfair treatment. This favorite passage is found in the center of the Torah (chiastically, the most important placement—the middle of the middle book). Leviticus was their priesthood manual, but the message applied to all Israelites. Jesus quoted this verse, Leviticus 19:18, when asked what was the most important commandment from the Law of Moses, wherein “hang ALL the laws and the prophets” (Matthew 22:39). It is the biblical commandment of love and Paul cited it, too (Romans 13:10). All the Jewish rites and precepts of purification were subsidiary to this “royal law.”

This unique reference to it as a “royal law,” may refer to God as the true King, superior to the Roman emperor. James had just mentioned political figures, so giving the title, “royal law,” may be in opposition to the Roman propaganda. Jesus built on this law when He gave the “new commandment” at his Last Supper, “That ye love one another; as I have loved you” (John 13:34)

Elder Marion G. Romney, while in the First Presidency, used the phrase, “the royal law of love” as the title to a general conference talk. He confirmed that: “The caring for the poor and the handicapped and those who need our help is a main purpose and an absolute requirement in fulfilling the royal law of loving our neighbors as ourselves.”²¹

James 2:9 “if you show favoritism, you sin” (NIV) If we are partiality moved by wealth or prestige in our respect and church fellowship of others, then we transgress God’s law of love.

Keep the Law of the Gospel

James 2:10–11

James 2:10–11 “whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all” The last phrase “is guilty of all,” can mean they are “accountable for them all,” or “liable to a penalty.”²² It does not mean that if one lies they are guilty of murder, but rather they are guilty of breaking the law. Joseph Smith also emphasized the importance of living all of God’s laws: “Any person who is exalted to the highest mansion has to abide a celestial law, and the whole law, too.”²³ This is why repentance and forgiveness are so vital. President Nelson’s call to repent daily will keep our allegiance aligned with righteousness: “Nothing is more liberating, more ennobling, or more crucial to our individual progression than is a regular, daily focus on repentance.”²⁴

We mortals progress line upon line. We can repent and return our desires and love to God and receive forgiveness with each stumble. With the help of the Spirit, we can progress to the level that Jesus encouraged in the Sermon on the Mount—to control our hearts and desires. Jesus warned his disciples that even if they only think about killing or breaking the law of chastity, they have broken the law (“whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart,” Matthew 5:28, NKJV).

Christians Show Mercy

James 2:12–13

James 2:12–13 “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom. For judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful” (BSB) The “law of liberty” (KJV) is Jesus’ higher Law of the Gospel, which is all based on His mercy and love. If we commit to becoming Christians, we need to live that way: offering forgiveness to others. When we forgive others—even those who have hurt or abused us—we learn how the “law of freedom” works. Allowing God to take over the judgement and mercifully offer forgiveness to those who have wronged us, leads to becoming free of hurt and anger which stunts our progress and inhibits the Spirit. When we show mercy to others, we become more Christ like as He, too, offers forgiveness. As James says, “mercy triumphs over judgment.”

Judgment under the higher law will be both sterner and milder than under the Law of Moses. Jesus and James both teach that those who show no mercy will be given no mercy (Matthew 25:34–41). Much of James’ counsel is actual quotations or elaborations on Jesus’ teachings.

Faith Requires Works

James 2:14–26

James 2:14 “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Can such faith save him?” (CSV) The section begins in the style of a Greco-Roman diatribe with questions and answers. In the New Testament when faith is mentioned it is always faith in Jesus Christ and not just wishful thinking or a positive attitude. This is why our deeds must follow, because belief in Christ requires following Him. If one does not live one’s faith, one does not really have faith. James attacks hypocrisy. The superficial condition that permits faith to be nothing more than a formal confession must have been a problem in James’ day as well as ours. Jesus warned of the same principle. Not everyone who says “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21).

James 2:15–16 “If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food . . . Depart in peace . . . notwithstanding ye give them not . . . what *doth it profit?*” James offers a logical example of showing that we must act on our beliefs to have them help us and others. The phrase, “depart in peace,” or “go in peace,” was a farewell used throughout the Old Testament and New Testament.²⁵ Here it is used to show the hypocrisy of those who voiced their peace but refused to feed orphans and widows in need.

James 2:17 “faith, if it *have not works, is dead*” (JST *italicized*) Four times James repeats this message that true worship is not just words and ceremonies, but active deeds of love (also see verses 20, 24, 26).

James 2:19 “Thou believest there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble; *thou hast made thyself like unto them, not being justified*” (JST *italicized*) James’ diatribe offers a slap in the face to those who feel verbal allegiance is sufficient. Satan and his devils also believe. We are on the same level as they are if we do not take this knowledge and apply it in our lives. Converts made up the entire Christian church at this point (possibly there were second generation members, but only a few), so one’s responsibilities upon joining needed to be completely understood. The reason why our faith dies if we do not incorporate it into action is because the Holy Spirit can only dwell with us if we are living the gospel. We cannot grow in faith if we are not receiving the nurture and admonition of the Holy Ghost.

James 2:21 “Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?” (NIV) At the time of James’ writing, the Jews held Abraham as the progenitor of the covenant, and the genealogical line that insured a place in heaven. In their thinking, Abraham’s seed had royal blood. Because of this, he is referenced often in the New Testament. In Hebrews 11:17–19, Paul used the example of Abraham’s great faith in offering Isaac. Here, James uses the same story as an example of Abraham’s works. Abraham needed both faith and works to carry out that command. The New Testament remembers Abraham for following God’s direction, even in the most difficult request imaginable. I personally believe that God will ask us to also sacrifice or offer up those things that are most tender to us in order to show our commitment to Him. This spirit of sacrifice is required to develop the faith needed to become more Christlike.

James 2:22 “You see that his faith was working with his actions, and his faith was perfected by what he did” (BSB) Abraham’s faith was perfected through his actions. Likewise, our faith is perfected as we complement our beliefs with deeds. James cites Genesis 15:6. The JST adds that “Abram looked forth and saw the days of the Son of Man, and was glad, and his soul found rest” (Genesis 15:12, JST). Abraham’s righteousness made him a friend of God (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:18). Jesus told his apostles that they would be His friends if they did whatever He commanded them (John 15:14).

James 2:24 “a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone” (NIV) James’ conclusion on the subject does not contradict Paul’s. Paul only rejects of works of the Law of Moses as a means to salvation. Paul never teaches that we do not need to live the Law of the Gospel, or as James referred to it, “the Law of Liberty” (see 1 Corinthians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Matthew 25:31–46).

James 2:25 “Rahab the harlot *was justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and sent them out another way?*” (JST *italicized*) James offers a second witness of where works and faith were combined, this time by a woman—the “harlot Rahab” from Joshua 2:1–6. Paul also highlights Rahab as a woman of great faith (Hebrews 11:31). The Old Testament book of Joshua described sending Israelite spies to check out Jericho. Rahab had a home on the city wall, and hid the Israelite spies on her roof until they could secretly escape

unharmd. Because of her kindness, when the Israelites returned to destroy Jericho, Rahab and her household were spared and they joined the Israelites. I assume the family became fully converted because she became the great-grandmother of King David, according to the genealogy of Joseph in Matthew 1:5. Throughout Jewish history, she was held as a shining example of hospitality and conversion.²⁶

The unusual aspect of this story is that the Bible always identifies her with the title: “harlot.” As mentioned in Hebrews, there is debate as to the translation of that word. Could it have meant she was an inn keeper? Or was she forced into that profession by the men in her life, but her heart was honorable? Whatever profession she had initially, Rahab became a heroine of faith, works, hospitality, honesty, conversion, and change. As good works need pure desires, we can assume that if Rahab’s actions were counted for righteousness, then God sees more than her title.

James 2:26 “as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead” For the fourth and most forceful time, James repeats his thesis. Faith is an action word and must motivate positive deeds or it is “useless” (NAS, NIV, JB). This time he adds the image of the death of our mortal bodies. We would die without our spirit residing within, and in the life hereafter, our spirits will be virtually dead without the presence of good deeds. In all periods of history, Christians’ good works are the way they are judged by outsiders and is a common sense standard. This was one of the favorite scriptures of Benjamin Franklin.²⁷

JAMES 3

Taming the Tongue

James 3:1–12

James 3:1 “Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (NIV) All other English translations I know of change the KJV word “master” to “teacher/*didaskalos*/an instructor,” giving this whole section a different bend. Both words could mean teacher at the time. James warns that there will be a greater condemnation if teachers speak falsely, or if teachers learn more, they will be held accountable for more.

James 3:2 “We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to control his whole body” (BSB) By practicing self-control of our tongues, we are better able to control every aspect of our lives. The author humbly includes himself as one who has offended others in word. This first phrase sounds just like Jesus’ admonition, “Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36). If the teacher or master is a good example of what to say and when, then the whole church learns self-control and the other virtues that their leader teaches.

Let's look at another interpretation. As God designed scripture to often communicate more than one meaning, and often to testify of His Son, it is interesting to see Jesus in this verse. The greatest “teacher” and “master” (3:1) is also known as “the Word.” Jesus is the perfect teacher who never said anything amiss, and He was able to control the whole body of the church. By His word, He created the world and controls it.

James 3:3–5 “ships . . . are so large and . . . steered by a very small rudder . . . the tongue is a small part of the body, but it boasts of great things. Consider how small a spark sets a great forest ablaze.” Paul illustrates his point with three images: a horse bridle/bit, a ship's helm, and a forest fire. A boat often symbolizes the early church in early Christianity. Hence, a rudder can be the leader or teacher. In the more literal understanding, the tongue's size does not measure its influence. We can control the rest of our actions if our mouth is governed. The fierce winds are often symbolic of temptations. Ephesians 4:14 uses the imagery of winds to symbolize extra distractions or useless interests. Some verbal abuse or persecution spreads repercussions like a fire. The phrase in KJV, “course of nature” is literally, “the wheel of being” referring to our existence.

James 3:7–9 “All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue” (NIV) Man is given dominion or stewardship over the animals in Genesis 1:28 and 2:19. Humans can train bulls and lions, but can still struggle with taming their own tongues. Controlling our tongues can be one of the “weaknesses,” that we need Christ's help to overcome as the Book of Mormon teaches: “I give unto men weakness that they may be humble, and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me” (Ether 12:27).

Coastline of the Dead Sea by Eduard Marmet. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



James 3:9–10 “Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing” Our words can be two sided: we can use them to praise God, and yet curse our fellow beings, God's creation. Combining blessings and cursing is incompatible. Blessings are from God and cursing from the devil. It is wrong to degrade each other.

James 3:11 “Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives” (NIV) If the audience were the Hebrews along the Jordan Valley, they were familiar with both mineral and fresh water springs. The fruits of the figs, olives and berries are indigenous foods from that area. Sweet and bitter waters did not mix. A fountain or spring of “sweet water” is another way of saying, “the well of living water.” If the water is sweet it is living or running water. Bitter water is stagnant. The Children of Israel on their exodus through Sinai experienced the bitter waters of Marah (Exodus 15:23). In contrast, Ezekiel 47:1 describes pure waters flowing from the Temple as a symbol of revelation, God's gifts, and life (also see Psalm 46:4; Isaiah 55:1). Sweet water was the clear flowing inspiration from God. John 7:37 compares preaching to water which ties back to one of the meanings of the first section, about teachers. James teaches that Christians who praise God, should never speak unkindly, abusively or dishonestly. We need to follow the examples of nature.

True Wisdom Involves Humble Living

James 3:13–18

James 3:13 “Are any of you wise or sensible? Then show it by living right and by being humble and wise in everything you do” (CEV) If we are wise and knowledgeable, we must guard against pride. Maintaining a meek, humble perspective will foster more learning. We are “wise” only if we stop bragging. The KJV “conversation,” is also translated, “life,” (NIV) “behavior” (NASB), and “conduct” (NKJV).

James 3:14–16 “If you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts . . . such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic” (NIV) The antithesis of humility and wisdom is pride and selfishness which fosters “unrighteous dominion” (D&C 121:39). The motives behind selfishness and ambition, or “this wisdom,” are Satanic.

Seeking more wisdom was one of the noblest Greek values. The word “philosophy” comes from two roots: “*philo/love*” and “*sophy /wisdom*.” Greek schools of philosophy such as the stoics and cynics taught the art of argument, of “dialectics.” James differentiates between wisdom from God and the counterfeit version from Satan.

James 3:17–18 “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” We learn of wisdom from above through revelation. If it brings peace and speaks to our mind and heart, it is from the Spirit of God (D&C 6:15, 23; 8:2). In addition to God's wisdom, it brings mercy, fairness, sincerity, and good fruits, Isaiah 32:17 describes that “the fruit of righteousness will be peace and the effect of righteousness quietness.”

JAMES 4

Worldliness is an Enemy of God

James 4:1-6

James 4:1-2 “What causes fights and quarrels among you? . . . You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God” (NIV) There may have been a problem among the saints with contention. It may have been Jews fighting Christians, zealots, or even Christians against Christians. These verses suggest that the fighting was for lusts, material advantage, gratification, passions, or pleasures. He is probably is not referring to a military war of killing, but definitely to hostilities that figuratively kill the spirit. Their hearts were set on the wrong thing

James 4:3 “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures” (NIV) The Lord will not answer us if we are asking for the wrong things, with the wrong attitude, or at the wrong time. James addressed “ask[ing] amiss” (KJV) earlier in James 1:5, “ask in faith, nothing wavering.” If we are motivated by the wrong source or if we are not asking for what is wisest in the Lord’s sight, we will not receive what we ask. However, God still hears all our prayers, and His delay in answering is to teach us a wiser purpose (D&C 6:14; 9:7; 122:7). God will answer our prayers as we align our will with His, and not the other way around. It is always our hearing problem, not His. This is why we must humbly trust and keep seeking.

James mentions two reasons why our prayers are not answered, but there are many more.²⁸ We may feel like Joseph Smith, when he charged God with hiding (D&C 121:1-2). But, as God taught Joseph in Liberty Jail, His ways are wiser and we have something to learn from the process. Prayers may not be answered to try our faith, or until repentance occurs, or to learn from the process of drawing closer to God, or perhaps God previously gave the answer. Or, our prayers are answered but we cannot hear Him because of distractions (Mosiah 4:11, 20; Alma 39:16 D&C 4:5; 6:22; 90:24; 122:7). During those times that we desperately want God’s witness, we need to follow the Apostle Thomas’ example—he did not leave his fellow apostles. He continued to hope. While waiting, he did not deny his past witnesses. He remained in the right place, so that at the right time, he heard the Lord’s answer.²⁹

James 4:4 “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God?” (NIV) In this context, “adulterers” (KJV) not only refers to all sexual sinners, but also to idolatry. In the Old Testament, the marriage covenant is often used to describe the chosen people’s relationship to God (i.e. Hosea 3:1). Zion is to be God’s bride. In this relationship, when they leave God’s covenant, they are figuratively committing adultery. James may be referring to those who selfishly love money more than feeding the poor or keeping the Sabbath day holy. Jesus also addresses this in Matthew 6:24. According to James, if we love worldli-

ness, we are an enemy to God. Our hearts must be purified to want God’s will more than the things of the world (James is not referring to those who love God’s creation and hope to preserve our planet).

James 4:5-6 “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” James quotes Proverbs 3:34. The idea is also in the Book of Mormon, where the natural man takes over our hearts. We cannot be arrogant in our relationship to God and His creations. For eternal blessings we must humbly seek His will and His divine path.

Submit Your Will to God’s Will

James 4:5-12

James 4:7-8 “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts” This is the formula for conquering and abandoning evil. God can transform our lives. We should think of the imagery of walking toward the Lord and then like a magnetic pull, we become embraced in His love. Jesus’ taught the same principle in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:24 and in Jeremiah 31:3).

James 4:9-10 “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” We must change from our extravagant ways, lament over our sins and fully change through whole-hearted repentance. It sounds as though James is promoting unnecessary mourning or weeping and interpreting laughter as a sin. But, in the context, it appears he is asking for a reverent nature before God, not a stoic nature or forced depression.

Judge Not

James 4:11-12

James 4:11-12 “Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another . . . There is only one Lawgiver and Judge . . . who are you to judge your neighbor?” (NIV) This is an elaboration on the need control our tongues from James 3:1-12. When we speak against others, we are judging them which breaks God law. The Law of the Gospel calls for forgiveness and followers not critics. From our one-sided mortal perspective we need to trust the one who can see the whole eternal picture. Jesus is the one “Lawgiver” and the “Judge.”³⁰ Are we trying to take over God’s role when we judge another?

Do Good in God and Boast Not

James 4:13-17

James 4:13-15 “You who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there . . . and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. . . . Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do . . .’” (NIV) James reminds his audience that they should never leave God out of their plans. As disciples, our lives are not in our own control but in God’s. And, the goal of mortality is not gain. We need to be malleable to God’s directions. Rather than anti-capitalism, James is anti-self-assurance.

Throughout the epistle, James condemns those who seek and prioritize material riches and worldly advantage (i.e. James 1:10; 2:1–7; 5:1–6). The scriptures are filled with examples of God blessing His people with the goods of the world, but James condemns the commercial schemer who carries out his or her elaborate plans to get rich without consulting God. Humanity tries to calculate the earth's events, but they are subject to God. The Lord calls on His disciples to plan for their future and to create and bless the world. Yet the sinful self-centeredness of the planning and executing without attention to God filled James' society and ours.

James 4:16 “**You boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil**” (NIV) Boasting is prideful and comes from a self-centered heart. However, James is not referring to building a child up with encouragement or honoring another. In the Book of Mormon, Ammon's brother cautioned him not to boast about his missionary success, but he defended himself, that he was praising God (Alma 26:10–11).

James 4:17 “**If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them**” (NIV) God will hold us accountable for knowing what He has revealed. All those that come into the earth are given the light of Christ to distinguish right from wrong. And, those of the age of accountability will be held accountable. Serving and loving more comes at the price of learning more. Or as the Lord taught, “Where much is given, much is required.”

JAMES 5

Warning to Rich Oppressors

James 5:1–6

James 5:1–3a “**You who are rich, weep . . . Your riches have rotted and . . . their corrosion will testify against you and consume your flesh like fire**” (BSB) James writes like an oracle of doom. Seeking money to get gain is Satan's first law of false faiths.³¹ Those whose hearts are set on materialism will even lose the self-satisfaction that came when they first made money. The forthcoming natural disasters and divinely-guided destructions will change the plans of the materialistic. James wrote this in the perfect tense as if the misfortunes had already occurred. This tense is always used in the prophetic voice.

James 5:3b–4 “**You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you**” (NIV) God will punish those managers who cheat their laborers. Like the blood of Able that cried from the ground for justice (Genesis 4:10), the poor laborers cry out against their overlords who become rich off the laborers' service. The KJV includes the title, “Lord of the Sabaoth” which does not mean the Lord of the Sabbath, but is a military title. It is the “Lord of Hosts” (ESV) or the “Lord Almighty” (NIV), the one who will deliver judgment.

James 5:5–6 “**You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous, who did not resist you**” (BSB) James likens the secular selfish people who are insensitive to the needs of those around them, to a fatted calf ready to be slaughtered. They glut themselves for no personal avail, as their lives will end shortly. The problem is the self-indulgence. The fat heart represents the feeding of our selfish desires.

Patience through Suffering

James 5:7–12

James 5:7–8 “**Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land . . . You too, be patient and stand firm . . .**” (NIV) The early Christians expected Jesus to return to reign in glory within their generation or their grandchildren's. This agricultural reference of patiently waiting was well known from Daniel 11:14. It is an expression of trusting God. Patience shows our trust in God. His implanted word will bear fruit. After two-millennia, Christians continue to trust in the Second Coming, but expect that His Kingdom will come in His time. In modern scripture we learned that the righteous can cut that time short if a Zion people becomes ready.

James 5:9 “**Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!**” (NIV) For the fifth time, James returns to the theme of judgement (James 1:16–17; 2:12–13; 3:1; 4:11). He warns his audience not to “complain” (BSB) or create contention. Contention was also the first problem that Jesus denounced when visiting the Nephites (3 Nephi 11:29).

James 5:10–11 “**Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets . . . Job's perseverance . . . The Lord is full of compassion and mercy**” (NIV) The ancient prophets are still our examples of patience, with Job leading the list. The Lord also used the example of Job as the prime example of suffering to the Prophet Joseph Smith in Liberty Jail (D&C 121:10). We use these two examples of Job as evidence that he lived and was a real person rather than just a fictitious story.

James 5:12 “**Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple “Yes” or “No”**” (NIV) James turns to many of Jesus' teachings here (Matthew 5:33–37). Swearing shows impatience. It appears that James' uses the phrase, “above all” as a connecting phrase, and not necessarily to point to the most important commandment in his epistle. Since this directive is only mentioned once, and ten others are repeated and elaborated on multiple times, we can assume that it is not his most valued message.³²

Nevertheless, the importance of making oaths with God is of serious import and should not be taken lightly. In the context, the saints needed patience to endure their suffering. Perhaps he is asking those who have made covenants, with a clear “yes,” to hold and maintain integrity by keeping those covenants.

Elders Heal the Sick through Laying on of Hands

James 5:13–18

James 5:13 “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms” James opens the subject of healing with the reminder that all Christians should pray to endure affliction. He includes singing hymns or “praises” (BSB) as an expression of joy (also Ephesians 5:8). I find the Psalms and hymns help to endure trials. As we are merry, the type of music we choose to sing is important. James specifies that it is to praise the Lord. As in our day, at this time in the Greco-Roman world, many rejoicings included “arrogant and salacious songs that were characteristics of banquets and similar celebrations.”³³

James 5:14 “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” Anointing with oil typifies of Christ. The word “Christ/Messiah” in English means, “Anointed.” God the Father anointed Jesus to become the Holy One. It is significant that the oil used for anointing is olive oil. It symbolizes the atonement. As mentioned earlier, the garden of Gethsemane referred to an olive press where the oil was crushed and squeezed out (Matthew 26:36–46). Jews saw olive oil as a type of special use for life and spirit. The *Apocalypse of Moses* 9, and *Book of Adam and Eve*, describe the “Tree of Life” as flowing with healing olive oil.³⁴ Also, as instructed in the Law of Moses, the anointing of the sons of Aaron to become priests and the coronation of kings both used olive oil (1 Samuel 10:1, Exodus 28:41; 30:30). It was also used for wounds (Isaiah 1:6; Luke 10:34), and in preparation of death (Matthew 26:6; Mark 16:1).³⁵ Jews and Jesus anointed the sick with oil (Mark 6:13).³⁶ There was nothing magical about the oil, yet if done according to God’s laws, the anointing was done on the symbolism of Christ, the Anointed One, as the prayer intercedes with God our Creator.

What role did an elder play in the early church? In the New Testament, “Elders” are not just older citizens, but are the leaders (1 Peter 5:2). By AD 40–50, the elders had a permanent place in the Jerusalem congregation along with the apostles (Acts 11:30; 15:2; 16:4; 22:18). Barnabas and Paul were ordained “elders” (Acts 14:23). They are mentioned as church leaders (Acts 20:4, 28; 1 Peter 5:15), as preachers and teachers (1 Timothy 5:17–19) and in an ordination (1 Timothy 4:14). An Elder was a title of honor and distinction (1 Peter 5:1; 2 John 1; 3 John 1). Also, Elders appear to be lay members as they are engaged in ordinary occupations as well.³⁷ The anointing of the sick is one of the ordinances from the primitive church that the Lord restored in our dispensation.

James 5:15 “the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him” James’ emphasis is on the Lord’s role and the prayer of faith. The gift of healing is available to all with faith (1 Corinthians 12:28). Many ancient peoples, including those in the Old Testament and New Testament, thought that sickness was a consequence of sin (1 Kings 15:4; Matthew 9:2). As discussed earlier, this is a mistaken notion (see John 9:1).³⁸ The praying saint or elder calls on God’s power for both healing and forgiveness. James links divine healing and forgiveness. In one example of healing, Jesus showed that He had

power to forgive sins as well as heal (Mark 2:5–11). Yet, not everyone that Jesus healed appeared to have had a repentant heart. Forgiveness requires repentance. But, if the power of God is used to physically heal someone, it certainly may have the power to cleanse them spiritually, too.

Both healings and cleansing use the Spirit and power of God. James’ discussion raises a few questions, Can one be healed by the power of God without a spiritual cleansing? Does the Spirit carry out both cleansing and healings? Does the Spirit’s presence always cleanse to some degree? To find answers, we look to the Book of Mormon. There Jesus taught: “Yea, blessed are they who shall believe in your words, and come down into the depths of humility and be baptized, for they shall be visited with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and shall receive a remission of their sins” (3 Nephi 12:2). And, again in the final pages, Moroni summarized this key doctrine: “. . . were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 6:4; 8:26; also see D&C 76:52). As the Spirit is the cleansing agent, when the Spirit is present for healing, a cleansing may well occur too.³⁹ This does not mean that everyone who feels the Spirit will be healed, but perhaps everyone who is healed is cleansed, at that moment.

Confession and [Re]Conversion

James 5:16–20

James 5:16 “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (NIV) Confession is a very important part of the repentance process. It enables accountability, change acceleration, and reconciliation. Acknowledging our mistakes and apologizing to those we have aggrieved is the beginning of deep, meaningful change. Some serious sins should be confessed to a bishop.⁴⁰ Confession to a priesthood leader can be daunting, but when done with a humble spirit, it becomes a giant step towards forgiveness. Confession may seem like a difficult and sometimes embarrassing first step, and yet, it is often the easiest part of truly repenting.

James 5:17–18 “Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not” (NIV) In Greek, “Elias” (KJV) is the name for Elijah. This venerable Old Testament prophet was a righteous example of offering prayers to draw God’s power to earth. 1 Kings 17 and 18 tells the story of Elijah asking God to close the heavens from rain for 3 ½ years in order to bring the Children of Israel to repentance. The climax of the account is the day of the return of the rains when all the wicked priests of Baal met on Mt. Carmel to offer sacrifices to Baal with great drama, followed by Elijah offering a sacrifice to Jehovah with great fire from heaven. The following death of the priests of Baal stopped the drought, and the down pour of rains came as Elijah ran down the mountain. (Consistent with many of James’ examples, Jesus also recalled this story in Luke 4:25.)

James 5:19–20 “My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth . . . Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins” (NIV) James

closes his epistle with this last charge for preaching the gospel and a promise of forgiveness. If we can help restore a non-committed-believer, or returning-believer it brings great blessings to both parties. The entire epistle of James is filled with guidelines on how to become more Christ like. James' closing promise is that as we come toward "perfection" (KJV), we receive God's forgiveness.

On a related note, bringing someone back to the fold includes the need to bear testimony so that the Spirit can witness of the truth. In this dispensation, God also promised to forgive our sins when we testify: "the testimony which ye have borne is recorded in heaven for the angels to look upon; and they rejoice over you, and your sins are forgiven you" (D&C 64:3). The two are related as bearing our testimonies can be the means of restoring us to a straighter path.

Header Image: Image by Valiphotos via Pixabay.

ENDNOTES

1. Raymond Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1997), 725.
2. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Anchor Yale Bible: The Letter of James* (New Haven, CT: Yale Press, 1995), 6.
3. The title, "General Epistle," is also written as, "Catholic Epistle," which means general or universal.
4. Elizabeth and Zacharias from Aaron (Luke 1:5); Anna from Asher (Luke 2:36); Joseph husband of Mary, from Judah (Matthew 1:3, 16); Paul from Benjamin (Romans 11:11); Barnabas from Levi (Acts 10:36).
5. The Old Testament was an open cannon at the time of the Apostolic church. It was referred to as the Law of Moses, Writings and Prophets.
6. The word "apostle" may have referred to a missionary, or anyone else "sent" as well. It appears that there are more people referred to as "apostles" than to members of the "Twelve." The word "apostolos" was used as "a messenger, one sent on a mission, an apostle, envoy, delegate, one commissioned by another to represent him in some way, especially a man sent out by Jesus Christ Himself to preach the Gospel." Strongs, # 652, "Apostolos."
7. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.9.1.
8. Harper, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 447. The structure is also similar to the apocryphal literature known as *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.
9. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 725.
10. See Come Follow Me #22: Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22; #32: 1 Corinthians 1–7; and #40: Ephesians 1–6.
11. Lavina Fielding Anderson, *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 2001), 38. The practice of daily devotionals was recorded by both Lucy and her son William. Daily prayer, "both morning and evening," which was also consistent with Lucy Mack's childhood under the tutelage of her mother, Lydia Gates Mack. During the winter of 1830–31 between twelve and twenty neighbors attended the devotionals (ibid. 34–35). The most exhaustive biographer of Lucy Mack Smith, described her "as a model of domestic spirituality, a model drawn directly from her New England culture about proper behavior for pious women." (ibid. 17). Again Lucy Mack, "Whilst we worked with our hands we endeavored to remember the service of & the welfare of our souls" (ibid., 323). According to first-hand accounts, Joseph Smith continued this same practice of evening family devotionals in his home (Andrus, *They Knew the Prophet*, 147). Jessee, *Personal Writings of Smith*, 10. "[My] goodly parents spared no pains to instructing me in the Christian religion."
12. Richard Bushman, *The Beginnings of Mormonism*, 54. William, the only son to live to an old age, remembered that his mother "made use of every means which her parental love could suggest, to get us engaged in seeking for our soul's salvation" (ibid. 39).
13. James 1:5 was the topic of a sermon: "What Church Shall I join?" by the Methodist minister, George Lane. He preached at camp meetings within near the Smith's home in Palmyra. Years later, Joseph younger brother William recalled that Joseph heard him preach on James 1:5. Unfortunately, William was not very stable and this is our only source of this detail. Joseph Smith was also very familiar with the Bible on his own right. <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/arti->

- cle/museum-treasures-jesse-townsend-sermons?lang=eng (accessed 10-30-19).
14. Wilson, *Learning the Language of the Lord*, 163–193. Chapter 6, “What If I Do Not Feel Revelation?”
 15. M. Russell Ballard, “O That Cunning Plan of the Evil One,” General Conference October 2010.
 16. David A. Bednar. Face to Face with Elder and Sister Bednar (May 18, 2015). <https://www.lds.org/youth/activities/spiritual-strength/scriptures-and-pro-ets/face-to-face-with-elder-and-sister-bednar>.
 17. Johnson, *The Anchor Yale Bible: James*, 221.
 18. Petri Luomanen, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects and Gospels* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012), 48. A splinter group of Jewish Christians were known by the Hebrew/Aramaic name “poor/Ebionites.” The group’s records reveals they had a letter of “James the Just,” but we do not know if it were similar to the New Testament Epistle.
 19. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Bartchy, “Servant” 4.420. ^{Timothy G. Parkin}, *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins, 2003), 183.
 20. Johnson, *The Anchor Yale Bible: James*, 226.
 21. President Marion G. Romney, “The Royal Law of Love,” General Conference April 1978, Welfare Session.
 22. Johnson, *The Anchor Yale Bible: James*, 232.
 23. Dean Jessee, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 319. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 331.
 24. Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” General Conference April 2019.
 25. In the Old Testament: Judges 6:23; 18; 6; 19:20; 1 Samuel 20:22; 29:7; 2 Samuel 15:27; 2 Kings 5:19. In the New Testament: Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50; 8:48; 24:36; John 20:19; Acts 16:36; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 6:23; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Titus 1:4; 3 John 1:15; etc.
 26. Johnson, *The Anchor Yale Bible: James*, 245; lists at least twelve examples of ancient texts highlighting her in a positive manner.
 27. Thomas S. Kidd, *Benjamin Franklin: The Religious Life of a Founding Father* (New Haven, CT: Yale Press, 2017). Benjamin Franklin called himself a Deist rather than a Christian, but he still loved good moral council for the nation that as was taught in the Bible.
 28. Wilson, *Learning the Language of the Lord*, chapter 6. I spend thirty pages elaborating on the problem of not hearing answers.
 29. Patrick Q. Mason, *Planted: Belief and Belonging in an Age of Doubt* (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship and Deseret Book, 2015), 131–32.
 30. The Lord has delegated short term judgement to his Bishops as “judge in Israel” (D&C 58:14–17; 107:69–72).
 31. Hugh Nibley, “Leaders and Managers” *BYU Speeches* Commencement Address, August 19, 1983. As referenced in commentary from Luke 12: 15, “Satan has tempted humanity with greed or a love of materialism since Adam’s children. Hugh Nibley helped define the problem: “We have been warned against things of this world . . . but exactly what are the things of the *world*? An easy and infallible test has been given us in the well-known maxim ‘*You can have anything in this world for money.*’ If a thing is of this *world*, *you can have it for money*; if you cannot *have it for money*, it does not belong to this *world*”
 32. The ten mentioned in chapter one as listed in the “Structure” include: patience, prayer, faith, wealth, temptation, good

- gifts, communication, sin, doers of the word, generosity.
33. Johnson, *Anchor Bible: James*, 57.
 34. Gregory Dix, Henry Chadwick, eds., *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St Hippolytus of Rome* (London, NY: Routledge, 2013), preface g. “. . . a blessing of olive oil: the Oil from the tree of life was the elixir of immortality according to many ancient texts. e.g. Life of Adam and Eve 36; II Enoch viii.3—5; Apocalypse of Moses ix.3; Acts of Pilate 3 (19); Acts of Thomas 157.” Also see Bo Reicke, *Anchor Bible: James, Peter, and Jude* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1964), vol 37, 59.
 35. *Mishnah, Shabbath*, 23:5.
 36. This later reference claiming to be practiced earlier: *Jerusalem Talmud, Berakot* 1, 3a; 9.
 37. Johnson, *Anchor Bible: James*, 59.
 38. Avraham Steinberg, ed., *Encyclopedia of Jewish Medical Ethics* (Jerusalem Israel: Feldheim, 2003), 34, “Any illness may result from sin.” Their society incorrectly presumed that physical imperfections made one a sinner because priests with birth defects were not allowed to serve at the altar of the temple: “No man that hath a blemish of the seed of Aaron the priest shall come nigh to offer the offerings of the LORD made by fire” (Leviticus 21:21, 17–23).
 39. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:499–500. On July 9, 1843, on a Sunday Sermon in Nauvoo the Prophet Joseph taught: “You might as well baptize a bag of sand as a man, if not done in view of the remission of sins and getting of the Holy Ghost. Baptism by water is but half a baptism, and is good for nothing without the other half—that is, the baptism of the Holy Ghost. The Savior says, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”
 40. Spencer W. Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, 179, 186.



1 AND 2 PETER

BECOMING MORE HOLY

CA. AD 61 TO 68

Author

Both 1 and 2 Peter begin by introducing the author as “an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1). His birth name was “Simon/Symeon” (Greek/Hebrew spelling, Acts 15:14), the same as one of the twelve sons of Jacob. During Jesus’ ministry, at the most sacred times, He often separated Peter, James, and John from the other apostles (i.e., raising Jairus’ daughter, on the mount of Transfiguration, in Gethsemane, etc.). Paul has referred to him as one of the “pillars” of the church. Peter led the Jerusalem Council and is known as the leader of the Twelve Apostles.

The Greek texts of both Epistles are vastly different. This may be due to different scribes. Peter thanks Silas for either translating, compiling, or editing his first letter: “With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you” (1 Peter 5:12). We are not told who helped him with the second letter. Both are both finished in elegant Greek, yet, they have very different writing styles, vocabulary, themes, and organization.

Peter very well may have authorized both, but as an Aramaic speaking fisherman from Galilee, we assume that a well-educated, native Greek speaker finalized the letter.

SILAS

The name “Silas/Silvanus” is mentioned 34 times in the New Testament. He was introduced at the Jerusalem Council as a Jewish-Christian leader who accompanied Paul and Barnabas to Antioch to explain the changes made in Christianity from the Law of Moses (Acts 15:22, 26, 32). Paul asked Silas to join him on his second apostolic mission when Mark joined Barnabas (Acts 15:36–18:5). Silas also became Paul’s scribe (1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1).

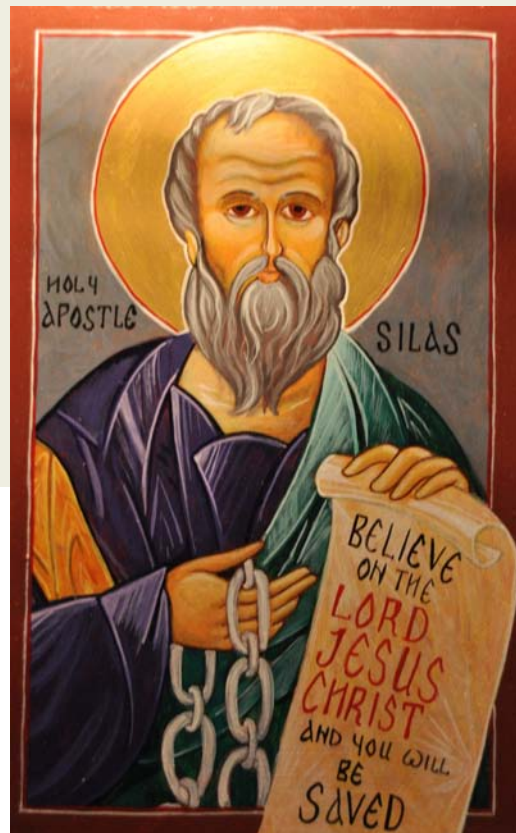
The first letter has no evidence of Hebrew or Aramaic nuances. The author of 1 Peter also knew his scriptures and included at least fourteen Old Testament citations in the first letter.¹ In contrast, 2 Peter only sights Proverbs once, and an apocryphal work of 1 Enoch. In 2 Peter 3:1, he refers to it as “this second epistle.” Also, 2 Peter is a farewell discourse and follows that literary format.²

The author references being in Rome with a code name: “the church that is at Babylon . . . saluteth you” (1 Peter 5:13). “Babylon” referred to Rome in the book of Revelation, which may apply here (Revelations 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21). History tells us that Caesar Nero imprisoned Peter before he crucified him. (Peter requested to be crucified upside down, as he did not feel worthy to die as the Lord had.) Nero’s reign allows us to date both Epistles sometime before AD 68.

Introduction to 1 Peter

First Peter is a guidebook on how to become more holy through trials. It connects enthusiastic exhortations with sensitive consolations for the saints who were suffering persecution. It repeats themes of:

1. Trials and Suffering Can Develop Greater Faith and Holiness
2. The Old Testament Prophecies about Jesus
3. Follow the Savior’s Example Even in Persecution
4. Christian Code of Conduct (Families, masters, etc.)



Icon of the Apostle Silas by Ted via Flickr.

OUTLINE [SIDEBAR]

- 1:1–2 Greetings to Israelites
- 1:3–12 Hymn of Praise
- 1:13–2:12 A New Chosen Israelite Identity
- 2:13–3:7 Submission to Authority
- 3:8–4:11 Holy Suffering as a Witness
- 4:12–5:8. Perseverance in Persecution
- 5:1–11 Responsibilities for Men
- 5:12–14 Final Greetings [end sidebar]

1 PETER 1

Greetings to Israelites

1 Peter 1:1–2

1 Peter 1:1 “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout . . .” The Epistle opens in the same formal Greek format of most of Paul’s letters. This may have been added by Peter’s scribe Silas (who was also Paul’s scribe (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1). Peter introduces as mentioned above. The audience is referred to as “strangers” (KJV), “pilgrims” (NKJV), or “exiles” (BSB) which referred to Christians living outside the land of Israel in the Diaspora—specifically, five specific areas in Asia Minor (or modern-day Turkey).³ As Christians, they were exiles in this world, seeking to return to their heavenly home. Figuratively, they must re-walk the path of the Children of Israel in their search for their Promised Land. This title reminds his audience that all who make covenants are adopted into the family of Abraham and house of Israel. The audience was made up of both:

- Jewish-converts who had settled in Asia Minor after generations of scattering—either from the Assyrian or Babylonian captivities (between 730 BC and 600 BC).⁴
- Gentile-converts who are now adopted into the family of Abraham as new chosen exiles.

1 Peter 1:2 “chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ . . .” (BSB) In the Restoration, we refer to the “elect” (KJV) or “chosen” (BSB) as predestined



to be saved in the Calvinistic sense.⁵ We understand that God has omniscient foreknowledge, but He still allows for individual choice or agency, so that we can choose to be chosen. The Lord taught the Prophet Joseph that many were called premortal, and those who make and keep their covenant with God will become His chosen people. Those who are chosen, do not set their hearts “upon things of this world” nor “exercise unrighteous dominion” (D&C 121:34–42; Abraham 3:22–4).

Peter goes on to acknowledge the Spirit and Savior’s roles in anyone becoming chosen as God’s elect. The Spirit’s cleansing and the Savior’s blood work together to redeem us. As we obey Jesus, the sanctifying power of God’s Spirit draws us to Him through His grace. The Spirit acts as an enabling agent to implement the cleansing of the atonement.

“Sprinkling by His blood” (BSB) The symbol of sprinkling the blood comes from ancient Israel Temple worship. The sacrificial animal’s blood was sprinkled on the altar and veil to represent the atoning power of Redemption (Exodus 24:6, Leviticus 1:5; 3:2, 8, 13, etc.). The blood foreshadowed the Great Redeemer’s obedient sacrifice. Understanding this allows us to see the unity between obedience and sacrifice.

“Grace unto you and peace be yours” (BSB) The greeting closes with the formal Greco-Judaic.

A Hymn of Praise for God’s Lively Hope

1 Peter 1:3–12

1 Peter 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus” Note how often the New Testament describes a unity of work between the three separate members of the Godhead. This prayer or hymn begins by praising God for His gift of life through our physical birth, and spiritual life through a “new birth” (NIV). Peter describes being born again as a “living hope” (KJV). This hope stems from understanding Jesus’ atonement, resurrection, immortality and Eternal Life (NIV). When Christians exercise their faith, they are born again, and then receive the gift of hope. As disciples hold onto, and internalize that hope—their faith in the Savior—it can penetrate all aspects of their lives. When hope is living, it grows to fill disciples with love for God and charity toward others.

1 Peter 1:4 “To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” Prophets foretell that God’s inheritance far surpasses all mortal inheritance. With His omniscient, God has “reserved” an “incorruptible” inheritance for the saints.

1 Peter 1:5 “who through faith are shielded by God’s power for the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time” (BSB) If disciples exercise faith, God can protect and guard them. This is similar to Paul’s shield of

faith and the armor of God (Ephesians 6:11–13; 1 Thessalonians 5:8). As another example, this verse speaks of the early saints' expectation that Jesus' Second Coming was imminent.

1 Peter 1:6 “now for a season . . . ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations” The “season,” includes most of mortality. The KJV, “temptation/*peirasmos*” is also used as “a trial, probation, testing, being tried . . . calamity, affliction.”⁶ All who live long enough will experience hardships, grief, and pain. Yet, Christians believe that God is aware of their trials and they fulfill a purpose in life. As we read of the lament and subsequent joy in the Psalm of Nephi: “O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities” (2 Nephi 4:17). Even in times of calamities and temptations, Nephi (and Peter) finds cause to “greatly rejoice” (KJV) by pondering on the gift of our Savior: “Rejoice, O my heart . . . O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness!” (2 Nephi 4:28, 33).

1 Peter 1:7 “the trial of your faith . . . more precious than of gold . . . tried with fire” Peter explores how a “trial of faith” can lead to deeper faith. Whether our trials come from normal mortal challenges, or God's tailor-made trials, Peter sees them “of greater worth than gold” (NIV). Gold will perish but the purified soul is immortal. Like the refining of metal, God will purify the saints through burning fire. Peter hopes our trials lead us to praise God more. If during trials, we humbly turn to God, our faith can become a sustaining and purifying power. Like Peter's audience, we too can look at trials as a means to become more holy.

1 Peter 1:8 “Though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and rejoice with an inexpressible and glorious joy . . . you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (BSB) The goal of his audience is to be able to believe and someday see their Salvation (which also can mean to see the Lord). Through faith, *all* may rejoice in the hope of salvation and God's love. Each disciples' prayer can realign our daily goals to build our faith in, and see life through the lens of Salvation. Peter's writes from the perspective of one who has seen, as a special eye-witness, of the resurrected Lord (1 Peter 5:1).

The Witness of the Prophets

1 Peter 1:10–12

1 Peter 1:10–11 “Concerning this salvation, the prophets . . . searched and investigated carefully, trying to determine the time and . . . [of] the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow” (BSB) Ancient prophets across the world sought to understand the timing of the Messiah's redemption. By the time of the Herod's Temple, the Jews had combed through their holy scriptures for predictions of the Messiah. They collected and studied them.⁷ Early Christians also looked for ancient prophecies of the Messiah and used them to show how Jesus fulfilled all (Revelation 10:7). These prophecies piece together Israelite history with Jesus' ministry.⁸

1 Peter 1:12 “It was revealed to them . . . [for] you . . . now announced by those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things” (BSB) The prophecies were not for the ancients as much as they were for the generation in which they were fulfilled. Prophecies of the Lord’s coming in scripture are also studied by heavenly angles. Even during His life, Jesus did not know the timing of His Second Coming, as He said, “no man knoweth the hour neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father” (Mark 13:32). The same truth is taught in the Book of Mormon; it was written for those people near the time of it coming to pass so that they might recognize the fulfillment of the prophecies as a witness of their truth (Mormon 3:17–20; Moroni 1:4; Book of Mormon Title Page).

A New Chosen Israelite Identity: Become Holy

1 Peter 1:13–25

1 Peter 1:13 “gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end” The KJV, “gird up,” was used in the military or athletics: “To gird one’s loin” involved the pulling up and tightening together of the long wide outer garment so that it would not cause the wearer to stumble in the line of march or a race. According to tradition, Passover was to be celebrated in like fashion to show they were ready for imminent departure. We now say, “Pull up your sleeves and get to work!”

The phrase, “gird up,” also means to “prepare your minds for action” (NASB). Peter calls Christians to strap in our thoughts and minds so that we are prepared for future trials. We do this with “soberness/*néphó*.” Literally this means “to abstain from wine,” but it also meant: “calm (vigilant), circumspect.”⁹ If we can truly trust the Lord in all situations, we can remain calm and collected.” The next phrase also has expanded meanings in Greek for “end.” The KJV, “hope to the end for the grace,” is also translated as “set your hope completely” (CSB), and “set your hope perfectly” (ASV). There is much room for personal effort as we strive to keep our hope fully focused on the Lord.

“**at the revelation of Jesus Christ,**” The last phrase in this verse has led some Christians to define revelation not as the Spirit’s work, but as Jesus’ coming. Because of this, I prefer the NIV, “when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.” As recipients of the modern revelation, we often have unique definitions of biblical phrases. This is because the Lord gave Joseph Smith fuller definitions of many of the words that we find in the Bible. We share the KJV vocabulary with many Christians, but we identify it with a nuanced definition that other Christians do not.¹⁰ This is also true of the word “revelation.” Stemming from ideas from this verse, some Christians limit the



Israelites eating the first Passover, with loins girded. Illustration from the 1728 *Figures de la Bible*; illustrated by Gerard Hoet (1648–1733). Image via Wikimedia Commons.

definition of “revelation” to Jesus’ coming. Others see the word revelation synonymous with Jesus. But, thanks to the Restoration, the word “revelation” holds a broader meaning including all the workings of the Spirit.

1 Peter 1:14–15 “As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But . . . ‘Be holy, because I am holy’” (NIV). Peter cites Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2.¹¹ This was instruction for the priests’ temple work. In this dispensation, the Elders in Zion received a similar charge: “Lift up their voice and declare my word with loud voices, without wrath or doubting, lifting up holy hands upon them. For I am able to make you holy, and your sins are forgiven you” (D&C 60:7). The Lord’s people have been asked to follow His example of holiness since the beginning. Our efforts to obey God’s commandments, repent daily, and follow the Spirit’s guidance, will allow the cleansing of the atonement to sanctify us disciples into becoming “saints.”

A “saint/*hagios*” is one who is “sacred, holy, set apart by (or for) God.”¹² To move forward spiritually, we must be *obedient children* of God. God called His holy ones, because they did “holy works” (NIV) “conduct” (RSV) “conversation” (KJV). The Greek word encourages disciples to actively follow with diligence and good works. Holiness belongs to God, so we become sanctified or holy through Him as we live holy lives.

1 Peter 1:17–19 “Since you call on a Father who judges . . . live . . . in reverent fear. For you . . . were redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish” (NIV) Peter calls us to always be cognizant that a judgement is coming. Our Judge is impartial, and He has prepared a Redeemer, but we still are to live in humble, “reverent fear.” The word “fear/*phobos*” is defined as “panic flight, the causing of fear, terror,” but can also be used for “reverence” and “respect.”¹³ I think of it as respectful humble meekness.

The ancient Israelite ordinance of animal sacrifice (which Moses 6:5–8 teaches began with Adam and Eve), symbolized the “great and last Sacrifice . . . yea infinite and eternal” (Alma 34:14). Also, Isaiah 53:7, looked forward to an incorruptible sacrifice. Peter accredits the Savior’s sacred blood, the life line for mortality, with the redeeming power. Paul also attached this Christian application of the temple’s law of sacrifice (1 Corinthians 5:7, Hebrews 9:14).

1 Peter 1:20 “was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” Our Savior was chosen in our pre-mortal existence. There is very little in the Bible on this, hence it is not believed by other Christians (i.e. John 1:1–3). However, the Lord restored far more on the doctrine of premortal life. In a sermon in Nauvoo the Prophet Joseph Smith taught: “At the first organization in heaven we were all present, and saw the Savior chosen and appointed and the plan of salvation made, and we sanctioned it.”¹⁴ These pre-mortal hints are rare in the Bible. The LDS footnote clarifies the difference between *foreordained* and *foreknown*. As mentioned earlier, the KJV translators believed in foreordination under their Augustine and Calvinistic roots.

1 Peter 1:21–23 “Believe in God . . . that your faith and hope might be in God. Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other . . . you have been born again, not of perishable seed” (NIV) These verses teach us about the three most important gifts of the Spirit: faith, hope, and charity. God gives these gifts as fruits of our belief and obedience. Disciples can know they are born again when we have a pure heart filled with genuine love. Once purified, saints are to exercise Christ-like love towards our fellowmen. We are to love *fervently*. This is also described in more detail as a “baptism of fire” (3 Nephi 31:13–21). Being born again also becomes our Christian baptismal imagery.

1 Peter 1:24–25 “All people are like grass, and . . . the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever” (NIV) Peter quotes Isaiah 40:6–8. Earlier, Jesus used similar ideas in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:30), and later in D&C 124:7. All the Old Testament quotes in this book are from the Greek Septuagint (not the Hebrew or Samaritan Bible, as we find in some of Acts).

1 PETER 2

1 Peter 2:1–2 “Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation” (BSB) Peter uses another metaphor to teach the same principle of rebirth—from the “word-as-seed” to the “word-as-milk” (NASB). He writes more boldly this time, with an “imperative force . . . ‘abandoning,’ ‘renouncing,’ or ‘ridding oneself’” of wickedness.¹⁵ Peter calls on committed disciples to abandon all negative attitudes towards others. The CEV translates them as “Stop being hateful! Quit trying to fool people . . . Don’t be jealous or say cruel things about others.” The KJV “malice” is also translated: wrongdoing, wickedness, and deceit (BBE, ASV, NIV). The phrase, “evil speaking” as “all the ways there are of speaking against people” (CJB).

Peter’s general list of five sins to “put off,” also invites Christlike attributes for the saints to put on. The spiritual milk, is only figurative, but the metaphor is clear. As a newborn hungers for milk, so Christians who are born again should hunger for the word of God. Jesus taught disciples to “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matthew 5:6). Once they have “tasted” or felt the love of the Lord, they know the “Lord is gracious” (Psalm 34:18).

The Chosen People and Stone

1 Peter 2:4–10

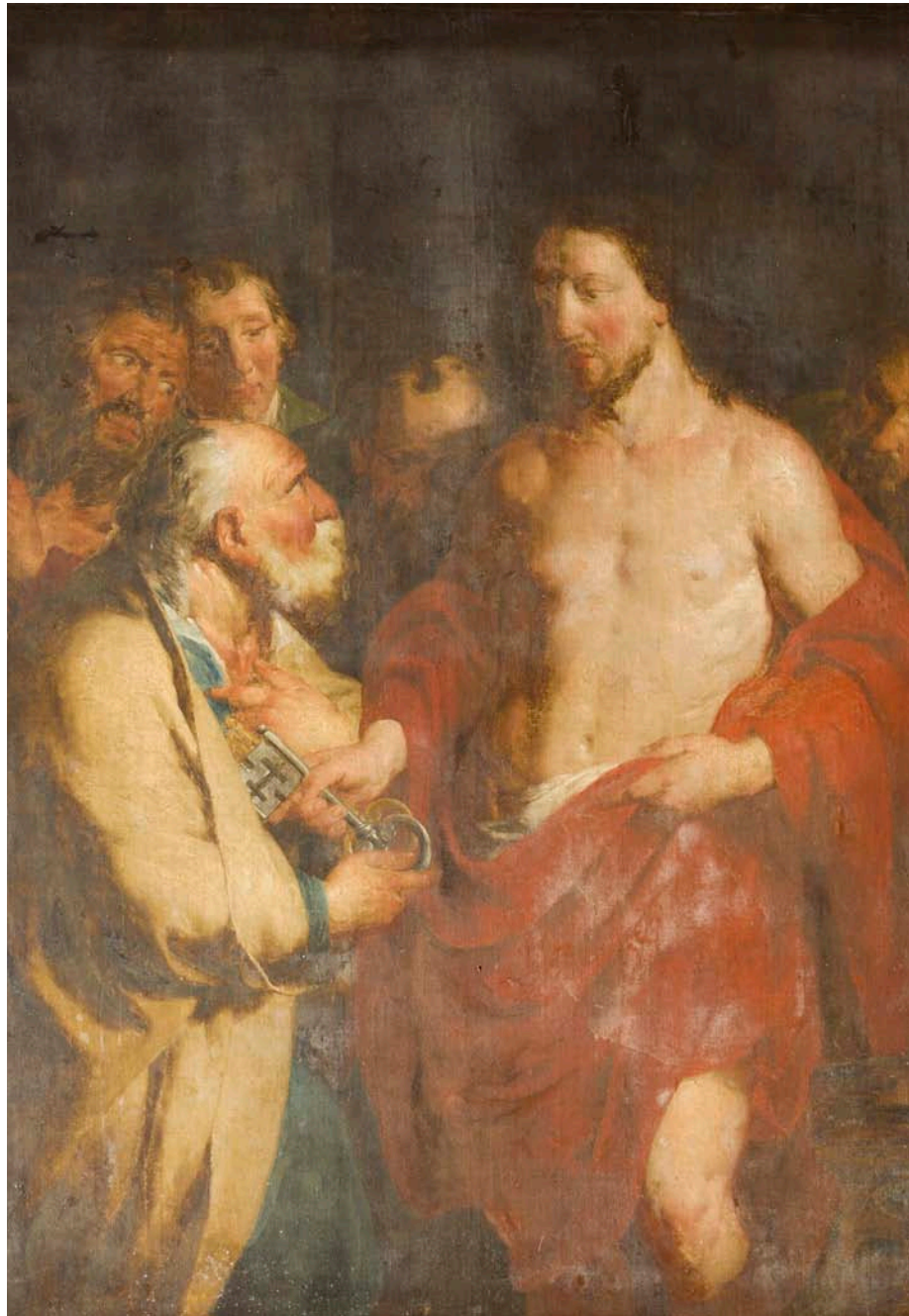
1 Peter 2:4 “As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him” (NIV) Any time we read the word stone or rock here, think of what it meant to *Peter*—as the Lord nicknamed him “Rock[y]/*Petros*.” Later Jesus said to him, “Thou art Peter/Stone and upon this rock [referring to revelation] I will build my church . . .” Rocks cover most of the ground in Palestine. There are so many that on their

graves they pile rocks instead of flowers.

In addition to the landscape, “Christ is the living stone, the bedrock and chief cornerstone of the Saints’ faith.”¹⁶ Isaiah 28:16 foreshadowed the Messiah as our “stone,” as the rock becomes our sure foundation. Those who receive the “rejected stone” receive their Messiah and King. Stones also reminded Israelites of the Urim and Thummim (Exodus 28:30). These two stones also symbolize the omniscience of God.

1 Peter 2:5 “you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus” (NIV) Peter refers to all devoted disciples as living stones used to build a spiritual house or temple. Similarly, to the woman at the well, Jesus taught of “living water” available to all believers (John 4). Peter invites all of God’s disciples to become workers or servants on His “spiritual house to be a holy priesthood.” In this sense, those who help build God’s Kingdom each work together under God’s power, or priesthood. This includes all disciples who serve with God’s power and direction. This is the same sense that President Russell M. Nelson referred to:

Every woman and every man who makes covenants with God and keeps those covenants, and who participates worthily in priesthood ordinances, has direct access to the power of God. Those who are endowed in the house of the Lord receive a gift of God’s priesthood power by virtue of their covenant,



Christ handing the keys to St. Peter by Pieter Jozef Verhaghen, 1802.
Image via Wikimedia Commons.

along with a gift of knowledge to know how to draw upon that power.¹⁷

In the way we build the Kingdom, the priesthood includes both priests and priestesses. God accepts our spiritual sacrifices, especially during the sacrament as we commit our service to Him and place the offerings of our service that week on the figurative altar.

1 Peter 2:6–8 “they stumble because they are disobedient” (NASB) In the next three verses, Peter cites three Old Testament scriptures that use rock symbolism from the NIV:

QUOTING ISAIAH 28:16

I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame

QUOTING PSALM 118:22

The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

QUOTING ISAIAH 8:14

A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.

1 Peter 2:9 “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people . . . [God] hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous [sic] light” Ancient Israel received this same title “a peculiar people” five times in the Old Testament and twice in the New Testament. “Peculiar” also is used for, “valued property” or special treasure or jewels.¹⁸ God asked the Israelites to become a “holy nation” in Exodus 19:6. This is the goal of a Zion society. Peter added to the Old Testament phrase to describe the early church as “royal priesthood.” Abraham learned that the priesthood is everlasting (Genesis 17:7–19). Christ’s church always has His power through the priesthood. His power may be accessed by those who exercise faith, kindness, longsuffering, humility, patience, love, etc. (D&C 121:236–46).

1 Peter 2:10 “Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have” (NIV) Early Christians came from many ethnic backgrounds and were not unified until baptism. Whether they were born as Israelites or converted to the covenant, all are in the new family with the new name, Christians, seeking Christ. When they chose to enter God’s covenant, they became His people, exiles and foreigners to the world, but people of God. For thousands of years before, God’s people and priesthood were chosen by their lineage. But, through the mercy of Jesus, all will have the opportunity in this life or the next to receive the message of salvation.

The Christian and Unbelievers

1 Peter 2:11-12

1 Peter 2:11-12 “I urge you . . . to abstain from sinful desires . . . Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (NIV) Peter tenderly refers to the group of covenant makers as “foreigners and exiles,” which used to be used just for Israelites, but now is for all disciples (BSB). As a new people they join together to fight against “the natural man.” Peter pleads for them to practice self-control to master their natural appetites and temptations. By so doing their lives will be a witness to those who do not believe, and over time instead of persecuting and slandering them, they will soften and aid in the building up of the church of God. It sounds as if Peter also thought Jesus’ coming was soon, but this may be a euphemism.

The Christian Example and Government

1 Peter 2:13-15

1 Peter 2:13-15 “Submit yourselves . . . to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority . . . For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant” (NIV) This counsel is

especially meaningful when we remember that while Peter dictated this letter, he was unjustly incarcerated for his religious faith. Nero was a violent murderous leader. And yet, Peter asks Christians to submit to their leaders. How much more do modern Christians need to obey the laws of the land, pay taxes, etc. The eleventh Article of Faith teaches the same thing. By so doing, the good lives of believers can be in a better position to mediate laws and exemplify Christian living. However, this does not mean that Christians should not speak up on matters of God’s laws and defend truth.



Bust of Nero at the Capitoline Museum, Rome. Photo by cjh1452000 via Wikimedia Commons.

The Servant and His Master

1 Peter 2:18–20

1 Peter 2:16–17 “Live as God’s slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor” (NIV) Many translations use the phrase “servants of God,” because of the voluntary nature of conversion. Yet, the word can mean either slave or servant, or “bondservant” (NKJV). If we are following Christ’s example as the suffering servant, then servitude becomes our way of life. As in a servant-master relationship, each morning and evening disciples ask their Master, God, how they can serve Him that day. As the Savior did, they can seek for opportunities to magnify their service by loving one another and respecting God.

1 Peter 2:18 “Servants, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but even to those who are unreasonable” (BSB) Consistent with Paul’s advice previously, household servants or slaves are counseled to be good to their masters, whether or not they are treated kindly. This observation that Christianity does not condemn slavery is startling to some. As discussed previously, their servitude was more like the feudal system; slaves only served for a set amount of years, and they were often paid.¹⁹ The message that Jesus taught was not to stop servitude, but rather to teach all how to serve. Jesus was a Master who served.

1 Peter 2:19–20 “if for sake of conscience toward God, anyone endures griefs, suffering unjustly . . . if you shall endure doing good and suffering, this is commendable before God” (BLB). Peter’s audience was facing all sorts of persecutions. The example of being “buffeted,” meaning “struck with fists” was a real concern for them. Peter is suffering at that moment for his beliefs, and will be crucified soon. Yet, he asks those believers who are likewise persecuted to not react with violence. He encourages them to live God’s laws and commit their souls with confidence into the hand of their loving Father and Judge (also see D&C 54:10). He describes suffering for God as a grace.

Christ’s Example of Suffering

1 Peter 2:21–25

1 Peter 2:21–25 “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example” (NIV) These verses describe details of our Savior’s passion which fulfilled prophecy starting with Jesus’ sinless nature (2:22) and His scourging or stripes (2:24).²⁰ “Stripes” in Greek means bruises or bloody welts from whipping or scouring. Peter echoes several verses from Isaiah 53 to show Jesus’ suffering (compare with Matthew 26:57–68; Mark 14:53–65; John 18:19–24). We must endure trials in order to receive salvation. Just as Jesus first wore “a crown of thorns before the crown of glory.”²¹

The following parallels help to see the fulfillment of this part of Isaiah’s “suffering servant” passage.

1 PETER 2 (KJV)

v. 21 because Christ also suffered for us . . .

v. 22 Who did no sin, neither was guile

v. 23 When he was reviled, reviled not again,
when he suffered, he threatened not
but committed *himself* to him that judgeth
righteously.

v. 24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own
body on the tree
that we being dead to sins, should live unto
righteousness
by whose stripes ye were healed.

v. 25 For ye were as sheep going astray;
but are now returned unto the Shepherd

ISAIAH 53 (KJV)

v. 4 He hath borne our griefs, and carried our
sorrows

v. 9 He had done no violence, neither *was any*
deceit in his mouth.

v. 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet
he opened not his mouth

v. 5 He *was* wounded for our transgressions,
he was bruised for our iniquities
the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him
and with his stripes we are healed.

v. 5 All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned



1 PETER 3

Wives and Husbands

1 Peter 3:1-6

1 Peter 3:1 “Likewise, wives, defer to your own husbands, so that if they disobey the word they may be attracted back by the conduct of the wives, without a word” (NTR²²). Previously, Peter taught Christians how to act toward the government, slaves, masters, and now, he turns to married couples. Remember that the word “*hupotasso*” translated as, “defer” (NTR), “submit” (NIV) or “subjection” (KJV) and was initially a military word used to describe the troops lining up behind the leader. But, in a non-military setting the word was used as “a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.”²³ I assume that is how Peter meant for it to be used here. He also uses the same word in the previous chapter “submit yourself to every ordinance” (1 Peter 2:13 also 2:18); and again in 5:5, “...submit yourselves unto the elder.” It’s one of Peter’s favorite words to express the idea of humbly cooperating.

Peter specifically addresses women who had converted to Christianity, but their husbands had not. Peter hoped that the unbelieving husbands would be softened toward the gospel message by not only the “conversation” (KJV), but more so, the “conduct” (JST) of their believing wives. The woman’s example is a great missionary tool in the home and the world.

1 Peter 3:3-4 “*Let your adorning be not be that outward adorning . . . But let it be the hidden . . . meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price*” (JST *italics*). Peter asks women to work toward an imperishable character rather than acquiring beauty through elaborate hairstyles, jewels, or “*apparel/grand robes*.” The KJV, “meek/*praeōs*” also refers to “kind, gentle, serene, mild, or forgiving.” These are traits all saints should adopt according to the Prophet Joseph Smith, “We should cultivate a meek, quiet and peaceable spirit.”²⁴ These traits help us find unity with God, the “hidden man.”²⁵



Bust of a Roman woman, ca. 80 CE. Raised hairstyles, made by mixing stranger and own hair, were very common during the Flavian dynasty (Vespasian, Titus, Domitian: 69–96 CE) at the court and outside. The pointed nose and double chin indicate a realistic design of the portrait, which points out the republican time and comes in contradiction with the idealization of the early empire art. Photo by Bibi Saint-Pol via Wikimedia Commons.

1 Peter 3:5–6 “Women of covenant—those who hope in God—adorned themselves, supporting their husbands. Sarah was obedient to Abraham, calling him ‘Lord,’ and you have become her daughters, doing good works and not fearing, without any anxiety” (NTR) Sarah and Abraham were a model couple of unity. The quote from Genesis 18:12 (LXX), is slightly different: “After I am waxed old . . . my lord also.” In this dispensation, the Lord taught that we may become Abraham’s seed through making and keeping sacred covenants (D&C 132:30–37).

The last two phrases turn Peter’s message to encourage women to strive for unified relationships with confidence, love, and joy. Other translations are helpful in understanding: “not afraid with amazement” (KJV) as either “let nothing terrify you” (RSV) or do not “give way to fear or worry” (JB). At that time, many wives were fearful of their husbands. Divorce was a constant threat that hung over a wife.²⁶ Christian wives may have also worried about being taken before Jewish authorities for violating religious law. Peter’s counsel is the opposite of a chauvinistic society. He tells the women to not be intimidated or fearful, but to perform her duties toward her family and society without fear.

1 Peter 3:7 “Likewise husbands, live together with *your family* according to revelation, awarding honor to your wife, respecting her delicate feminine body and recognizing that you and she will be joint heirs of the blessing of life” (NTR) Peter calls husbands to likewise be considerate and respectful as they conduct their family life. They are to follow the teachings of God, “according to revelation” or “truth/knowledge/*gnosis*” or understanding. The “delicate element” (AB) or “vessel/*skueos*” (KJV), has a metaphorical meaning: “a person of quality, a chosen instrument; equipment or apparatus.” (For a broad usage across the New Testament see Mark 11:16; Luke 8:16; Acts 9:15; 10:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:4; 2 Timothy 2:21.) Within the context of the next phrase, Peter speaks of mutual respect within marriage with the eternal hope of being co-heirs together in the grace of God, or Eternal Life. This is a regular topic by living prophets.²⁷

Peter’s perspective is very different from the ancient patriarchal culture where women were in the same social class as slaves. They were considered “by nature inferior to males (and husbands) physically, intellectually, and morally, and were therefore consigned by nature to the authority, tutelage, and protection of the later.”²⁸

“Do this so your prayers are not hindered *by any discord*” (NTR) Husbands will not be able to communicate with God if they are not communicating with respect to their wives. Our spousal relationships are key to the harmony we feel before God in prayer. We have to treat each other well if we want God’s help. I think there is an extra measure of power in united prayers whether offered in a marriage or in a group.

Christian Conduct in Review: Suffering While Doing Good

1 Peter 3:8–12

1 Peter 3:8–9 Finally, all of you, be . . . because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing” (NIV) To inherit God’s eternal blessings requires becoming like Him. In Peter’s list of Christlike attributes he focuses on behavior that fosters unity and love:

- Like-minded
- Sympathetic
- Love one another
- Compassionate
- Humble
- Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult
- Repay evil with blessing

Thus, in Christian homes, churches, and communities we can learn to become more like our Savior.

1 Peter 3:10–12 “Whoever would love life . . . must keep their tongue from evil. . . the face of the Lord is against them that do evil” (NIV) These virtues were also part of the Old Testament scriptures that Peter knew and loved. In the next three verses Peter cites Psalm 34:12–16.

Persecution

1 Peter 3:13–18

1 Peter 3:13–14 “And who can really harm you if you are zealous for the good? But if you even suffer on account of righteousness, *you will be blessed*” (NTR) but we have power to withstand them through the Spirit, commandments, and help from fellow saints.

1 PETER 5

1 Peter 5:10–11 “God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast” (NIV) Those who endure have a great potential for reward. The Greek implies that the suffering and conquering saints will be rewarded with an association with the Savior, as they will be like Him.²⁹ While referencing this verse, Elder Neal A. Maxwell encouraged, “Let us all take extra care to avoid both giving and taking offense. Let us be loving, kind, and forgiving—helping these friends to become, as Peter and Paul said, grounded, rooted, established, and settled!”³⁰ This is why we want to give Him Glory and trust his Dominion forever.

Final Greetings

1 Peter 5:12-14

1 Peter 5:12 “With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it” (NIV) Peter’s postscript introduces “my scribe Silvanus” (NTR). He was also probably the executive assistant and delivery man. It sounds as if “I have written to you . . .” may have been Silas’ short addition of exhortation to testify that he knows what Peter said is true.

1 Peter 5:13 “The church in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, as does my son Mark” (BSB) The verse actually begins not with “church,” but the singular pronoun “she.”³¹ In the Book of Revelation, “she” became a code word for the church, and “Babylon” for Rome (Revelation 17:5–18; 12:7 JST)

Peter refers to Mark, as “my son,” which speaks of the close relationship they had as disciple and mentor. Mark was not a blood son, as history assumes it is the same “John Mark,” from Acts 12:12, 25. He was the son of a wealthy Jerusalem woman named Mary who opened her home as a House Church for Christians. Mark was also the Apostle Barabbas’ nephew and companion on Paul’s first apostolic mission. He is traditionally known as the compiler and editor of the Gospel of Mark (which has early claims to have been dictated by Peter in prison; see Mark’s Gospel background). In addition to his tender ministering to Peter, we read of his help with other church leaders across the Empire (Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11).

1 Peter 5:14 “Greet each other with an expression of sincere Christian affection. Peace be with all of you who are in Christ Jesus. Amen” (NTR) Peter’s closing is similar to Paul’s, “greet ye one another with a kiss of charity” (KJV; also 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 2 Corinthians 13:12). This was a common custom at the time, but was often altered for rank and station. In Christianity though, all were treated equality, as it remains in some peoples of Latin decent (i.e. French *bisous*).³² Peace is the sign of the Spirit and it should follow members of the Church who enjoy its companionship (D&C 6:23).

2 PETER

Introduction: Themes

Each point of the Epistle fits into different aspects a farewell sermon. Chapter 1 is a personal guidebook for all those seeking their exaltation or calling and election. After Peter’s beautiful motivation of temple promises, he turns in chapter 2 to a stern warning of Satan’s efforts to influence them through false teachers, which will lead to an apostasy. The letter ends with chapter 3 focusing on the Savior’s Second Coming.

Outline or 2 Peter

- 1:1–11 Seeking Your Calling and Election
- 1:12–15 Prophecy and Scripture
- 1:16–18 Jesus’ Transfiguration
- 1:19–21 More Sure Word Of Prophecy
- 2:1–22 False Teachers And Their Destruction
- 3:1–7 Christ’s Return and Judgement
- 3:8–13 The Second Coming: Day of the Lord
- 3:14–18 Peter’s Concluding Farewell

Farewell Sermons

Second Peter is a farewell address. Moses’ last sermon became the precedent and a literature form developed that we find scattered across scripture (Deuteronomy 31–33).³³ This Epistle contains 19 of the 20 standard points found in farewell sermons.³⁴ It begins with the prophet’s summons, and includes warnings, blessings, covenant renewals, what will happen after his departure, and his imminent death. For Peter, that includes warning against false teachers who will unsettle the church.

We find farewell addresses in the New Testament from Jesus at His Last Supper (John 12–17) and from Peter in his address here. Also, Paul offers a farewell sermon while visiting the Ephesians (Acts 20:17–38) and in written form in 2 Timothy. In the Book of Mormon, Lehi gave his children blessings and a farewell address (2 Nephi 1–4:12). King Benjamin’s farewell sermon also follows Moses’ pattern (Mosiah 2–5). This formal type of a farewell is often called a “testament” rather than an Epistle.

2 PETER 1

Seeking your Calling and Election

2 Peter 1:1–11

2 Peter 1:1 “a servant and an apostle of Jesus” Peter introduces himself and his authority as a “special witness” (D&C 107:23). He was a “servant/*doulos*/slave” and an “*apostolos*” (from *apo* and *stellō*, “send out”). Peter’s use of these two titles together is significant. It helps us understand our relationship to God:

In antiquity good slaves were proverbially loyal, especially when they were sent out specifically to accomplish something for their master. If ancient slaves excelled in serving their masters well, they could be freed, which in a gospel context might correspond to the freedom from spiritual death extended by Peter to all who follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter overtly and forthrightly declares, “I will not be negligent.”³⁵

“to those who have obtained the same precious faith” (NTC) The audience is different for this letter than the first (which was to an area of saints in Asia minor). This is for those who have already “obtained” something special “in the righteousness of our God.” John Welch sees the audience as a more exclusive group of committed saints.

2 Peter 1:3 “His divine power has bestowed upon us all things that will lead us to eternal life and to the fulfillment of our duty to God, because of our true knowledge of him who has called us to his own glory” (NTC)

We refer to God’s divine power as Priesthood power. It is the priesthood covenants that give us “knowledge of Him” to pass by the angels to enter into the presence of God. This intimate knowledge is to “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (KJV). I think he is talking of Temple promises mentioned also in verse 10. God calls us through or by His glory and virtue to serve Him.

2 Peter 1:4 “God has given us the most expansive and honorable promises, so that through these things you might share in the divine nature” (NTC) Every time the New Testament mentions, “Divine Nature” (Capitalization added), it always refers to Jesus as our Savior and God (Acts 17:29; Romans 1:20; 1 Corinthians 2:10). We receive it only because we join Him. Peter includes a condition to our receiving His Nature: “having fled from the degeneration that is in the world because of covetousness” (NTC) Once we can do that, then His precious promises allow us to partake in God’s Divine Nature.

2 Peter 1:5–7 “For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith . . .” (BSB) For the purpose of escaping evil desires, Peter calls on disciples to strive (hourly if not constantly) to build our faith with all seven virtues. In these virtues, Peter admonishes us to go beyond our love of God and work on our relationship with



Saint Raphael Catholic Church (Springfield, Ohio) - stained glass, Jesus calms the storm, detail. Photo by Nheyob via Wikimedia Commons.

our fellowman. After faith—which really represents our relationship to God—the rest of the list deals with our relationship to others. I’ll include several translations for a broader feel of Peter’s list.

1. **Virtue** (KJV), goodness (NIV), moral excellence (WEB), worthiness (YLT), full virtue (NTC)
2. **Knowledge** (KJV), spiritual knowledge (NTC), in Greek, “*gnosis*/knowing, doctrine, wisdom”
3. **Temperance** (KJV), self-control (NIV)
4. **Patience** (KJV), perseverance (NIV) endurance (YLT), tenacious endurance (NTC)
5. **Godliness** (KJV), piety (YLT), consecration (NTC), in Greek “*usebeia*/devotion/holiness”
6. **Kindness** (KJV), mutual affection (NIV), concern for others (CEV)
7. **Charity** (KJV), love (NIV), the love of Christ (NTC)

I think there is significance to this order. We often refer to virtue as the law of chastity; yet in the Greek it has a broader meaning. These verses make up the law of the Gospel, and end with charity, which is the foundation of the law of consecration.

2 Peter 1:8 “if you possess these qualities and continue to grow in them, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord” (BSB) By developing these virtues, we “sharpen our spiritual-saw.” As we develop these qualities in our service to others (which is serving God vicariously), we can develop a nature that will be able to be in the presence of the Divine Nature. God gives us the gift of faith and knowledge of His plan of Salvation; then we must give to Him gifts of good fruits or service to our fellowmen.

2 Peter 1:9 “If these things are not present in any person, that person is blind—myopic—forgetting the atoning of his sins from the foundation of the world” (NTC) As disciples, if we do not work on becoming more Christlike, we are shortsighted in our eternal perspective. For the entire history of the earth, God’s gracious atoning gift has been available. We can progress and repent and become holier each day. If we do not move forward, then we are sliding backwards.

2 Peter 1:10–11 “do everything necessary to insure your calling and election” (NTC) The phrase “calling and election” has special meaning to Peter and in the restoration. He includes it in his farewell discourse as a final admonition to the saints. Much of the first chapter discusses principles that evidently relate to this ordinance. Joseph Smith taught that Paul knew “all the ordinances in the church,” and we have evidence that Peter did too.³⁶ Other Christian interpretations range from either something associated with Calvinism’s predestination, or that we must have fruits of our faith to attain salvation, but not as the Prophet Joseph restored.³⁷

The Prophet Joseph received revelations where he learned that “calling and election” was a special title and associated with an ordinance.

. . . though they might hear the voice of God & know that Jesus was the son of God this would be no evidence that their election & calling & election was made shure that they had part with Christ & was a Joint heir with him, they then would want that more sure word of prophecy that they were sealed in the heavens & had the promise of eternal live in the kingdom of God— then having this promise sealed unto them it was as an anchor to the soul sure & steadfast . . .³⁸

According to D&C 131:1–5, there are other titles that share the same meaning—to being sealed up to Eternal Life in the Celestial Kingdom (also D&C 132:19, 26, 49). Joseph taught in public sermons in Nauvoo that after one has received the saving ordinances of baptism, confirmation, washings, anointings, endowment, and a sealing, they should also prepare for their calling and election. In the first summer of 1839, a few months after leaving Liberty Jail, the prophet’s scribe, Willard Richard, recorded Joseph’s sermon in Nauvoo (when it was still called “Commerce”):

After a person hath faith in Christ, repents of his sins, & is Baptized for the remission of his sins & receives the Holy Ghost (by the laying on of hands) which is the first Comforter. then let him continue to humble himself before God, hungering & thirsting after Righteousness. & living by every word of God & the Lord will soon say unto him Son thou shalt be exalted, &c When the Lord has thoroughly [sic] proved him & finds that the man is determined to serve him at all hazard. then the man will find his calling & Election made sure.³⁹

Even though most qualified saints will receive this sealing ordinance after their death, modern prophets of God still administer it in our day. This ordinance is administered by prophets in the Holy of Holies to worthy couples.⁴⁰

2 Peter 1:11 “In this rich and abundant way, entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be added upon you” (NTC) Peter encourages his audience to seek for this “entrance.” It is the fulfillment of the Mosaic Tabernacle, as Aaron the high priest led “the way” through sacrifice, washing, anointing, clothing, prayer, receiving the cleansing of the Redeemer, and finally back to the Tree of Life (menorah) to enter into the presence of the Lord without his sins. In Abraham 3:26 we find the same phrase, used for those “who keep their first estate, shall be added upon.” In this context, the phrase must be used for the second estate or mortality too.

Prophecy and Scripture: The Basis of True Knowledge

2 Peter 1:12–15

2 Peter 12:12–15 “I think it is right, as long as I am in this ‘tent’ of flesh, to awaken you in convent remembrance, For I know that very soon I will set aside my ‘tent.’ Just as our Lord . . . has made plain to me” (NTC)

Peter plans to testify in remembrance until his death. The image of our bodies as a “tent” or “tabernacle” (KJV) is also used by Paul when he calls them our “temple” (1 Corinthians 6:9). As Peter and our sacrament covenant reinforces, we need to be reminded to always remember the sacrifice of our Lord. During Jesus ministry, he also hinted to Peter that he would die before His Second Coming (John 21:8). This appears to be another witness to Peter about the end of his life.



The Transfiguration by Lodovico Carracci, 1594. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Jesus' Transfiguration

2 Peter 1:16-18

2 Peter 1:16 “we were endowed as eyewitnesses of his divine grandeur” (NTC) Peter wants to make absolutely sure that no one thinks the gospel is mere fables. He testifies that he was an eyewitness of Christ’s glorified state.

2 Peter 1:17-18 “For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when a voice enveloped him under the cloud . . . ‘This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased’. . . we were with him up on the sacred mountain” (NTC) As evidence to the validity of his message, as well as his focus of motivating the saints to seek their calling and election, Peter chooses to share a very sacred experience. He, James and John were eyewitnesses of the Savior’s majesty on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5; also, D&C 63:20-21). The Father’s introduction of His Son included Messianic titles that were known from Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 5:1; 42:1. This is another verse for understanding the separate nature of the Godhead.

More Sure Word Of Prophecy

2 Peter 1:19-21

2 Peter 1:19 “We have also a more sure word of prophecy” Peter continues to teach more about his sure witness as an eyewitness of the glorified Lord (verse 16). Peter introduces another special phrase, “a more sure word of prophecy,” which is not mentioned again in the Bible. This is the subject and verse that Joseph Smith referred to when he said: “Peter penned the most sublime language of any of the apostles.” Joseph defined it for the saints in Nauvoo according to his scribe’s record:

He said the more sure word of prophecy meant, a mans knowing that he was sealed up unto eternal life by revelation & the spirit of prophecy, through the power of the Holy priesthood. He also showed that it was impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance. Paul had seen the third heavens and I more. Peter penned the most sublime language of any of the apostles.⁴¹

Probably over a decade before this sermon, Joseph changed the phrase in his translation of the Bible: “We have *therefore* a more sure *knowledge of the* word of prophecy; *to which word of prophecy* ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light *which* shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (JST) Even if the young Joseph did not know the full implications of that verse at the time, it still rings of truth as the more sure word of prophecy is also great knowledge that comes through prophecy.

Joseph Smith also tied the “more sure word of prophecy” with the Second Comforter.⁴² Even though we do not hear these phrases often in General Conferences, Joseph Smith used them repeatedly.

Now wherein could they have a more sure word of prophecy than to hear the voice of God saying this is my beloved son &c. Now for the secret and grand key. Though they might hear the voice of God, <& know that Jesus was the son of god> this would be no evidence that their election and calling was made sure that they had part with Christ, and were joint heirs with him: they then would want that more sure word of prophecy, that they were sealed in the heavens and had the promise of eternal life in the kingdom of God, then having this promise sealed unto them, it was as an anchor to the Soul sure and steadfast.⁴³

Peter and Joseph shared very sacred information with the saints, both just a few years from their martyrdoms.

2 Peter 1:20 “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is *given of any private will of man*” (JST) Peter hopes to defend prophecy as the word of God and not his *own* words. The JST change from “private interpretation” to “private will of man” more clearly confirms that prophecy is God’s words not man’s “whim.”⁴⁴ The KJV “private/*idios*” is used 113 times in the New Testament. But only here is it translated “private.” 77 times it is translated “his own” (i.e. his own servants, his own country, his own sheep John 10:34). As the NIV reads: “no prophecy of Scripture comes from one’s own interpretation.” Other religions interpret this to mean that those who are properly qualified, called by God, and prompted by the Spirit must interpret scripture.

What did Peter mean by scripture? Most of the time scripture is mentioned in the New Testament it refers to the writings later compiled into the Old Testament. Yet neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament were closed cannon in Peter’s life time. So if Peter understand that scripture was the word of God, then he may have known his letter would be among new scripture. The pious group of Jews known as Essenes “believed in the principle that prophesy was from God (1QS 8.16; 6QD 2.12).”⁴⁵

2 Peter 1:21 “For prophecy has never come from the will of man, but men revealed prophecies from God as they were moved upon by the power of the Holy Ghost” (NTC) Prophecy did not come through caprices of private individuals, but through the preaching of men prompted through revelation by God. If prophecies are

used correctly, they contain sure proofs that God lives, and they testify of Christ. Peter's words, "moved upon by the Holy Ghost," became a phrase repeated in revelations given in the restoration (Moses 6:8; D&C 68:3–4; 121:43).

1 PETER 2

False Teachers and Their Destruction

2 Peter 2:1–22

2 Peter 2:1 “There also came false prophets among the people of Israel, just as false teachers will intrude among you” (NTC) To be a biblical “false prophet” was a serious offense. They were compared to Sodom and even stoned (Deuteronomy 13:5; Jeremiah 23:14). In the New Testament a false prophet did not exclusively mean a fallen apostle. Rather a prophet was used for anyone speaking under inspiration (“For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” Revelation 19:10). A false prophet lied about speaking under divine authority (or was deceived by Satan).

Peter taught his audience how to identify false teachers, they: create factions in the group (2:1b), deny that Jesus as their redeemer (2:1b), entangle with brutalities (4:3), defame Christianity, are covetous (2:3a), and exploit Christians as merchandise (2:3b). Previously, Jesus warned of false teachers too (Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24; 1 John 4:1). Twice the KJV refers to “damnable” (2 Peter 2:1, 3), but the JST changes it to, “abominable heresies.” The Greek word works for either: “*apōleias*/destruction/ eternal ruin.”

2 Peter 2:2 “Many shall follow in the false and immoral ways of these teachers, and on account of those followers the way of truth will be blasphemed” (NTC) Peter prophesies that the false leaders will have many followers. The “*way of truth*” (or Christianity) will fall into “disrepute” (NIV) or “maligned: (NASB) because of it. The apostasy was foretold, and must of the world is still affected by it.

2 Peter 2:3 “In their greed they will take your money in exchange for their phony ideas” (NTC) The false leaders’ motivation is money. Their greedy covetousness beguiles them to make false statements which in turn entice followers. This is referred to as “priestcraft” in the Book of Mormon (Alma 12:1, 16). A judgment of “damnation/ *destruction*” (KJV/JST) is in store for those false leaders.

Judgment and Punishment

2 Peter 2:4–22

2 Peter 2:4–9 “For if God did not spare . . . then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly from temptation, and how to hold the unrighteous to be punished” (NTC) This section is one very long “If . . . then . . .” sentence.

Peter begins with “If” followed by examples of how God handled the wicked in the past. His five-verse-long-sentence then ends with God’s punishment of the wicked.

- **“sinful angels, but deposited them in chains in the underworld of darkness”** (2:4, NTC) The first example refers to the premortal existence where one-third of the hosts of heaven rebelled and followed Satan to an eternity without a body into “hell” (D&C 29:36; Rev 12:4). Those who do not believe in a premortal life see this as a discussion from the apocryphal book of 1 Enoch, interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4.⁴⁶
- **“did not spare the people of the first dispensation, but protected only Noah”** (2:5, NTC) Only seven other people followed the prophet onto the ark and were saved. Noah became a type of Christ (as are all the prophets according to Hosea 12:10). Noah exemplifies hope to Peter’s audience of righteous saints looking to their prophet in a world of wickedness. The number “seven” (NTC) was used to mean complete or whole. The KJV uses “eight” which echoes the age of baptism for the earliest Christian baptism, the covenant number for the day of circumcision, and the day of the Christian Sabbath.
- **“the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah . . . turned them to ashes”** (2:6–8, NTC) Peter next references the most wicked example of immoral sexual behavior in the Bible—Sodom and Gomorrah. Only Lot and his family were saved before God destroyed the city (sadly his wife did not make the journey either). The word “*overthrow/catasstophe*” in the Old Testament (LXX) always refers to Sodom and Gomorrah. The traditional location of the two wicked cities is at the southern end of the Dead Sea, in one of the deepest cracks in the earth’s surface.

Like Lot, we too live in the midst of wickedness, but many have become immune to the “false teachers” surrounding us. The Book of Mormon teaches that “the wicked remain as though there had been no redemption made, except it be the loosing of the bands of death” at the judgment when they are resurrected (Alma 11:41). It also describes “he has all power to save every man that believeth on his name and bringeth forth fruit meet for repentance” (Alma 12:15)

- **“then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly from temptation, and how to hold the unrighteous to be punished in the judgment day”** (2:9, NTC) Finally, the long sentence transitions to the main point: God will deliver his children (“the godly”). Like Noah and Lot, we can be delivered. The wicked, though, will be reserved for the judgment day and second resurrection, after the millennium.

2 Peter 2:10 “He will punish those who . . . despise leadership . . . are not afraid to blaspheme against the dignitaries” (NTC) These next four verses apply directly to the false teachers/deceivers of the early church.

Peter defines them as worried about human interests of “the flesh.” Their self-centered behaviors and egoistical thoughts refuse to submit to God’s will. The KJV, “government,” refers to anyone with “dominion or power” with politics or the church. Rebellion often includes criticism of authorities and leaders. When you hear criticism realize it signals the spirits of apostasy (3 Nephi 11:29).

2 Peter 2:11 “Even angels, who are greater in power and authority, are not so daring as to bring such a blasphemous judgment against them before their Lord” (NTC) According to the apocryphal book of 1 Enoch, even angels do not criticize or the fallen angels (10:1–16; 12:3–13:3).

2 Peter 2:12–14 “these people, acting like natural-born irrational animals . . . They that count it pleasure to indulge themselves all the time” (NTC). The false teachers are like “natural brute beasts” (KJV) or in the words of King Benjamin, “a natural man and . . . enemy of God” (Mosiah 3:19). Another reference to “natural brute beasts” is found in an “Epistle of Barnabas” that also addresses false teachers.⁴⁷ The wicked do not fully understand what harm they cause because they are puppets for Satan. To overcome this we must put off “the natural man” through the atonement of Jesus Christ (Mosiah 3:19).

False leaders are hypocrites and “revel in their own deceptions” (NEB). Unfortunately, our dispensation has the same problem. Pornography addicts can be described as, “eyes full of adultery.” And their master has them “trained in greed” (NAS, RSV).

2 Peter 2:15–16 “Having abandoned the straight way, they wander, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor” (NTC) Peter includes more Old Testament accounts to illustrate false leaders. Numbers 22 and 31 tells the story of Balaam who enticed the Israelites to leave the Lord. He acted as a hired agent and received bribes from King Balak of Moab. The Lord saved his life by intervening with his donkey! The Lord spoke through his animal to set things right. Several other scriptures refer to this unusual story (Jude 1:11; Micah, 6:3; Deuteronomy 23:5).

2 Peter 2:17 “These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest” Peter uses the imagery of a deceptive dry well, or clouds that blow away as deceptive as false leaders. No water is found in the well, clouds, nor living water from the teacher. The deceivers have no saving sustenance. Only Christ has that, but they have rejected Him.

2 Peter 2:18–19 “They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves to depravity” (BSB) These smooth-talking educators’ prey on new converts and entice the saints with promises of false liberty. What a great irony that sin promises more freedom, yet it is promoted by the one who against free agency from the beginning. Satan’s promises of liberty will be rewarded with eternal imprisonment (or a lack of progression).

2 Peter 2:20–21 “It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command” (NIV) Those saints who succumb to the false teachers, loose their faith, and sin against God’s commandments are in worse shape than if they had never been baptized or known the Lord. Once we have committed or covenanted with God, we must be responsible.

2 Peter 2:22 “The dog has returned to his own vomit” (NTC) Peter quotes a well know Proverb 26:11. Jews held both dogs and swine as “unclean” animals. Peter uses the same image of uncleanness for false leaders.

2 PETER 3

Christ’s Return and Judgement

2 Peter 3:1–7

2 Peter 3:1–2 This now, beloved ones, is the second letter . . . that you may remember the words which were foretold by the holy prophets, and . . . the Lord and Savior *issued by your apostles*” (NTC) Peter points to the harmony between the “holy prophets” in scripture and the words of Jesus and the apostles. He wants the pure minded disciples to remember their messages of future false speakers who will ridicule the truth in the “last days” (which in the New Testament usually refers to their own time).

Remembering something in the ancient world was more than recalling a story. “In the Hebrew Bible, remembering often carries the meaning of acting in obedience to God’s commands. Remembering God and thereby prospering so as to be lifted up at the last day (as in 3 Nephi 15:1 and Alma 38:5) are contrasted with forgetting and then perishing, or being cut off from God’s presence (as at Alma 37:13 and 42:11). These opposites remind us of the grand law of opposition Lehi described in 2 Nephi 2.”⁴⁸

2 Peter 3:3–4 Knowing this first, that *in the last days* there shall come scoffers . . . *denying the Lord Jesus Christ*, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? . . . all things *must continue as they are, and have continued as they are from the beginning of the creation*” (JST *italicized*) When humans assume that the world will continue as it has, they deny their Savior and His Coming.

2 Peter 3:5–7 “The heavens and the earth . . . *were created by the word of God And by the word of God, the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But . . . now, are kept in store by the same word, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment*” (JST *italicized*) Peter recounts the story of the creation, the flood, and foretells of the earth’s great cleansing by fire.



The Second Coming of Christ window at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Charleston, SC. Photo by Cadetgray via Wikimedia Commons.

Second Coming: The Day of the Lord

2 Peter 3:8–13

2 Peter 3:8–9 “*But, concerning the coming of the Lord, beloved, I would not have you ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years . . . The Lord is not slack concerning his promise and coming*” (JST *italicized*) Peter defends the Lord’s omniscient wisdom in directing the earth. The supposed, “delay” in the Second Coming, was actually an issue of perspective. Peter knew that there would be a long time before the Lord’s coming in glory. We assume the number 1,000 was used figuratively for a large number, but Peter may have understood it literally as time was described between heaven and earth in Abraham 3:4, “one revolution was a day unto the Lord, after his manner of reckoning, it being one thousand years according to the time appointed.” More likely, Peter probably alluded to Psalm 90:4 “For a thousand years in thy sight *are but* as yesterday.” If he meant literally, we must ask, did Peter refer to a lunar calendar? Roman solar? The Julian or Gregorian Calendar?

As we look across different books of scripture, this is not a standard use of time. Alma 40:8 reads, “all is as one day with God, and time only is measured unto men.” Furthermore, Genesis and Moses did not use 1,000 days for each day of creation. Although we do not know the timing of the Lord’s coming, we do that He will cut His work short if the righteous are ready (D&C 52:11; 84:97; 109: 59; also see Revelation 8:1 and D&C 88:95 on other timing). Rather than focus on whether the 1,000-year timing is literal or figurative—whether time is uniform to the Lord at all—we would do better to look at both the fulfillment of prophetic promises and our personal preparation. Peter will turn his focus there, too.

2 Peter 3:10–11 “**But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall shake, and the earth also shall tremble, and the mountain shall melt, and pass away**” (JST *italicized*) When the Lord arrives, He will take most by surprise. But we are also promised “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). Modern day revelation speaks much about the Lord’s Second Coming, including that those who pay their tithe will not be burned (D&C 64:23–25). And, not only will the earth burn, but the heavens will dissolve and a new earth will be formed for the celestial kingdom (D&C 29:23–28; 88:19). The JST continues in verse 11 to add that not only will the earth be filled with heat, but also “*corruptible works.*” The “nuances of Greek terms in this verse express Peter’s call to repentance in preparation for the second coming.”⁴⁹

2 Peter 3:12–13 “**Looking unto , and preparing for the day of the day of God, wherein the corruptible things of the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved . . . Nevertheless if we shall endure, we shall be kept, according to his promise**” (JST *italicized*) The JST adds a focus on the saints’ preparation and endurance. They will see “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” These prophecies are elaborated on in modern scripture as well (i.e. 3 Nephi 26:3; Mormon 9:2; D&C 101:24–25; 121:11; 133:40–42; etc.).

Peter’s Concluding Farewell

2 Peter 3:14–18

2 Peter 3:14 “**Beloved ones, seeing that you look forward to such things, be diligent that you may be found by him to be at peace, without spot, and blameless**” (NTC) As we await the Second Coming, we must diligently prepare ourselves by living closely to the Lord in order to receive his cleansing power—“without spot, and blameless”—to escape the power of the adversary (D&C 38:31).

2 Peter 3:15–16a “**Consider also that our Lord’s patience brings salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom God gave him. He writes this way in all his letters, speaking in them about such matters. Some parts of his letters are hard to understand**” (BSB) Peter points to Paul as a second witness of what he is teaching to be true. Peter’s acknowledgment of Paul’s several letters in the same sentence as other “*scriptures*” is a step towards realizing that the apostles’ Epistles were going to become as cherished as the Old Testament scriptures (3:16b).

It is also reassuring to hear Peter speak so kindly of Paul. Once in Galatians 2:12, Paul recorded a disagreement on a bad day. Biblical scholars often emphasize that conflict, yet we also have this verse and other positive statements that show a sweet brotherhood between Peter and Paul as members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (Acts 15:25; Galatians 1:18; 2:9; etc.)

JST rearranged the order so that it is clearer that Paul also taught that we should use the time before the Second Coming to repent and strive for salvation. The JST also adds three words, “the longsuffering *and waiting* of our Lord, *for salvation*” (JST *italicized*).

2 Peter 3:16b “Ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction” (NIV) Sometimes scriptures can be hard to understand if we do “not inquire of the Lord,” or are “stiff-necked” (1 Nephi 15:3; Enos 1:22). Sometimes though, it is the ancient symbols and language (2 Nephi 25:1). Worse than misunderstanding are false teachers who “twist” (NTC), “wrest” (KJV) or “distort” (BSB) the scriptures away from the plan and simple truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Book of Mormon warned against this too, “if ye will wrest them it shall be to your own destruction” (Alma 13:20).

2 Peter 3:17–18 “beloved, seeing ye know *before the things which are coming*, beware lest ye also, being led away . . . grow in grace, and the knowledge of our Lord . . .” (JST *italicized*) The JST additions emphasize the opportunity and responsibility of having prophecy and revelation. Peter gives more than a final warning; he asks us to use this prophecy to guard against personal apostasy and remain steadfast. We can avoid falling away or being deceptively “*led away*” by growing in our knowledge of the gospel and in applying the gospel through charitable, full of grace, action. As long as we continue to meekly learn more about our Savior and apply what we learn, we will not be led astray. With this hopeful guideline, the letter closes without any personal greetings or scribes farewell.

Header Image: Jesus Walking on the Sea of Galilee with Peter by Paul Brill and Frederik van Valckenborch, 1590s. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

1. Each of the Old Testament citations are from the Greek translation (LXX). In 1 Peter they are all from Isaiah, Psalms Proverbs, and Leviticus.
2. John W. Welch and Brent J. Schmidt, “Reading 2 Peter as a Farewell Text,” in *The Ministry of Peter, the Chief Apostle*, ed. Frank F. Judd Jr., Eric D. Huntsman, and Shon D. Hopkin (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014), 317–35. This is discussed in more detail in the introduction to 2 Peter.
3. Footnote of *Berean Study Bible*, https://biblehub.com/bsb/1_peter/1.htm (accessed 11-2-19)
4. The majority of Jews in the Roman Empire lived in the Diaspora, not Judea. Ten percent of the Empire claimed Israelite lineage. The Assyrians displaced the northern tribes from the land of Israel in the eighth century BC, and Babylon removed the southern tribes in the sixth century BC.
5. The *Westminster Confession* 3.6 was the foundation of the Protestant believe on “election” that taught that God chooses to save only certain mortals: “As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, fore-ordained all the means thereunto.” Again in 12.1 and 3: “All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death . . . this effectual call is of God’s free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit.” Also see Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2.362; 3.104; 3.475.
6. Strong’s, #3986, *peirasmos*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/3986.htm> (accessed 11-5-19)
7. Dead Sea Scrolls, 1 Qp Hab II, vii. We also see this in *The Psalms of Solomon*. <http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/psalmssolomon.html> (accessed 11-5-19).
8. Margaret Barker, *Christmas*, 17.
9. Strong’s, #3525, *néphó*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/3525.htm> (accessed 11-5-19).
10. For example: the Holy Spirit of Promise, the Gift of the Holy Ghost, calling and election, rest of the Lord, Godhead, the other Comforter, the Son of God, created in the image of God, the more sure word of prophesy, and baptism for the dead.
11. Also D&C 60:7, “Lift up their voice and declare my word with loud voices, without wrath or doubting, lifting up holy hands upon them. For I am able to make you holy, and your sins are forgiven you.”
12. Strong’s # 40, *hagios*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/40.htm> (accessed 11-5-19).
13. Strong’s #5401, *phobos*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/5401.htm> (accessed 11-5-19).
14. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 60.
15. John Elliott, *The Anchor Bible: 1 Peter* (New Haven, CT: Yale Press, 2000), 395.
16. D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew Skinner, *Acts through Revelation*, (Chelsea, MI: Deseret Book, 1998), 280.
17. Russell M. Nelson, “Spiritual Treasures,” General Conference October 2019. “The restoration of the priesthood is just as relevant to you as a woman as it is to any man. Because the Melchizedek Priesthood has been restored, both covenant-

keeping women and men have access to “all the spiritual blessings of the church”

18. Strong's, #5459, *segullah*, <https://biblehub.com/str/hebrew/5459.htm> (accessed 11-5-19).
19. Wilson, *Emancipation of New Testament Women*, chapter 8.
20. Deuteronomy 25:3. Romans and Jews whipped with long leather thongs with bones or rocks attached to the end which cut and tore the skin open. The Law of Moses wouldn't allow more than 40 stripes, so the Jews stopped at 39 (also see 2 Corinthians 11:24).
21. The quote is passed down through Christianity, and reworded by Elder James E. Faust, General Conference April 1991. I found references from 1656, but it appears older. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1991/04/a-crown-of-thorns-a-crown-of-glory?lang=eng> (accessed 11-5-19).
22. John Welch's translation will be published as part of the BYU New Testament Commentary. The notes are from a draft.
23. The NAS New Testament Greek Lexicon, Strong's #5293; *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT), 8:39, 1156; <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/hupotasso.html> (accessed 11-5-19).
24. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 316.
25. John W. Welch, *BYU New Testament Commentary*, 1 Peter 3:4, changes this from the inner spirit to the love of a marital relationship: “but let your intimate adornment be the man of your heart in the eternal *bond* of kind and gentle spirituality, which is of great worth before the face of God.”
26. Wilson, *Emancipation of New Testament Women*, chp 6; Ben Sira, *Ecclesiasticus*, 25:26. Greco-Roman adults often divorced four or five times, but the numbers appear lower in the Jewish culture. Nonetheless, it was a constant threat for things as minor as burning toast, raising one's voice, or spinning in the doorway for more light.
27. Elder M. Russell Ballard, *Ensign* (May 2012): 19. “Men and women have different but equally valued roles. Just as a woman cannot conceive a child without a man, so a man cannot fully exercise the power of the priesthood to establish an eternal family without a woman. In other words, in the eternal perspective, *both the procreative power and the priesthood power are shared by husband and wife*. And as husband and wife, a man and a woman should strive to follow our Heavenly Father. The Christian virtues of love, humility, and patience should be their focus as they seek the blessings of the priesthood in their lives and for their family.” Also, then Elder Russell M. Nelson explained, that husbands and wives’ “stewardships, equally sacred and important, do not involve any false ideas about domination or subordination.” Russell M. Nelson “The Sacred Responsibilities of Parenthood,” *Ensign* (Mar 2006): 29-30. A third example from Elder L. Tom Perry, taught in marriage there is “not a president or a vice president. The couple works together eternally for the good of the family . . . They are on equal footing.” L. Tom Perry, “Fatherhood, an Eternal Calling,” *Ensign* (May 2004), 71.
28. Elliott, *Anchor Bible: 1 Peter*, 554. Aristotle said, “The freedom in regard to women is detrimental both in regard to the purpose of the *politeia* and in regard to the happiness of the state” (555).
29. *Ibid.*, 5:10.
30. Neal A. Maxwell, “A Brother Offended,” General Conference April, 1982.
31. Welch, *BYU New Testament Commentary: 1 and 2 Peter*, 1P5:13. “The feminine singular pronoun *ē* could refer to the church, a thing of the feminine gender or a woman in general, possibly Peter's wife because we know that Peter was married (Matthew 8: 14; Mark 1:29). Women in the Old Testament and in Revelation 12:1 also are symbolic of the church.

It is likely that “she” refers to the church which is ‘co-elect.’”

32. Ibid.; 1 Peter 5:13. “Peter’s instruction that all greet one another with a kiss provides evidence of the egalitarian ideal in the nascent church in contrast with the larger, ancient world. According to Herodotus, when Persians met each other in the streets, you would know if the persons meeting are of equal rank by the following token: if they are, instead of speaking, they kiss each other on the lips. In the case where one is a little inferior to the other, the kiss is given on the cheek; where the difference of rank is great, the inferior prostrates himself upon the ground (Herodotus *Histories* 1.134).”
33. Welch, Schmidt, “2 Peter as a Farewell Text,” 317 “William Kurz is most helpful.[4] This scholar has analyzed twenty-two farewell speeches in the Bible and in classical Greek and Roman literature, identifying twenty elements.” <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/ministry-peter-chief-apostle/17-reading-2-peter-farewell-text> (accessed 11-7-19)
34. Ibid., Kurtz list of the 20 standard points from Farewell Addresses: 1. Summons, 2. Invoking own mission as an example, 3. Declaration of innocence and discharge of duty, 4. Reference to impending death, 5. Exhortations, 6. Warnings and final injunctions, 7. Blessings, 8. Farewell gestures, 9. Specific immediate tasks for successors, 10. A theological review of history, 11. Revelation of future events. 12. Promises, 13. Appoints or refers to a successor, 14. Bewailing the loss, 15. Future degeneration is to come, 16. Covenant renewal (sacrifices), 17. Providing for those who will survive, 18. Final consolations to the inner circle, 19. Didactic speech, 20. Facing death.
35. Welch, Schmidt, *BYU New Testament Commentary*, 2 Peter 1:1.
36. Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 9-10, 42, 110, 210, 327-331. “Paul . . . knew . . . all the ordinances, and blessings were in the Church.” Peter refers to ordinances in his letters (i.e. 1 Peter 1:21-23; 3:19-21; 2 Peter 1:10, 19).
37. David Hubbard, ed., Richard J. Bauckham, *World Biblical Commentary: Jude 2 Peter* (Waco, TX: World Books, 1983), 190. “Call and election’ . . . This passage does not mean that oral progress provides, the Christian with a subjective assurance of his election (the sense it was given by Luther and Calvin . . .), but that the ethical fruits of Christian faith are objectively necessary for the attainment of final salvation . . . Our author seems to emphasize man’s role in his salvation, the content should be remembered.” Interestingly, I also checked three other commentaries who did not mention the phrase in their commentary on 2 Peter 1:10 (*The Anchor Bible*, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, and *The New Interpreter’s Bible*).
38. “Discourse, 14 May 1843, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff,” p. [32], *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed November 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-14-may-1843-as-reported-by-wilford-woodruff/3>
39. Joseph Smith, “Discourse, between circa 26 June and circa 2 July 1839, as Reported by Willard Richards,” p. 19, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed November 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-between-circa-26-june-and-circa-2-july-1839-as-reported-by-willard-richards/5>
40. Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (NYC, NY: Macmillan, 1992), 2. 651. Ehat and Cook, ed., *Words of Joseph Smith*, 4, 15, 17-20, 26, 205-206, 209, 284, 391, 403. “The Council of Fifty and Its Members, 1844-1945.” *BYU Studies* 20 (Winter 1980); Ehat “‘It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth’: Joseph Smith and the Constitution of the Kingdom of God.” *BYU Studies* 20 (spring 1980). Hyrum. Andrus, *Doctrines of the Kingdom-Foundations of the Millennial Kingdom of Christ* (SLC, UT: Bookcraft, 1973) 352-401, 550-60. 2 Peter Holzapfel, *BYU Studies, 50th Anniversary*, orga-

nization of Council of Fifty 3/11/1844.

41. Joseph Smith, “Discourse, 17 May 1843–A, as Reported by William Clayton,” p. [16], *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed November 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-17-may-1843-a-as-reported-by-william-clayton/1>.
42. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph*, 150-151. “After a man so devotes himself to righteousness that his calling and election is made sure, ‘then it will be his privilege to receive the other Comforter’ the Prophet says. ‘ Now what is this other Comforter? It is no more nor less than the Lord Jesus Christ himself; and this is the sum and substance of the whole matter; that when any man obtains this last Comforter, he will have the personage of Jesus Christ to attend him or appear unto him from time to time, and even he will manifest the Father unto him, and they will take up their abode with him, and the visions of the heavens will be opened unto him, and the lord will teach him face to face, and he may have a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of God; and this is the state and place the ancient saints arrived at when they had such glorious visions—Isaiah, Ezekiel, John upon the Isle of Patmos, St. Paul in the three heavens, and all the saints who held communion with the general assembly and Church of the Firstborn.”
43. Joseph Smith, “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” p. 1549, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed November 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/192>.
44. Welch, Schmidt, *BYU New Testament Commentary*, 2 Peter 1:20. “But first know this, that every prophecy in scripture did not come from any personal whim of man”
45. Ibid. 2P1:21.
46. [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Book_of_Enoch_\(Charles\)/Chapter_09](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Book_of_Enoch_(Charles)/Chapter_09) (accessed 11-9-19)
47. Barnabas Chapter 115
48. Louis Midgley “The Ways of Remembrance” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* edited by John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 170.
49. Welch, Schmidt, *BYU New Testament Commentary*, 2 Peter 3:11.



1–3 JOHN; JUDE

1–3 JOHN: DISCIPLESHIP LIVED BY LOVE

JUDE: WARNINGS AND EXHORTATIONS

INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLES OF JOHN

John's epistles are placed as the second to last of the Epistles, longest to shortest.¹ First, second, and third John do not include an author's name, but in the latter two, the author introduces himself as "the Elder"/ *presbuteros*. All three books share vocabulary, themes, and style with the Gospel of John (which also never introduces the author by name).² By 215 AD, the authorship of 1 John was accepted by the eastern and western Christian churches as John the Beloved.³ However, debate over the authorship and dating of all three Epistles continues.⁴ I will avoid that arena here, and focus on how we can understand and apply them as scripture.

Themes

John's Epistles continue with the same themes we find in the Gospel of John: light, darkness, truth, love, and the name of the Lord. Only 1 John has the length to develop these themes. He builds mainly on ideas presented during Jesus' Last Supper. He develops them into a poetic sermon more than a letter. John writes to all saints and calls them, "children."

THE EPISTLE OF 1 JOHN

Organization

The prologue speaks of John's physical contact with the resurrected Lord, repeated five times. He then introduces his two main points. First, "the message we have . . . God is light." Two chapters later, he repeats the phrase, "the message that . . ." and goes on to teach God is love, and "we should love one another." He ends with his testimony, "we know," repeating three key points.

Outline

- 1:1–4 Prologue
- 1:5–3:10 The Message of Light
 - Warning against Antichrists
 - Children of God Will Become Like God
- 3:11–5:12 The Message of Love
 - Love One Another to Abide in God's Love
- 5:13–21 Conclusion

1 JOHN 1

Prologue: The Word of Life

1 John 1:1–4

1 John 1:1: "*Brethren, this is the testimony which we give of that which was from the beginning . . .*" (JST *italicized*) The Prophet Joseph's addition sounds similar to his words in D&C 76:22 "after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him . . ." which interestingly, Joseph received while translating the Gospel of John 5:29. I presume the words in the JST reflect the words that John wrote.⁵ This is the only JST change in this chapter.

Similar to John's Gospel, this prologue emphasizes the "beginning," "Word," and "life." As discussed earlier, three of the four Gospels also open with the same words as Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning" (also Mark 1:1, Luke 1:3;

John 1:1). The New Testament authors knew their Old Testament scriptures, and built their own writings after the pattern as another witness of God's words. They also wrote to testify that Jesus fulfilled the old law as the Promised Messiah, making a new law.

“which we have heard,
which we have seen with our eyes,
which we have looked at and our hands have touched—
this we proclaim concerning the Word of life” (NIV)

The Epistle or sermon is written in poetic parallels. By comparing the wording with the Gospel of John, we can see where the author introduces new ideas. For example, here in the Epistle, he emphasizes the physical nature of Jesus' resurrected body (also see 1 John 4:3). It was probably in response to the growing problem of Gnosticism, which taught the Greek philosophy that all things physical were evil and the spirit alone was ultimately good. John points out that he (and others, “we”) saw and touched the of the *body* resurrected Lord. The “we” may refer to other members of the Twelve as “a special witness of the name of Christ” (D&C 107:23, 26). John refers to Jesus as the “Word of Life” with a body (as Paul did in Philippians 2:16). John uses the same Greek word, “*logos*” from his Gospel prologue. Here though, he wants to emphasize Jesus as “life,” meaning Eternal Life. Earlier Jesus taught, “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life” (John 5:24, NIV).

1 John 1:2 “The Life was manifested, and we have seen, and do testify, and declare to you the Life . . .” Five times in the prologue alone, John mentions that Jesus was seen and handled (Five was an important Hebrew number representing the “five books of the law” or Pentateuch). Also, it can mean that Jesus' words bring us hope and life, even an abundant life here and afterwards.

1 John 1:3 “We have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son” (NIV) This “life was revealed” (ISV) to John includes a relationship with both God the Father and His Son. For here on earth, Joseph Fielding Smith added the companionship of the Spirit into this hope: “If we are in fellowship with this Spirit, then we walk in the light and have fellowship with God.”⁶ I also believe that we can feel the fellowship with the Spirit powerfully when we taste of God's mercy or forgiveness. The word “fellowship/*koinóni*” literally means partnership, and can also refer to “contributory help, participation, sharing in, communion, spiritual fellowship.”⁷ Inherent in Christian fellowship is the responsibility of sharing our livelihood with those in need (Acts 2:44–45).

1 John 1:4 “These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full” Most other English versions other than the KJV express that John teaches this “to make our joy complete” (NIV). The Book of Mormon also referred to the eternal consequence of joy when Jacob taught “men are that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25).

1. THE MESSAGE OF LIGHT

1 John 1:5–3:10

Light and Darkness: Sin and Forgiveness

1 John 1:5–2:2

1 John 1:5 “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” John introduces the first section of his sermon: God as light. Light was also one of the major themes of John’s Gospel (John 1:4–9; 3:19–21; 5:35; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9–10; 12:35–36, 46; also see D&C 50:23–24; 88:67–68). Many levels of meanings can be found in the phrase, “God is light.” Light is energy, reason, color, heat, food, and inspiration. Light fuels life and feeds our spirits. Light inspires art and science. Light holds the secrets of the universe. Light is threaded into modern technologies and electricity. A Stanford professor of science, Markus Covert, shed a deeper level of significance to this concept:

When I think ‘God is light’ I think: light is everything! Light is gorgeous! It is beautiful! It is mysterious! We don’t even know if it is a wave or a particle—probably neither! It’s eternal! Who would dare to say where it came from or where it’s going? It is the fastest thing in the universe, 300,000,000 meters per second without breaking a sweat. It warms us! It feeds us (From the sun to the photosynthetic plants to the rest of the animal kingdom)! It comforts us (triggering serotonin release and sensing by our brain cells). It protects us (vitamin D). Our bodies have all kinds of ways to harvest light, but the most spec-

Artist’s concept of galaxy WISE J224607.57-052635.0. Image via NASA.gov

A detailed artist's concept of a galaxy, showing a bright, glowing core with a complex, multi-colored structure of orange, yellow, and red. The galaxy is surrounded by a vast field of stars and smaller, distant galaxies, set against a dark, starry background.

tacular is the ocular—our eyes are absolutely amazing in what we can perceive, and yet so much of the light around us is completely undetectable or only with advanced technology. It's completely amazing!

More than an image to describe God, I think God and light have a literal connection (D&C 88:7). This description of God is completely different than that of the Greco-Roman gods. John worships a perfect being.

1 John 1:6 “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” In order to enter into fellowship with God we must live our lives in accordance with the “light of Christ.” Moroni 7:18–19 describes the “light of Christ” similar to a conscience: “the light by which ye may judge . . . that ye may know good from evil.” I see it as the rudimentary work of the Spirit that is given to everyone to learn how to “hold upon every good thing” (Alma 28:14). When we walk in the light, we walk with our Savior, as He is the “light of the world” (John 8:12; 9:5).

1 John 1: 7 “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sins” (NIV) Fellowship includes serving and loving our neighbor (i.e. *all* that cross our path). Interesting, John calls for fellowship with God first and then with our neighbors. The order is significant, just like the Old Testament two great commandments—Love God and Love your neighbor (Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:28–31). It is easier to love others when we feel God's love.

We also walk with God when we walk in harmony with one another. We walk in harmony with God, vicariously, when we help others in need. To walk in God's light allows us to see others in God's light. When we have a hard time getting along with someone, use God's light to see him/her as He does. If we humbly acknowledge our own weaknesses, then it is easier to endure them in others. We are all in need of the cleansing light of our Savior.

1 John 1:8–10 “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us” If we confess and repent of our sins, Christ's atoning sacrifice has the power to cleanse us through the workings of the Holy Spirit. Even though we do not believe we are depraved because of Adam's transgression, we mortals all sin and need to repent daily.⁸ The best “weapon against sin is its recognition and a dependence on the redemption wrought by Jesus.”⁹

Paul and other New Testament authors taught the need as well (also see Romans 3:23). Yet the Book of Mormon includes the word repent six times more often than the New Testament and the D&C three times more often. It is obviously a message for our day. President Russell M. Nelson taught in April 2019 Conference:

Too many people consider repentance as punishment—something to be avoided except in the most serious circumstances. But this feeling of being penalized is engendered by Satan. He tries to block us

from looking to Jesus Christ, who stands with open arms, hoping and willing to heal, forgive, cleanse, strengthen, purify, and sanctify us.¹⁰

Satan's false propaganda distorts the blessings of repentance. Humble confession brings great blessings.

1 JOHN 2

1 John 2:1 “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin” (NIV). John is the only author to use “*teknion*/little child” in the New Testament (once in his Gospel, seven times in this Epistle). It was also used for “someone *deeply loved*.”¹¹ Outside of the New Testament, the term of endearment is used for disciples by their masters. John explains that the purpose of his Epistle is to persuade his readers to “sin not.” His Epistle is filled with more information on sin.

But if any man sin and repent, we have an advocate with the Father” (JST). The JST addition of “repent” is doctrinally significant. In modern revelation, the Savior further explains that He will intervene if we “repent,” otherwise, “if they would not repent they must suffer even as I” (D&C 19:17). The word for “advocate”/*paraklétos* can also mean “intercessor, a consoler, helper, and Paraclete.” In the entire Bible, Jesus’ role as an “advocate” is mentioned only here, but we find it five times in the D&C. For example:

Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him—Saying: Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified; Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life (D&C 45:3–5).

The Lord’s title of “Advocate” was a favorite of John’s. He mentions it five times (four times in his Gospel as *paraklétos*/“comforter,” John 14:16, 26; 15:26, 16:7).¹² This dual definition is consistent with D&C 88:3, and Joseph Smith’s teachings that define the Second Comforter as a visitation of the Savior.

Now what is this other Comforter? It is no more nor less that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; and this is the sum and substance of the whole matter; that when any man obtains this last Comforter, he will have the personage of Jesus Christ to attend him, or appear unto him from time to time, and even He will manifest the Father unto him, and they will take up their abode with him, and the visions of the heavens will be opened unto him, and the Lord will teach him face to face, and he may have a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God.¹³



Christ's Appearance to Mary Magdalene after the Resurrection by Alexander Andreyevich Ivanov, 1835. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

1 John 2:2 “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (NIV) Christ appeased the demands of justice through His “atoning sacrifice”/ *hilasmos* (NIV), as a remedy (NEB), expiation (RSV) or “propitiation” of an angry God (KJV). The Book of Mormon taught that Jesus’ atonement would become the “great and last sacrifice;” the Lamb of God sacrificed Himself for the world’s sins through His death (Alma 34:10). An interesting definition of the root of atonement is described by Hugh Nibley,

The basic word for atonement is *kaphar*, which has the same basic meaning in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic, that being ‘to bend, arch over, cover; . . . to deny, . . . to forgive, . . . to be expiated, . . . renounce.’ The Arabic *kafara* puts the emphasis on a tight squeeze, such as tucking in the skirts, drawing a thing close to one’s self. Closely related are Aramaic and Arabic *kafat*, meaning a close embrace, which are certainly related to the Egyptian *hpet*, the common ritual embrace written with the ideogram of embracing arms. . . . Most interesting is the Arabic *kafata*, as it is the key to a dramatic situation. It was the custom

for one fleeing for his life in the desert to seek protection in the tent of a great sheik, crying out . . . “I am thy suppliant,” whereupon the Lord would place the hem of his robe over the guest’s shoulder and declare him under his protection.¹⁴

We see this image in the Book of Mormon, too (see 2 Nephi 1:15; 4:33; Alma 5:24).

Keeping the Commandments

1 John 2:3–11

1 John 2:3 “We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands” (NIV) At His Last Supper, the Savior taught to *know God* is to have Eternal Life (John 17:3). This type of knowledge will result from obedience to His commandments and having a pure heart and desires. Knowing God can only happen in obedience to His truths and light. In Semitic thought, “knowledge implies intimacy.”¹⁵ That closeness with God comes from closely following His commandments so that we can become like Him.



The Last Supper by Hans Holbein, 1525. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

1 John 2:4–6 “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar . . . whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected” John emphasizes the importance of *doing* the word of God (as did James 2:7). If our actions are not consistent with our faith, do we really believe? Those sinners bound by addictions can overcome by doing all they can, and then strengthening their faith and love of God. We must live the teachings of the Lord to claim complete conversion.

1 John 2:7–8 “I write a new commandment unto you, but *it is the same* commandment which ye had from the beginning” (JST) Jesus taught the new commandment at his Last Supper. This is the test of discipleship—to love as Jesus loved (John 15:12). The phrase “from the beginning” may refer to the fact that Adam even had these commandments, or to the beginning of Christ’s example from the beginning of His ministry.

1 John 2:9–11 “Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light” (NIV) As we demonstrate Christ-like love, we will

receive and reflect the same light Christ possesses. We must live the gospel to receive its light. But studying these ideas, new windows of light are opened to help disciples forgive and love with God's love. John also teaches that hatred causes darkness so that we cannot see where we are going.

1 John 2:12–14 “I write unto you . . .” John poetically creates a double message to three groups (citing the NIV):

Children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

Fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

Young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

Children, because you know the Father.

Fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

Young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

John's acknowledgement of little children's purity is a dramatic departure from his culture (and sadly the direction that later Christianity adopted). Yet, restored scripture adds a second witness that children are whole, saved through the atonement, and do not need baptism (Moroni 8:9–14; Mosiah 3:16). John addresses different groups in his audience to get everyone's attention. The absence of women in this list is not a sure sign that women were not included in his audience, as several times John uses the word, *adelphos*/"member of the same religious community, especially a fellow-Christian," which the NIV translates as "brothers and sisters" three times (1 John 3:13, 15, 16).

Warning against Worldliness

1 John 2:15–17

1 John 2:15–16 “Love not the world, neither the things that *are* of the world . . . For all in the world, *that is of the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father*” (JST) The Prophet Joseph was inspired in his JST to distinguish that “in the world” can be different than “of the world,” which “is of the lusts.” Note the prominent place of lust and pride in the scheme of the world. Disciples must repel worldliness (D&C 84:50–53) and replace a love of self and materialism with service and generosity. Loving materialism more than consecration, sports more than God's Sabbath, and your will more than God's will are diametrically opposed to loving God. We “cannot serve God and Mammon” (Matthew 6:24; 3 Nephi 13:24). What does that say of our culture?

1 John 2:17 “The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever” (NIV) John describes the opposite of those in the world, as those who “*do the will of God*” (GNT). When you think of the great reward, it helps keep the requirements in perspective. We give so little to receive so much. Keep an eternal

perspective. Our lovely earth, which has been around for billions of years will pass away (at least as we know it), but humanity, who now live usually less than a century, will live forever!

Warning Against Antichrists

1 John 2:18-27

1 John 2:18 “Dear children, this is the last hour . . . even now many antichrists have come . . . but their going showed that none of them belonged to us” (NIV) The last hour or “last time” (KJV) is not how we define the “last days.” John prophesied of the great apostasy, not the end of the world. John’s “antichrists” included members of the church, who “went out from us” (KJV). John doubts that they were ever really converted. He defines an antichrist in verse 22 as one who denies Jesus as the Promised Messiah. Antichrists work for the devil and drove the apostasy. Corruption had already entered into the Lord’s church in John’s time.

The Book of Mormon also refers to antichrists in the form of Sherem (Jacob 7), Nehor (Alma 1), and Korihor (Alma 30), to name a few. Their arguments are similar to those used today. We, too, can see antichrists who try to stop the work of the Restoration, or cause contention within.

1 John 2:20 “you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things” (NKJV) The KJV, “unction” means “anointed,” (RSV), or “are among the initiated” (NEB). The same word is used to mean “inaugural ceremony for priests” and we find it in 1 John 2:27. John writes to those who knew the sacred ordinations and probably the temple ordinances. He speaks to those saints who are endowed with the power of God.

1 John 2:21–23 “I have not written to you because you lack knowledge of the truth, but because you have it . . . [But] the antichrist . . . denies the Father and the Son” (BSB) John writes to believers who trust in the truth. They should have, and use, the gift of the Spirit to discern truth from error. An important use of discernment is to recognize an antichrist as someone who denies the roles of God the Father and His Son Jesus the Christ.

The *italicized* words in verse 23 of the KJV do not appear in the Greek manuscripts, but were added to the Latin translation. John may refer to the difference between being able to enjoy the presence of the Son in the Terrestrial Kingdom, and the Father in the Celestial Kingdom (see D&C 76:70–79).

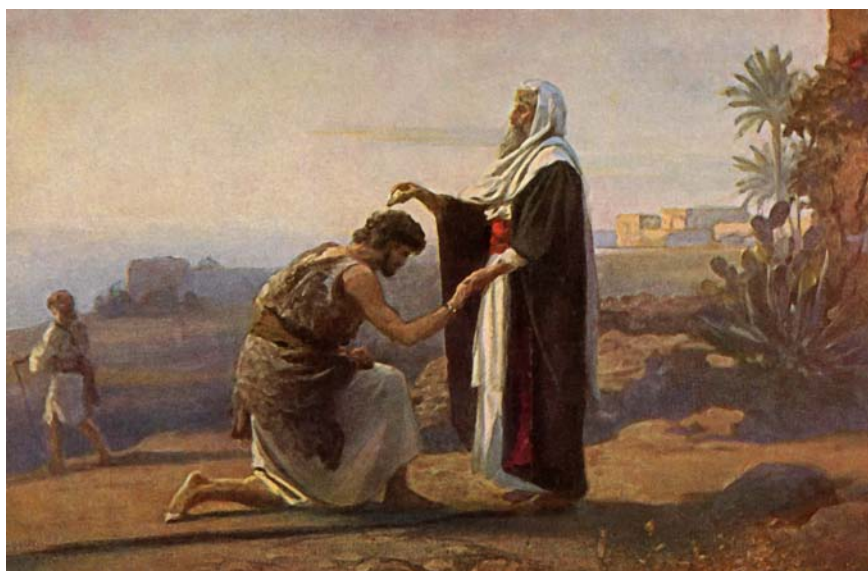
1 John 2:24–26 “. . . remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us—eternal life” (NIV) In the Restoration we define “Eternal life” as exaltation in the Celestial Kingdom with God the Father.¹⁶ This separation of “immortality” and “Eternal Life” and of kingdoms is unique among Christians (Moses 1:39). This was to clarify those who tried to deceive the saints.

1 John 2:27 “the anointing you received from Him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you . . . remain in Him” (NIV) John refers to this anointing as if it were available for all disciples, not just our “revelator,” an anointed prophet who speaks for Christ (D&C 124:125). This is the second time he reminds them that their “anointing”/“unction”/*chrisma* has the power to teach them “all things” (1 John 2:20, KJV). I presume this refers to all things required for exaltation. Consecrated disciples can be taught by the Spirit when they do nothing to offend the Spirit. Also Donald Parry taught:

Anointed individuals potentially acquired several heavenly boons. For instance, persons who received the anointing were protected by God (1 Chronicles 16:22; Psalm 105:15; 89:20–23; D&C 121:16), were taught from on high (1 John 2:27), and gained salvation (Psalm 20:6; 28:8; D&C 109:80). In addition, the Lord showed mercy to his anointed (2 Samuel 22:51; Psalm 18:50). Similarly, it was forbidden for souls to speak out against the anointed of the Lord (1 Samuel 24:6, 10; 26:9, 11, 23; 2 Samuel 19:21).¹⁷

Kelly Ogden explains this anointing is the gift of the Holy Ghost.¹⁸ Joseph Smith also emphasized the premier role that the Holy Spirit played in the church. To Joseph, the Holy Spirit is the great revelator and reveals God’s will to His children and shows them what they should do.

However, the verse here sounds like an anointing with oil, which is not the confirmation but an additional gift. Temple washings and anointings signify being cleansed and sanctified through Christ. John may have referred to these promises as the means to learn and hear truth (D&C 88:74).



Samuel Anoints Saul by Anton Robert Leinweber, 1910.

Children of God Will Become Like God

1 John 2:28–3:3

1 John 2:28–29 “Dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming . . . everyone who does what is right has been born of him” (NIV) John again uses “little children”/*teknion* endearingly, as a teacher would. He also defines “born of Him” as one who does “righteousness.” His encouragement to gain confidence in the Lord, to be worthy of being called a child of God, was also the topic of a General Conference talk by Elder Jörg Klebingat:

Do you have a personal witness that your current offering as a Latter-day Saint is sufficient to inherit eternal life? Can you say within yourself that Heavenly Father is pleased with you? What thoughts come to mind if you had a personal interview with your Savior one minute from now? . . . Yours is the privilege, if you want it, to come to know for yourself, today or soon, that you are pleasing God in spite of your shortcomings. . . . I testify of a loving Savior who rejoices when we apply His Atonement daily with the calm and happy assurance that we are facing in the right direction. I testify of a loving Savior who is anxious for your “confidence [to] wax strong in the presence of God” (D&C 121:45).¹⁹

1 JOHN 3

1 John 3:1–2 “What love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God—and we are! . . . We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is” (BLB) From the New Testament perspective, we become “children of God” when we live worthy of that title. (John the Baptist also taught this about claiming to be children of Abraham without the works of Abraham, Matthew 3:7–10). Yet, John’s audience has become just that. They do not fully comprehend what being a child of God entails. This amazing potential, including to “see him as he is,” can only come thanks to our Savior’s at-one-ment.

1 John 3:3 “This hope makes us keep ourselves holy” (CEV) The hope of purification should motivate us to become more like Christ. Becoming holy is the best preparation for becoming like Him. This is done as we repent of our sins—or repent of violating God’s law—and come to Him for cleansing.

Avoiding Sin

1 John 3:4–10

1 John 3:4–6 “Sin is the transgression of the law . . . He was manifested to take away our sins . . . Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever *continueth in sin* hath not seen him, neither known him” (JST italicized). John’s argument is built on two facts: sin exists, and we need a Redeemer to cleanse our sins. We only “abide” in our sins when we do not repent. When we abide with our Savior, we have repented and He has purified us. With this basis, John explains that we know God only when we return our allegiance to our Savior and live His laws. The JST points to the problem of “continuing to sin,” (and then repeats the correction in verses 8 and 9). This word choice was also chosen by the NIV which translates it: “continue to sin.”

1 John 3:7–8 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous . . . He that *continueth in sin* is of the devil” (JST italicized). The JST changes the Calvinistic thought of God predestining humans to do evil. John, like James, calls the saints to demonstrate their beliefs with action. God can have no incongruity. If we come unto Him through regular repentance, then we are honored as His children. That is how

“the child of God is marked by freedom from sin, [and] the child of the devil is marked by sin.”²⁰

1 John 3:9 “Whosoever is born of God doth not *continueth in sin*; for *the Spirit of God remaineth in him*: and he cannot *continue in sin*, because he is born of God, *having received that holy Spirit of promise*.” For the third time in this chapter, the JST makes an important doctrinal clarification by adding “continueth.” Most other modern English translations also change the meaning to refer to “practices sin” (NASB) or “continue to sin” (NIV). This acknowledges the human propensity to sin, but leaves room for repentance and a change of our hearts and behaviors. Spiritual rebirth motivates us to forsake sin. Satan rebelled against God premortally and was removed from the presence of God, but Satan came to earth to tempt man (Moses 4:1–4 and Abraham 3:24–28). Both in his Gospel and Epistles, John repeatedly defines a spiritual birth (John 1:13; 3:3–7; 1 John 2:29; 4:4, 5:1, 4, 18).

The Holy Spirit of Promise has special meaning in restored scripture, which refers to the Spirit’s ability to ratify ordinances and seal them conditionally or prenatally (see commentary from Ephesians 1:13; D&C 76:53; 88:3–5; 124:124; 131:5, 7, 18, 19, 26).²¹

1 John 3:10 “This is how we know who the children of God . . . Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister” (NIV) John loves opposites and often illustrates the image of right and wrong or light and darkness. The Epistle has no middle ground or “gray.”

2. THE MESSAGE OF LOVE

1 John 3:11–24

1 John 3:11–12 “This is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain . . .” John returns to his key message, and the Lord’s message from the beginning: Love (1 John 2:10; 5:2; John 13:35; 15:12). This was also the message given to the Children of Israel through Moses (Deuteronomy 19:18). Yet, learning to love as Christ loves is the basis of God’s higher law. Looking back in biblical history, the first story of hatred, or the antithesis of love, was Cain’s selfish behavior and murder of his brother (Genesis 4:8). This was a New Testament favorite as the same story is also remembered in Hebrews 11:4 and Jude 1:11.

1 John 3:13 “Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you” (NIV) John warns his fellow saints that the world lives under the influence of Satan, hence it hates followers of God.

1 John 3:14–15 “Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer” (NIV) In a spiritual sense, John teaches that we are dead, or not “born again,” unless our hearts have been

permeated by a love for God and our fellow beings. In the higher law that Jesus taught at the Sermon on the Mount, He warned about the power of thoughts; “Whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of his judgment” (Matthew 5:22, JST). Selfless divine love is a sign of overcoming the kingdom of the devil.

1 John 3:16–18 Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters . . . let us not love with words or speech but with actions” (NIV) The ultimate testimony of love comes when we give and live our lives for others as Jesus did. John gives examples on how we can do this—giving to the poor in need and offering compassion. More than offering words, real love must be enacted. God demonstrated it, and so must we.

1 John 3:19–21 “by this we will know that we belong to the truth, and will assure our hearts in His presence . . . if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God” (BSB) If we feel and demonstrate Christ-like love by giving to our neighbors, then our hearts will not condemn us. Our own hearts, or conscience, knows what is right and wrong and whether we are filled with love or selfishness. The Spirit knows our thoughts and is the judge (which, in scripture, is called the Spirit of Christ or the Spirit of God as well as the light of Christ).²² The Book of Mormon affirms, “the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil” (Moroni 7:16, 19; see also 2 Nephi 2:5; Helaman 14:31). Because all responsible humans received this gift, all people know whether they are right with God, unless they have denied the voice to the point that they are “past feeling” (1 Nephi 17:45; Moroni 9:20).

1 John 3:22 “Whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (NKJV) Just as in the Epistle of James 1:5, John also encourages disciples to ask God for help. The Lord added a qualifier to the Prophet Joseph Smith; we must only ask if it is right, or “that is expedient for you” (D&C 88:65). Otherwise, we get what we ask for, which is wrong, as Joseph Smith did with the 116 pages of the Book of Lehi.²³

John teaches another interesting point here. The more righteous a person is, the easier it is to receive communication from heavenly sources. This is true most of the time, I presume, but even Joseph Smith felt unheard in Liberty Jail, and Job did not get the answer he desired when he asked. That said, I do think there is a great secret in gaining answers to prayers by being obedient to the Lord’s commandments. Furthermore, by keeping the Lord’s commandments, we will usually not ask amiss. Yet, there are times when all need to say, “Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42).

1 John 3:23 “this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another” (NKJV) Just as in the Gospel of John, this verse emphasizes the importance of the “name” of Jesus. There is power in the name—evil spirits can be cast out, miracles can be performed, and the Spirit may come when we call on His Name. (Think of how we are told to cast out evil spirits, or administer, or baptize.)

The Book of Mormon often speaks of the importance of the “Name of Christ.” For example:

- **Mosiah 5:9** “Whosoever doeth this shall be found at the right hand of God, for he shall know the name by which he is called; for he shall be called by the name of Christ” (also Mosiah 5:8).
- **Mosiah 26:24** “For behold, in my name are they called; and if they know me they shall come forth, and shall have a place eternally at my right hand.”
- **Alma 5:38** “the good shepherd doth call you; yea, and in his own name he doth call you.”
- **Alma 5:48** “[Jesus will] take away the sins of the world, yea, the sins of every man who steadfastly believeth on his name” (also Alma 9:27; 11:40; Helaman 14:2).
- **3 Nephi 27:5–6** “For by this name shall ye be called at the last day; And whoso taketh upon him my name, and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved at the last day.”

Elder Oaks spoke and wrote on this: “our willingness to take upon us the name of Jesus Christ affirms our commitment to do all that we can to be counted among those whom he will choose to stand at his right hand and be called by his name at the last day.”²⁴

1 John 3:24 “The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (NASB) When we keep the commandments of God, we receive that wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit. In the KJV, “dwelleth” is from the Greek word for, “remains, abides.” This verse helps us understand John’s imagery of the Godhead, too. If we abide in God and God in us, then we can understand how Jesus abides in God.

I JOHN 4

Try the Spirit: Truth or Deceit

1 John 4:1–6

1 John 4:1 “Beloved” John uses “Beloved”/ *agapétos* as an endearment ten times in his Epistles.²⁵ (We find it 61 times in the New Testament spread across every author.)

“do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God” (NKJV) In the pre-mortal realms, we believe Lucifer fought against God’s plan and one third of the heavenly spirits chose to follow him (Moses 4:1–3; D&C 29:36–37; 76:25–38). These devils promote evil and will never receive a body (D&C 10:20–23, 27; 93:39). Their eternal progression stopped and they became devils. Jesus, Luke, Peter, Paul and John all describe false spirits working through false prophets or teachers already functioning during their times (Matthew 24:24; Acts 13:6; 2 Corinthians 11:13; 2 Peter 2:1).

This same call to “try the spirits” (KJV) came in the Restoration during the Second Great Awakening. It was a favorite topic of the Prophet Joseph’s according to Elder George A. Smith of the Quorum of the Twelve (and the prophet’s cousin), “There was no point upon which the Prophet Joseph dwelt more than the discerning of Spirits.”²⁶ We, too, must “try the spirits” by checking the sources of our research, praying for warnings, following God’s messengers, and being aware of Satan’s deceptions.

“many false prophets are gone out into the world” The next four verses form a chiastic structure with this:²⁷

- A False prophets have gone into the world (1 John 4:1d)
- B The Spirit of God (1 John 4:2a)
- C Everyone who confesses Jesus . . . reflects the Spirit that belongs to God (1 John 4:2bc)
- C’ Everyone who negates Jesus reflects a spirit that does not belong to God (1 John 4:3ab)
- B’ The spirit of antichrist (1 John 4:3c)
- A’ The spirit of antichrist (1 John 4:3c)

1 John 4:2 “This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not . . . is the spirit of the antichrist” (NIV) This is the first of three ways that John offers to know if a spirit is of God or Satan (also in verses 6 and 7). Disciples must ask an important test of truth: Does the spirit or person testify that Jesus is the Christ/Messiah and came in the flesh as our God? Moroni 7:24 teaches how to test spirits: “All things which are good cometh of Christ” (also Omni 1:25). John gives three keys to know if a spirit is of God—vs. 2, 6, 7.

1 John 4:3 “This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which . . . is now already in the world” (NKJV) False teachers of *docetism* taught that Jesus was not really a “human” who lived to suffer and die.²⁸ Some taught that the divine Messiah or Christ joined the “man Jesus” at baptism and then departed from him just before his death. Others taught that the eternal Messiah really didn’t come in contact with temporal matter as that would have desecrated His divinity. These Greek philosophical arguments are laced with Gnosticism, which believed that only the spirit is perfect (that everything physical is bad and part of our punishment here on earth). They taught that salvation did not undertake to deliver mortals from sin and guilt, but rather it freed their spirit from contaminating matter.²⁹ We face other antichrists now—humanism, materialism, skepticism, secularism, rationalism, and agnosticism, to name a few.

1 John 4:4 “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” Those “of God” who enjoy the Spirit of the Lord have greater power than the devils. Thus, we can overcome the world with Christ’s help. Be careful with whom are the “he’s” in this verse.

The Anchor translation of this verse begins, “As for you, *Little Children, you belong in God*” giving it a sense of children’s innocence (D&C 93:38).³⁰

1 John 4:5–6 “They are of the world . . . We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. That is how we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deception” (BSB) In this context “the world,” or worldliness, includes everything that is under Satan’s domain. John describes the saints as coming from God. That entails our need to serve Him. He also offers a second key to identify false prophets—they will not listen to “us” or God’s apostles and prophets. Likewise, if we receive God’s message and messengers, then we are on the right track. However, if someone does not receive truth, then they have the spirit of error “or falsehood” (NIV).

Loving One Another to Abide in God’s Love

1 John 4:7–21

1 John 4:7–8 “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God . . . Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love” (NIV) John gives a third key to detect false prophets—whether or not they love one another. Moroni 7:48 also teaches that if we love each other we show our love for God (also Mosiah 3:19; Mormon 3:12). We can identify the wicked by asking, do they love their neighbor? The pure love of Christ, or *agapá* / “charity,” seems to be the essence of God’s character. Thus, to become like Him, disciples must seek this gift of charity, too. Paul and Mormon call charity the greatest spiritual gift that God gives His children (1 Corinthians 13:13; Moroni 7:46). John uses the perfect tense of the verb when describing being born of God, “has been [and remains] begotten”³¹ which happens through the sealing of the Holy Spirit of Promise” (JST 1 John 3:9).

1 John 4:9–10 “This is how God’s love was revealed . . . not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” The clearest and most wonderful example of God’s love is the gift of His Son as our Savior and Redeemer. (The word order in Greek stresses the object as the “only begotten.”)³²

Two more words play an important part to the text. The KJV uses “propitiation,” but the Greek *hilasmos* / “atoning sacrifice” is used by many modern English translations. Throughout this entire Epistle, John uses “love” / *agape* which is Paul’s “charity,” or “the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 4:47).

1 John 4:11 “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” God requires us to share His gift with others. If you don’t feel love for someone, pray to see people as God sees them. Ask the Lord to bless you with an understanding of His love for that person. Sometimes we mix up counterfeit forms of love—pleasure, praise, power, or even sex. But, if these are used for self-serving enjoyment-based emotions, they are not what John refers to as God’s unconditional love. He wants us to go beyond lust and self-aggrandizement, to selfless service and absolute deep caring for each other. The Lord’s example of love requires an eternal perspective.

1 John 4:12 No man hath seen God at any time, except them who believe. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us” (JST) The first phrase of this verse seems out of place as it reads in the KJV. When a portion of the text does not flow, scholars’ question if it were original to the text. The important JST correction opens the way for the biblical examples of the five hundred who saw the resurrected Lord (1 Corinthians 15:6) and many more. Two verses later, John says he has seen God, too! Many believers have seen God before and after His resurrection.³³

In the Gospel of John and other places in this Epistle, we find the same message as the JST. For example: “Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God” (John 6:46; also 1 John 3:6; 4:14). The Lord also told Joseph that He wanted believers to strive to see the Lord in D&C 93:1 “every soul who forsaketh his sins, and cometh unto me . . . and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am” (also see Genesis 32:30; Exodus 33:11; Isaiah 6; D&C 76:7; etc.). The Book of Mormon mentions several different groups of “other sheep,” that also saw or will see the resurrected Christ (3 Nephi 16:1).

1 John 4:13 This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit” (NIV) Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is one way that God abides in us. If you want to know if you are living in accordance to Jesus’ will, determine if you feel the Spirit of God. If you do, He abides in you.

1 John 4:14 “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son” (NIV) John bears his testimony that he has “seen” enough to know that the Father sent His Son. This sounds like our living apostles bearing testimony.

1 John 4:15–16 “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and . . . dwelleth in love” John lists two conditions as evidence of when God abides in us: 1) We believe in Jesus’ supreme act of atoning love, and 2) We are filled with God’s divine love/*agapa*/charity.

1 John 4:16b–18 “God is love . . . Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love” (NIV) This type of love gives us “confidence on the day of judgment” (1 John 4:17, NIV).³⁴ It has no strains of arrogance, because it comes from God. When we can trust God’s perfect love, we need not fear what the world or humans can do to us. Trusting in God’s love may give us the courage to really love one another unconditionally, too. Fear is a tool of the devil. We need to be careful and wise in our judgments, but we can move forward without fear as long as we walk on the path that God prepared for us, or figuratively, “walk where Jesus walked.”

1 John 4:19 “We love him, because he first loved us” This verse rings of our premortal existence where we lived

in a heavenly parental relationship. To some tiny degree, God gives parents the gift of unconditional love toward their children—but it must be fostered for it to survive and grow into charity.

1 John 4:20–21 “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar . . . Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister” (NIV) These verses repeat John’s theme, that when we are filled with God’s love, it will spill over to our feelings for others. The corollary suggests that when we have unkind feelings toward another, we need to pray to understand God’s love better so that we can share it with those with whom we have hard feelings. This wonderful theme runs through much of John’s writings. We also find it clearly taught across other scripture as well (Mosiah 23:15; Leviticus 19:18; D&C 88:133; etc.).

1 JOHN 5

Overcoming the World

1 John 5:1–5

1 John 5:1 “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him” (NASB) This is a continuation of the theme discussed earlier of being born of God (i.e. 1 John 3:9; 4:7; etc.). Yet, John gives us more and more details on what it means to be “born of God.” The new twist in this section brings in the Father. If we love God the Father, we must love his Son, as they are inseparable.

1 John 5:2–3 “We know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments . . . His commandments are not burdensome” (NKJV) The trio of loving God, His Son, and our fellowman is twirled together in these verses to make sure we make all the connections between them (also in 2:3, 5, 3:14, 22–24, 4:21). They are all linked and we must hold onto both the Godhead and His creations if we want to serve either one. It is interesting to realize that by keeping the commandments we show love for our neighbors. Our examples are not all that blesses them. Those who have God’s Spirit can share that light and influence with those around them. God’s commandments are a blessing to all. Life is easier when we live as God directs. “My yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30).

1 John 5:4–5 “This is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith. . . . that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God” This verse answers how a saint can overcome the world. There is a beautiful integration that comes from practicing love and faith together. Our faith in Jesus’ plan allows us to place our priorities heavenward and thus give us victory over worldly temptations. Only through Jesus’ redeeming powers can we really be removed from the sins of this world eternally. This also transports us to “overcoming” rather than just “surviving.” In the beginning of chapter five, John opens a discussion on how faith and love benefit each other, and how faith, love, and obedience work together.³⁵

Many Witnesses Testify of Jesus as the Son of God

1 John 5:6-21

1 John 5:6-8 “This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood” (NIV) John uses symbols from birth, for rebirth. In the birthing process there is great pain, water, blood, near death (sometimes), and then new life. Being born again through Jesus Christ requires the waters of baptism and His atoning blood painfully shed for our sins. John and Moses brought these symbols together as the Lord taught them.

1 JOHN 5:6-8	MORTAL BIRTH	RE-BIRTH INTO GOD'S KINGDOM	MOSES 6:58-60
Water	In which fetus grows	Baptism by immersion	Mortals born into world by water, blood, the spirit, and born again into the kingdom of heaven, also of water, of the Spirit, and cleansed by the blood of Christ By the water ye keep the commandment,
Blood	Through blood the fetus is nourished and grows. In the birth, blood is spilt.	Blood of Christ, redeems mortals from death	By the blood ye are sanctified,
Spirit	Spirit body, literal offspring of God, joins mortal body	Cleansing power of Spirit, purifies mortals to dwell with God again	By the Spirit ye are justified, to enjoy eternal life

Most modern English translations omit much of verse seven (including BSB, BLB, JB, NAS, NEB, NIV, RSV).

1 John 5:9–13 We accept human testimony, but God’s testimony is greater . . . And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (NIV) God’s witness is far greater than man’s witness, yet humans often trust physical witnesses more than God’s spiritual witnesses. These verses give one pause to ask, what do I accept as a valid witness of truth, from whom, and how? Those who lack faith call for evidence and reasoning without a witness of the Spirit. God’s greatest witness, and gift of love, is the life and death of His Son Jesus. We accept God’s gift by using repentance through the Savior’s atonement, and then He opens the way for Eternal Life or exaltation.

1 John 5:13 “and that you may *continue to believe in the name of the Son of God*” (JST, NKJV). This last phrase in the KJV is missing from modern English translations. Interestingly, the JST addition of “continue” is also added in the New King James translation. Without this phrase, the verse speaks either of the Calvinistic thought that if one is given belief, they know they are predestined to exaltation, or else it is written to those sealed up to eternal life (also see verse 11). The JST clarifies that the audience still needs to continue working.

1 John 5:14–15 “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us” This may be misleading and need clarifying. We learn in D&C 6:14 that God always hears our prayers and gives us direction: “as often as thou hast inquired thou hast received instruction of my Spirit.” But He will only give us what we ask for if it is right. And “if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong” (D&C 9:9). God’s silence is actually a blessing, as His eternal perspective is more than we comprehend. Learning to ask according to God’s will, and to listen for all inspiration is a spiritual skill that requires the Spirit’s tutoring. John’s qualifying guideline leads us to begin our requests with: “may I pray for this?” or “is this the best thing I should be asking?” The key is to always seek the Spirit in prayer.



Old Saint Paul’s Nativity Detail by Karl Parsons.
Photo by PaulaR123 via Wikimedia Commons.

1 John 5:16 “If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life . . . There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that” (NIV). John may be encouraging disciples to pray for those who are sick, but I do not think so. There are two things that confuse me about this verse. First, is the sin unto death the unpardonable sin? Denying the sure witness of the Comforter? And second, by praying for someone else we cannot remove their own accountability.

1 John 5:17 “All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death” John refers to some form of the word “sin” twenty-seven times in this letter. The Greek noun and verb (*hamarta/hamartia*) mean: “missing the mark; hence: (a) guilt, sin, (b) a fault, failure (in an ethical sense), sinful deed.”³⁶ John does not leave room for rationalizing our mistakes as he defines: “All wrongdoing is sin” (RSV, NIV). The second half of this verse is confusing, in part because the ancient world often attributed illnesses to sins. He may also be referring to murder, or something else.

1 John 5:18–20 “We know . . .” John repeats “we know” three times at the end of his Epistle as a summary and testimony:

1. “. . . whosoever is born of God sinneth not” (repeated in John 3:6, 8). The KJV sounds as if the righteous cannot sin and those who are elect do not need to work toward becoming Christlike. But, the JST once again changes the Calvinistic wording by adding five new words and cutting out three. “Whosoever is born of God *continueth* not *in sin*; but he that is begotten of God *and* keepeth himself, that wicked one overcometh him not.” The addition of *overcometh* identifies how Satan attacks us. He tries to influence us, but we do not have to yield. If we are not sinning Satan cannot “overcome” or conquer us. Many modern English translations also add the phrase, “continue in sin,” as Joseph did.
2. “. . . we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (NIV) As we are surrounded by wickedness, we do not even recognize all of it.
3. “. . . the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him” (NIV) John triumphantly confesses our Savior and our potential to become one with Him (John 17:21). Again he uses the definition of “one” as “we are with him.” Truly knowing God in the deepest sense of the meaning is the same as receiving Eternal Life to live with Him. This is repeated from Jesus’ Last Supper where John’s focuses on the intercessory prayer (John 17).

1 John 5:21 “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” John closes his testimony with a warning to his audience, “little children,” against idols. Idols encompassed far more than the Ephesian statues of the goddess Diana (Acts 19:24, 27–28, 34). In this sense, an idol is anything that takes one away from God. What takes you from God? What interrupts your Sabbath day?

2 JOHN

Find the Doctrine of Christ through Love

Author

“The Elder [or Presbyter]” (traditionally, John the Beloved, son of Zebedee and Salome). Peter also introduced himself as an “Elder” (1 Peter 5:1). In the Restored church, we call our Apostles, “Elder” interchangeably, too. At the organization of the church, the Prophet Joseph taught: “an apostle is an elder” (D&C 20:38).

The early Christian historian, Eusebius, recorded that John lived in Ephesus after Paul had opened the mission.³⁷ He spoke of him being a very old man who was known by Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria. Even though John doesn’t identify himself as the beloved apostle, the style is very similar to his Gospel, and 1 John, so traditionally the authorship is given to the same man. We believe that Jesus gave John his desire to remain on the earth and serve God until the Second Coming (John 21:22–23).

Audience:

“The Elect [or Chosen] Lady and her children,” (used as a figure of speech for the church and its members). Most scholars assume that the Elder wrote to either a “house church” (the saints usually met in someone’s home), or his own family (which may have included Mary, the Lord’s mother, John 19:26–27). John or the Elder uses a more personal tone to tell them he will visit soon.

Themes

Truth and Love (which share similarities with the Gospel—John 1:14, 17, 8:44; 18:37).

Outline

- 1:1–3 Greetings
- 1:4–11 Walking in True Doctrine and Love
- 1:12–13 Final Greeting

2 JOHN 1

Greeting

2 John 1:1–3

2 John 1:1 “The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth” The analogy of the “church” as a lady was used by the Lord during His ministry. Jesus introduced Himself symbolically as the “bride groom” and the church as his bride (Mark 2:19). If the “elect lady” represents the church, then its members are



St. John the Evangelist by Titian, first half of 16th century. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

“her children.” Tradition holds that John wrote to an unnamed church congregation in or near Ephesus.

Another interpretation speculates that the “elect lady and her children” refer to John’s wife and family. Some also project that the “*elect lady*” may refer to Mary (if she were still living and in John’s charge, John 19:26). The Prophet Joseph used the same title for Emma in D&C 25:3.³⁸ John’s gospel and first epistle uses 3 words for “children,” but in these two letters, just one: *teknon*/“offspring . . . affectionate address, helpers.”

Whoever the lady and her children are, they were known and loved by “all who know the truth.” The smaller of the two Epistles of John each add truth and love to their otherwise standard Hellenistic greeting. The words “truth” and “love” are included together four times in this short Epistle, and once each in the other two (1 John 3:18; 2 John 1:1, 3, 10; 3 John 1:1).

2 John 1:2 “The truth that abides in us and will be with us forever” (ESV) The Gospels record Jesus as saying “I tell you the **truth**” over one-hundred times. If He is the source of truth, then the Elder may be referring to the Lord or the Spirit of the Lord that dwells in Him. Truth may also refer to God’s knowledge, or Jesus as the Christ, His teachings, revelation, or election.

2 John 1:3 “Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love” The opening is a customary greeting used twelve times in New Testament Epistles (with John adding, “*truth and love*”).

Walking in Truth and Love

2 John 1:4-6

2 John 1:4 “I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father has commanded us” (BSB) John compliments the “children/members” for living the gospel or “walking in truth” (BLB). Walking in the light is also a phrase that means something similar as used in the Dead Sea Scrolls.³⁹

2 John 1:5-6 “. . . we had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments” We do not know what “beginning” he refers to, but it is certainly since the beginning of the Gospel, and perhaps since the time of creation (Genesis 1:1). John’s definition of love is as an action verb. His emphasis on love is very consistent throughout his writings (this verse repeats portions of 1 John 2:7; 3:11; and

John 13:34, 35; 15:12). His definition for love, may refer to God as it relates to walking after His commandments, or it may be teaching a broader truth, that all divine love includes obeying the Gospel. The Johannine writings consistently teach that if we really love God, then we will love our fellow humans.

Beware of Deceivers

2 John 1:7-12

2 John 1:7 “Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist” The same troubles of apostasy that were repeated in seven verses in 1 John are also a problem for these Christians (and in Alma 30:12–48, with Korihor, “there should be no Christ,” and Jung, existentialists, etc.). Anti-Christians promoted the idea that Jesus was not the Messiah, nor that he was resurrected with a body of flesh. “The full implication of this teaching attacks revelation, prophets, resurrection, and authority. It also promotes skepticism, empiricism, survival of the fittest, naturalism, and moral relativism.”⁴⁰

2 John 1:8–9 “Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son” (NIV) A belief of Jesus is essential for any real worship of the Father, as He is our mediator with Elohim. He teaches that Christians must obey and honor the teachings of Jesus. Literally “continue,” or “abideth” (KJV), or “without remaining” (BSB) means, “going ahead and remaining in the teaching of Christ.” Not only should the saints hold to what was taught from the beginning, but they should also be cautions that all of learning is truth (similar to 1 John 2:23, 24).

2 John 1:10 “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him” This probably refers to the “house-churches” that the saints gathered in for worship meetings.⁴¹ We must not support those who teach falsehoods or attack the Lord’s church. They are building up Satan’s kingdom. Elder Dallin H. Oaks gave a Conference talk to that effect.⁴² Paul, Peter, and John all warn against false teachers who may splinter the saints and obscure the truth.

2 John 1:11 “. . . neither bid him God speed” The 1600 KJV phrase, “God speed” wished one prosperity. The greeting in Greek, wished one well. Evil itinerant preachers could only exist if they were accepted and fed. To stop supporting them would stop their heretical preaching (as refraining from shopping on Sunday would close the stores on Sunday).

2 John 1:12–13 “I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. The children of your sister, who is chosen by God, send their greetings” (NIV) John apologizes for his brevity and hopes for a future visit. He ends with a greeting from the saints from his current congregation, “thy elect sister” (KJV).

3 JOHN

Author

The Elder or Presbyter (2 John)

Themes

Shared with John 1:14, 17, 8:44; 18:37

- Truth and love,
- Good and Bad Leadership

Audience

John wrote a personal note to a friend named, Gaius, it is the shortest letter in the New Testament. It was probably the length of a piece of parchment.

Outline

- 1:1–4 Greetings
- 1:5–8 Gaius Thanked for Hospitality
- 1:9–12 Do not follow a bad Example
- 1:13–14 Final Greeting

Greetings

3 John 1:1–4

3 John 1:1 “The elder, To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth” (NIV) The author again opens by naming himself, “Elder” (see 2 John 1:1). He writes to a fellow saint named, GAIUS, about missionary fellowship. Gaius was a popular first name in the Roman Empire.⁴³ We can find two or three different people named Gaius in New Testament within Paul’s circles (Acts 19:29; 20:4; 1 Corinthians 1:14; Romans 16:23). All three names in the epistle are Greco-Roman, without any derivative Hebrew or Semitic connections. This suggests that these men were gentile converts, but probably were three different people.

3 John 1:2 “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers” (NKJV) The wish of prosperous health—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—was a common greeting in Greek correspondence. We presume it means that if “the Elder” is John, then he used a scribe trained in Greek writing. This is the only Epistle that includes this standard greeting in the New Testament.

3 John 1:3–4 “. . . I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” John had heard from “some believers” (NIV), or traveling missionaries, that Gaius was still a faithful saint, and includes him as “my children.” As mentioned earlier, the use of “children”/*teknon* was an endearing term used by masters for their disciples. Just as in the previous letters, John emphasizes “walking in truth” (ESV) here and in the following verse as an action approach to living Christ’s Gospel. This Greek verb for “walk”/*peripateó*, was used Hebraistically in an ethical sense as “I conduct my life, lives.”⁴⁴

This verse has beautiful implications to families—our nuclear, extended, adopted, and church families. Missionaries certainly feel this for their converts. I really think John meant a far broader circle that stretched beyond his posterity to his children in the gospel.

Gaius Commended for Hospitality

3 John 1:5–8

3 John 1:5–6 “Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner that honors God” (NIV) John thanks Gaius for his kindness and for extending love to the visiting leaders, whom he did not know previously. We get a picture of the early church leaders traveling to different groups of Christians. Gaius’ example to support missionaries and church leaders is still applicable. He helped to build the kingdom from his home. We, too, help the missionary work when we help a missionary. This message of brotherly love is consistent throughout John’s writings.

3 John 1:7–8 “For they went out on behalf of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers for the truth” (BSB) Missionaries and servants of God go forth as representatives of His Name. This is especially true of the Apostles. The work is not ours, but His. We help as servants of God to build His Kingdom. The text sounds as if their leaders or missionaries went without purse or script (Luke 10:4; 22:35–36).

Diotrephes and Demetrius

3 John 1:9–10 I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us. So when I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, spreading malicious nonsense about us” (NIV) In contrast to Gaius’ loyalty and hospitality, John also wrote to warn him of Diotrephes, a bad example of a church leader. (This is the only time the word “church” appears in the Gospel or epistles of John.) It appears that Diotrephes served in a local congregation with Gaius. John alerts him of three specific problems.

4. Diotrephes likes to be foremost and will not bend to other leaders.

5. He ignored the authority of John by rejecting an earlier letter to the church. (If Peter has died, then John acts as the head of the church at this point.) The RSV reads, “does not acknowledge my authority.”
6. He cast out good members of the church. No heresy seems to be involved, just insubordination by an ambitious official.

If we can trust an early Christian source, *Apostolical Constitutions*, the story had a happy ending as John later ordained Diotrephes as a bishop of Philadelphia.⁴⁵

3 John 1:11 “Beloved, follow not that which is evil . . . He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God” The letter teaches this principle: follow those who do good, or bear good fruit. Little punishment is mentioned, other than to not follow his example. John’s writing often sounds like Mormon: “all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil” (Moroni 7:12; also see Omni 1:25).

3 John 1:12 “Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him” (NIV) Demetrius is the third person mentioned by name in this letter. We find the same name (but probably a different person) in Acts 19:24, and a Demas (possibly short for Demetrius) in Philemon 1:24 and Colossians 4:14. Demetrius may have delivered John’s letter, or perhaps he needed a little extra validation from Gaius.

3 John 1:13–14 “I had many things to write, but . . . I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace *be* to thee. *Our* friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name” The similarity between the second and third of John’s endings is one of the reasons why we assume it was the same author. John adds one addition to Gaius that has general application to church members and leaders which is to become acquainted with one’s fellow flock members well enough to call them by name.

JUDE

Warnings and Exhortations

Author

Jude is the nickname for Yehuda, Judah, Juda, or Judas. He introduces himself as a servant of Christ and “brother of James.” The New Testament includes multiple James and Judas.

7. One of the original Twelve Apostle, Judas, is identified in Luke 6:16 as “Judas *the brother* of James” in the KJV, and “Judas the son of James” in most modern translations. To differentiate himself from Judas Iscariot, he may have chosen to shorten his name, as Jude.

8. Judas in Matthew 14:55, is identified as the brother to James and son of Mary and Joseph, and half-brother of Jesus: “Is not this the carpenter’s son. . . and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?” (Mark 6:3).
9. James the brother of John the Beloved, son of Zebedee and Salome, is most well known in the Gospels, but we do not know of another brother named Jude or Judas.

We also see similarities phrases in this Epistle that are found in 2 Peter which opens the possibility of shared authorship, original source material, or scribes.

Audience

Jude writes to devout Christians who are “sanctified,” “preserved,” and “called” (Jude 1:1, KJV). The audience probably included Jewish converts to Christianity, as the text includes “you already know all this” and then quotes several Old Testament and apocryphal stories from Moses’ exodus, Korah’s sons, Enoch, Michael, and Cain (Jude 1:5, NIV). The audience was aware of attacks against their faith by “scoffers” trying to destroy the church.

Structure

The Epistle of Jude was carefully crafted. It opens with a friendly wish of God’s blessings. The body of the letter exhorts the saints to “earnestly contend for the faith.” The first of the two main sections warns against apostates that had crept in by deceit (1:4–16). This material is organized to alternate between crime and punishment in triplets. In the second half, Jude admonishes the saints to steadfastness which he divides into two parts—prophecy and exhortation (1:17–25). He also uses key words that give the letter unity and bind it together.



Chiasm

Jerome H. Neyrey found “a hint” of a chiastic structure in the exposition from verses 4–17.⁴⁶

- A 1:4a. Opponents proscribed
- B 1:4b Opponents labeled as godless
- C 1:6 Those judged kept in darkness
- C' 1:13 Those judged kept in darkness
- B' 1:15–16 Opponents labeled as godless
- A' 1:17 Opponents pre-told

Outline⁴⁷

- 1:1–2 Opening Blessing
- 1:1:3 Exhortation for Faithfulness
- 1:1:4–16 Crimes and Punishment
 - 1:4 Three Charges against Deceivers
 - 1:5–7 Three Paradigms of Punishment
 - 1:8 Three Charges
 - 1:9 Prophecy of Punishment
 - 1:10 Charge and Punishment
 - 1:11 Three Paradigms of Punished Sinners
 - 1:12–13 Multiple Metaphors of Charges
 - 1:14–16 Prophecies of Punishment
- 1:1:17–23 Warnings and Exhortations to Faith, Love
 - 1:17–19 Prophecies of Wicked
 - 1:20–23 Exhortations: Build Faith, Prayer, the Spirit
- 1:1:24–25 Benediction

Greetings

Jude 1:1–3

Jude 1:1–2 “Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, *and* called” We understand Jude’s audience and their relationship to God more intimately as we look closely at three Greek words. They are: “loved”/*agapaó* by the Father, and “kept intact”/*téreó* “to watch over, to guard” by the Savior, and “invited”/*kléto* “summoned by God to an office or to salvation.”⁴⁸ This summarizes the attachment and stewardship that disciples have with the Godhead. That sweet

relationship between saints and God provides mercy, peace, and love. The title, “God the Father,” is found twenty-nine times in New Testament, all but one are found in the Epistles (across several English translations).

Jude 1:3 “Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith” (NIV) The purpose of this Epistle is an “exhort[ation] . . . to contend earnestly” (BLB) “to defend the faith” (CEV). Jude feels obligated to admonish the saints to protect the truths which God entrusted to them.

Deceivers Pervert Truth—Their Crimes and Punishments

Jude 1:4-16

Jude 1:4 “Certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you” (NIV) While they pose to give help, apostates “secretly or under pretense . . . slip in a side door”/*pareisduno* but deceitfully lure believers away.⁴⁹ These deceivers “pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality” (NIV). The same problem exists in many forms of today’s Christianity (also see 2 Peter 2:1).

“**this condemnation, ungodly ones changing the grace of our God into sensuality and denying our only master**” (BLB) This verse lists the first of three crimes, and their punishment follows in the next three verses:

1. Ungodly men came to the church stealthily to deceive
2. Licensed immorality
3. Denied the Sovereign Lord, Jesus Christ

Jude 1:5 “Although you are fully aware of this, I want to remind you that after Jesus had delivered His people out of the land of Egypt, He destroyed those who did not believe” (BSB) Jude illustrates the punishment of the wicked with Old Testament examples of apostates who also enticed and disrupted faith of the Israelites. An entire generation died off for their disbelief. Jude warns that those Christians who yearn for worldliness or “Egypt” will fall into the same pattern.

Jude 1:6 “angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great

CRIMES

PUNISHMENTS

day” The fallen angels followed Lucifer in the “first estate.” Only the KJV translates the phrase “just estate,” and the Prophet Joseph Smith used it again to translate Abraham 3:26, 28 when describing our premortal existence. Other faiths interpret this verse as referring to angels who abandoned their “positions of authority” (NIV), or “did not stay within their own domain” (BSB). Without the context of the restoration, one cannot see the full meaning of this verse. Fortunately, the prophet Joseph Smith taught:

The spirits in the eternal world are like the spirits in this world. When those have come into this world and received tabernacles, then died and again have risen and received glorified bodies, they will have an ascendancy over the spirits who have received no bodies, or kept not their **first estate**, like the devil. The punishment of the devil was that he should not have a habitation like men. The devil’s retaliation is, he comes into this world, binds up men’s bodies, and occupies them himself. When the authorities come along, they eject him from a stolen habitation.⁵⁰

Jude 1:7 “Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire” (NIV) The third example of punishment falls on sexual immorality. The Bible often refers to Sodom and Gomorrah as a warning of similar punishment for sexual immorality (Genesis 18:20; 19:28; Isaiah 13:19; Jeremiah 49:18; 50:40; Amos 4:11; Matthew 10:13; 2 Peter 2:6). In 2004, Elder Boyd K. Packer compared our society to Sodom and Gomorrah as well: “Nothing happened in Sodom and Gomorrah which exceeds in wickedness and depravity that which surrounds us now . . . [Then] these things were localized. Now they are spread across the world, and they are among us.”⁵¹ Jude warns his audience that God will enforce this disobedience with severe consequences.

Jude 1:8 “In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams these ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings” Jude makes three more charges. The *Anchor Bible* translates this second phrase about dreamers, as “hypnotized as they are.”⁵² We can recognize this type of apostate because they:

4. Contaminate or defile their God given bodies
5. Do not respect God’s servants as having authority
6. Speak evil of the Lord’s anointed

CRIMES

Jude 1:9 “Even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, “The Lord rebuke you!”” (NIV) In the biblical canon, Jude alone tells stories from this apocryphal book, *The Assumption of Moses*.⁵³ It describes Moses’ translation in front of Joshua and Caleb (also see D&C 84:25).⁵⁴ The apocryphal story describes Satan and Michael debating over Moses killing the Egyptian. Michael, the archangel steps in to remind the Devil that God is the judge, “The Lord will punish you” (CEV). Jude depicts apostates as the devil who reviled against Moses. He wants the saints to also say likewise and rebuke the servants of the devil who are slandering the church leaders.

Jude 1:10–11 “These people slander whatever they do not understand . . . Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain . . . Balaam’s . . . Korah’s rebellion” (NIV) Jude again rebukes the deceivers for speaking of things which they do not know, and attack God’s laws.⁵⁵ He then offers three more Old Testament examples that illustrate wicked men who receive God’s punishment.

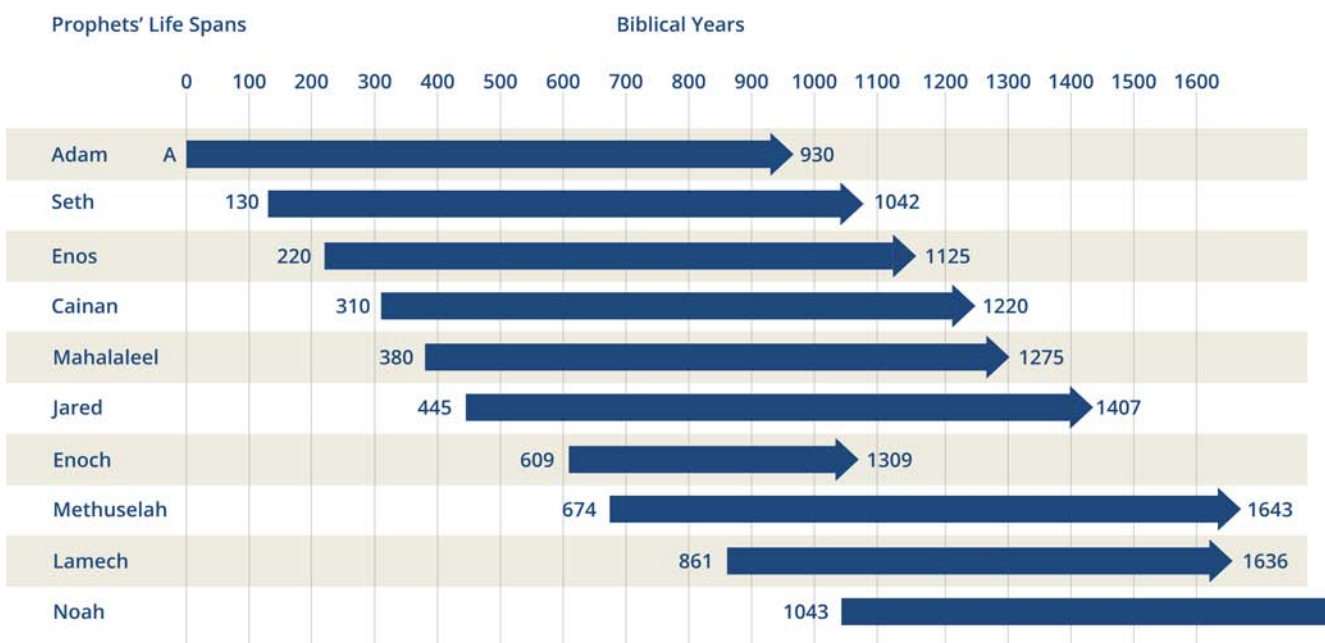
1. **Cain** is Jude’s next example of heresy. Cain represents “the archetype of those who through zeal, envy, social dissatisfaction, and hostility to society, drive their brethren in the faith to death.”⁵⁶ The fratricide of apostates may be spiritual death, but it well could lead to murder as well with the growth of Christian persecution (especially under Domitian in ~AD 95).
2. **Balaam’s** sin of idolatry sought to seduce God’s people to follow alien masters and then paid the false teachers for gaining followers.
3. **Korah (Core)**, was an Israelite who rebelled against Moses’ authority by instigating a rebellion (Numbers 16:1–35). Jude warns his readers that they will end up like sons of Korah if they follow these men.

Jude 1:12–13 “These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain . . . wild waves . . .” (NIV) Early Christians referred to partaking of the Lord’s sacrament as a “feasts of charity” or “love feasts.” Paul also described Sabbath shared meals (xx). Jude’s three physical examples of clouds, waves, trees, are self-explanatory for the similar effects left by these apostates. The overlap with 2 Peter 2:13, 14, 17.

Prophecies of Punishment

Jude 1:14-16

Jude 1:14-15 “Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon . . . all their ungodly deeds” The prophet Enoch is mentioned in eleven biblical verses (Genesis 4:17, 18; 5:18, 19, 21-24; Luke 3:37; Hebrews 11:5; Jude 1:14). The table below outlines the timeline of prophets as described by years in Genesis. The table below shows where Enoch fits into the biblical timeline:



Jude refers to ten-thousand saints who will join the Lord at His Second Coming, which the Book of Revelations echoes. Outside of the Bible, three other ancient texts shed more light on him.

- First or Ethiopic Enoch—quoted by Jude (1 Enoch 1:9). Today, Jews and traditional Christians do not hold Enoch as scripture.
- Second or Slavonic Enoch,
- Third or Hebrew Enoch describes Rabbi Ishmael’s vision of Enoch in the 7th heaven (discovered 1873).

JOSEPH SMITH AND ENOCH

In addition, the Prophet Joseph Smith received much information on Enoch by revelation including Moses 6-7 and eleven verses in the D&C. The restored texts have unique information as well as some that collaborate with

the three apocryphal books of Enoch.⁵⁷ Joseph Smith also spoke of both Enoch and Jude in a sermon in Nauvoo:

Now this Enoch God reserved unto Himself, that he should not die at that time, and appointed unto him a ministry unto terrestrial bodies, of whom there has been but little revealed. He is reserved also unto the Presidency of a dispensation, and more shall he said of him and terrestrial bodies in another treatise. He is a ministering angel, to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation and appeared unto Jude as Abel did unto Paul; therefore, Jude spoke of him (14, 15 verses).⁵⁸

PUNISHMENTS

Jude 1:15–16 “To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly . . . murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts . . .” The Lord will execute judgment on all (good and bad). He will convince the unrepentant of their sins. This becomes a regular in restored scripture as well with over fifty reference (i.e. 2 Nephi 9:15–16, 46; etc.).

Prophecies of Wicked

Jude 1:17–19

Jude 1:17–18 “But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold . . . ‘In the last times there will be scoffers” Jude and 2 Peter 3:3 cite this statement from the Lord warning His apostles that persecution would rise among the wicked (although it is not in our Gospels).

Jude 1:19 “It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit” (ESV) He offers another key to discern false leaders or teachers. They “separate themselves” (KJV) which means they cause divisions among the people, as well as value materialism, and do not have the Spirit of God directing them.

Exhortations to Build Faith, Prayer with the Spirit, Seek God’s Love

Jude 1:20–23

Jude 1:20–21 “But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for . . . eternal life” (NIV) Jude offers three keys to the saints to avoid apostasy:

1. Build your faith (the Book of Mormon teaches this happens when joined by repentance, Helaman 5:41)
2. Pray with the Spirit (also see D&C 50:29–30; 101:27)
3. Seek God’s Love as you Patiently Wait our Savior’s gifts (also see 1 Nephi 11:25; Jacob 3:2, 6–7; etc.)

Jude 1:22 Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire . . . even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh” (NIV) This image comes from the ancient practice of stopping the spread of disease by fire. The Law of Moses instructed clothing should be burned if it were spotted with diseases. So too D&C 36:6 reads: “Save yourselves from this untoward generation, and come forth out of the fire, hating even the garments spotted with the flesh.” Jude exhorts the saints to avoid contact with even a spot of sin.

Benediction: Doxology

Jude 1:24–25

Jude 1:24–25 “To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.” Jude close his Epistle with a benediction, asking God for divine help to “to keep you from falling.” In Christian terms, these last two verses form a “doxology” (a liturgical formula of praise to God) just as we find in Romans 11:36; 16:25–27; Galatians 1:5; Philippians 4:20; Ephesians 3:20–21; 1 Timothy 4:17; 6:16; 2 Timothy 4:18; and 2 Peter 3:18. Look at the similarities between these prayers or hymns (these use the *Anchor Bible* translations⁵⁹):

ROMANS 16:25–27

to him who is able
to strengthen you . . .
to the only wise God.
be glory
forevermore
Amen

EPHESIANS 3:20–22

To him. . . who is
able to do . . .
to Him
be glory
to all generations
Amen

JUDE 1:24–25

to the One who can guard
you . . . to the only God
be glory, majesty, might,
and authority
before all ages, now and
forever
Amen

2 PETER 3:18

to him
be the glory both now
and to the day of
eternity
Amen

The Lord's prayer also acknowledged God the Father's glory and included about one third of the prayer filled with praise and honoring God. So too Jude's last words reflect his witness and testimony of God.

Header Image: Saint John the Evangelist Weeping by Colijn de Coter, ca. 1504. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

1. As explained earlier in Romans 1, “Introduction,” biblical compilers organized the Epistles by length, not chronologically. Paul wrote the most, so his books all come first—largest to smallest. John wrote next to the shortest epistles, so his first letters come at the end, ending with the shortest, Jude.
2. Raymond Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Epistles of John* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 20. Brown does not think all four books share the same author, even though he quotes another scholar who argued: “The three Epistles and the Gospel of John are so closely allied in diction, style, and general outlook that the burden of proof lies with the person who would deny their common authorship.”
3. Brown, *Epistles of John*, 10. “Tertullian (d. AD 215) cites 1 John some forty or fifty times, referring to it as the work of John. Clement of Alexandria (d. ca. AD 220) not only cites 1 John but speaks of it as ‘the greater epistle.’”
4. Terry L. Wilder, J. Daryl Charles, Kendell H. Easley, *Faithful to the End: An Introduction to Hebrews Through Revelation* (Nashville, TN: Zondervan, 2007), 173. Papias of Hierapolis (died 120), “was the first one to refer expressly to a letter of John as being the work of the apostle. Irenaeus credited John with writing 1 and 2 John. Origen designated the apostle as the author of all three letters.” In spite of this, scholars have debated the issue for centuries. By the fourth century these epistles were generally accepted as scripture and placed before Revelations.
5. At times the JST is not restoring what was originally said, but adds clarification like modernizing spellings.
6. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:290.
7. Strong’s #2842, <https://biblehub.com/greek/2842.htm> (accessed 11-11-19)
8. Elder Jörg Klebingat, “Approaching the Throne of God with Confidence,” General Conference October 2014.
9. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988), 111.
10. Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” General Conference April 2019.
11. Strong’s, #5040, <https://biblehub.com/greek/5040.htm> (accessed 11/11/19).
12. Ibid., #3875, <https://biblehub.com/greek/3875.htm> (accessed 11/11/19). “Notice Jesus is the paraclete (‘advocate’), a title which the Gospel applies to the Spirit.” Brown, *Concise Commentary*, 111.
13. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:381.
14. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, 558–559.
15. Brown, *Concise Commentary*, 111.
16. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, “Exaltation,” Margaret Pope, 3.479.
17. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, *The Allegory of the Olive Tree* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1994), 271.
18. Kelly Ogden, Andrew Skinner, *New Testament Apostles Testify of Christ* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1998), 295.
19. Elder Jörg Klebingat, “Approaching the Throne of God with Confidence,” General Conference October 2014.
20. Brown, *Concise Commentary*, 115.
21. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 4.266. The Holy Spirit of Promise also became a topic that Joseph addressed outside

of the revelation.

22. There is debate on the role of the “light of Christ,” as restored scripture includes a range of influences. For example, this is the light “which is in all things, which giveth life to all things” (D&C 88:13, 11; also see 84:46).
23. Preface to Book of Mormon, circa August 1829, Historical Introduction, (<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/search?query=lost%2016%20pages&sort=relevance&page=1&perpage=10&startdate=&enddate=&transcripts=false&issuggestion=false&types=documents-papers|documents-papers-documents|related-materials|biographical-directory|geographical-directory|glossary|event> (accessed 11-16-19).
24. Dallin H. Oaks, “Taking upon Us the Name of Jesus Christ,” General Conference April 1985. He also published a book on this entitled, *His Holy Name*.
25. 1 John 2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11; 3J 1:1, 3, 5, 11. The KJV translates nine as “beloved,” but in 1 John 2:7, uses “brethren.”
26. George A. Smith, Sermon, November 28, 1869, in “Minutes of Meetings Held in Provo City,” microfilm of holograph, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. (“It should be noted that at the time of this statement of George A. Smith, the Mormons were in a debate with a growing number of Spiritualists in Utah, and hence had a reason to emphasize the importance of discernment.” <http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=imwjournal>)
27. Raymond Brown, *Anchor Bible: The Epistles of John* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 502.
28. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 375–6.
29. These ideas of early Gnosticism are also reflected in 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, 2 Peter, and Colossians.
30. Brown, *Anchor Bible: The Epistles of John*, 485.
31. *Ibid.*, 514. For a review of what John taught on *being “born of God,”* see John 3:3–7; 1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18.
32. *Ibid.*, 516.
33. Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 209–210. A rich visionary culture filled early America with many prophets. Susan Juster documents over three hundred published sources of unorthodox prophets who circulated their visions in early America. The Prophet Joseph Smith’s vision, exceeded what was held to be the limits of acceptable responses to prayers, but it was not entirely unique. Terryl Givens has pointed out that many nineteenth-century visions often had a mythic orientation, but “Joseph’s language was anything but reveling with metaphor and obscurity.” Givens reported that Bushman found thirty-two published pamphlets that described visionary experiences between 1783 and 1815. Terryl Givens, *Hand of Mormon* (New York: Oxford, University Press, 2002), 72, 79. Perhaps a little more vagueness would have been easier for Joseph’s Methodist minister to accept. As it stood, though, his vision violated the minister’s bounds of propriety because in part of 1 John 4:12 KJV.
34. Brown, *Anchor Bible: The Epistles of John*, 561.
35. Class with Judith Moss, 2012, Palo Alto, Ca.
36. Strong’s # 264, 266. <https://biblehub.com/greek/264.htm> (accessed 11-14-19).
37. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*: III.23:7 “The church at Ephesus was founded by Paul, and John remained there till Trajan’s time; so she is a true witness of what the apostles taught.” Quoting Irenaeus (AD 180), *Against Heresies*,

book II; “All the cleargy [*sic*]who is Asia came in contact with John, the Lord’s disciple, testify that John taught the truth to them; for he remained with them till Trajan’s [98 to 117 A.D.] time.” There is still scholarly debate on this matter of John in Ephesus.

38. The Greek the word “*elect*” is from the same root as, “election” (as in the seal of “calling and election” from 2 Peter 1:10).
39. Brown, *Concise Commentary*, 123.
40. Kelly Ogden, *New Testament Apostles Testify of Christ*, 300.
41. Everett Ferguson, ed. *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd Ed (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2013), 546. “House-church” is used in New Testament to describe early Christian churches that met in the saints’ homes. The book of Acts and 1 Corinthians refers to these “house-churches” in Acts 1:13–14; 2:46; 20:7–12, 20;v 1 Corinthians 16:19.
42. Elder Dallin H. Oaks.
43. Brown, *Anchor Bible: The Epistles of John*, 702.
44. Strong’s, #4043, *peripateó*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/4043.htm> (accessed, 11-15-19).
45. John Stott, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Letters of John* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014, reprint), 237.
46. Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Anchor Bible: 2 Peter, Jude* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1993), 24.
47. *Ibid.*, 23; adapted.
48. Strong’s #25, 5083, 2822, <https://biblehub.com/greek/2822.htm> (accessed 11/15/19).
49. Strong’s #3921, *pareisduó*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/3921.htm> (accessed 11/15/19).
50. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:403; for original spelling of scribes notes see Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 205.
51. Elder Boyd K. Packer, “**Address to CES religious educators**,” Feb. 6, 2004, 4.
52. Neyrey, *The Anchor Bible: 2 Peter, Jude*, 65–66.
53. https://archive.org/stream/assumptionofmose00unknuoft/assumptionofmose00unknuoft_djvu.txt (accessed 11-15-19)
54. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, IV. viii, 48–49. “The children of Israel and Moses himself wept . . . Now as he went thence to the place where he was to vanish out of their sight, they all followed after him weeping; but Moses beckoned with his hand and bade them to stay behind in quiet . . . At Mount Abarim he dismissed the senate; and he was going to embrace Eleazar and Joshua and was still discoursing with them . . . A cloud stood over him on the sudden, and he disappeared in a certain valley, although he wrote in his holy books that he died” (referring to Deuteronomy 34:5–6).
55. Neyrey, *The Anchor Bible: 2 Peter, Jude*, 203. In approximately AD 95, 1st Clement also wrote about troublemakers who opposed authority.
56. Neyrey, *The Anchor Bible: 2 Peter, Jude*, 206; 1 Clement 4:1–7.
57. Hugh Nibley, *Enoch the Prophet* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1986).
58. Smith, *History Church*, 4:209; Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 41.
59. Neyrey, *The Anchor Bible: 2 Peter, Jude*, 95.



REVELATION 1–11

CHRIST'S COVENANT FULFILLED

Title: Revelation = Apocalypse

The title comes from the opening phrase: “a Revelation from Jesus Christ,” but the Greek word describes a specific type of revelation: “Apocalypses/*apokalupsis*/an unveiling, uncovering, revealing.”¹ In modern use, the word “revelation” is used to refer to all Divine inspiration in various forms. Yet, this book’s use of “apocalypses/unveiling,” has the limited meaning of uncovering the end of times.

Author: John the Beloved

John writes his “Revelation/Apocalypse/*apokalupsis*” from the “Island of Patmos” (Revelation 1:9, NIV). We date it at the end of the first century because Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyon (AD 120–203), recorded that John wrote his Apocalypses “towards the end of Domitian’s reign,” which ended in AD 96. As a second historical witness, Tertullian (AD 155–240) also said John was forced to Rome and “plunged, unhurt into boiling oil and thence remitted to his island exile.”² When the cult of Emperor Worship was enforced, Christians found themselves banished or killed. But Caesar Domitian was not able to kill John, so the apostle was exiled to an island

APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

A genre that prophesies about the end of time. It is highly symbolic and means: “something uncovered” or “revealed.” It includes prophetic visions that describe the supernatural and cataclysmic events (i.e. Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 37, the second half of Daniel, Apocalypse of Baruch, IV Enoch, and many more dating from 210 B.C. and 200 A.D.). It claims to record what the prophets saw in dreams or visions. It includes unusual images cloaked to inspire deep thinking to figure it out—like a riddle.



that was used as a prison. Patmos is 60 miles off the coast of Ephesus (the western coast of modern Turkey). It is a small rocky island 10 X 6 miles. In the fourth century, the historian Eusebius recorded that John resumed his residence in Ephesus after his exile on Patmos.

The other apostles had all been killed by this time.³ This was the blackest time in early Christian history. The book of Revelation was a great comfort and encouragement to the remaining Christians assuring them that Christ’s covenant would be fulfilled.

Audience

Apocalypse of John was written specifically to seven Christian churches around Ephesus (chapters 2 and 3). These seven are all off the main roads around Ephesus. These Christians knew about the ordinances and knew John as their ecclesiastical leader. Beyond these immediate seven churches, the revelation was written to testify to the world of Jesus as the Creator and Redeemer.

Synopsis

The Apocalypse of John describes a series of visions that symbolically depicted the history of the world. This is the only scripture that reveals the whole scope of the Lord’s

plan. We don’t have a full record yet (D&C 93:18). The record is filled with strange images and ideas to force the reader to deeply study in order to understand.

Many prophets received a vision of the history of the world: Adam, Enoch, the brother of Jared, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Nephi. Yet God gave John the responsibility of having his record known to the world (1 Nephi 14:24, 18–27; Ether 4:16; etc.).

Historical Understanding

The Book of Revelation was accepted as scripture in the first century, questioned in the second, and canonized in the third. From approximately AD 300 to 1000 it was interpreted as an allegory of good and evil with evil being

destroyed when Satan is bound. During the Reformation, Revelation received a physical process-oriented interpretation. They felt missionary work would commence for 1000 years and then Christ would come.

It was not until the Restoration that the Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith that the book was the chronological history of the earth (D&C 77:6–7). Each seal is a period of approximately one thousand biblical years of history. The Prophet Joseph Smith also taught about the Book of Revelation and left many keys to help understand the symbolism: D&C 77; 88; 93:18; Ether 4:15–16; and the JST. Knowledge of the ancient Israelite temple rites or the modern temple endowment also helps one understand the symbols and events described in John’s Apocalypses. With these important keys, the book more accessible than it ever has been. We hold the responsibility of reading, understanding, recognizing and preparing for the last days.

Summary of Restored Keys to Interpretation

These keys help unlock the door, but once inside, the text must be explored. The vision was recorded for us to learn from.

- D&C 77 is God’s “explanation of the Revelation of St. John” (follow footnotes and Topical Guide parallels).⁴
- Look for the Plan of Salvation and pray for the Spirit of Revelation.
- Commit time and thought to understanding by reading with an ancient Near Eastern mind set looking for symbols.
- Identify symbolism and numerology only from ancient scripture and temple texts (see Symbolism chart below).
- Approach as an apocalyptic puzzle or riddle of the future that God wants us to understand.

Outline

VISION	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE	NUMBER OF VERSES
Throne of God	1, 4–5	36
Seven Churches	2–3	51
BC 4000–1000	6:1–11	11
AD 1000– AD 2000	6:12–7:3	14
AD 2000 Second Coming	8:1–19:2	201
Millennium 20XX–30XX	20:1–6	6
Final Scenes	20:7–15	9
Celestialized Earth	21:2–22:6	33

Chapter Organization

(mainly a chronological history of the earth with four interludes)

1	Intro and Vision of the Christ <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 24 Elders• 4 Beasts
2–3	Message to Seven Churches <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Description of Christ• Condemnation• Challenge• Promise
4–5	Throne Theophony—Vision of Heavenly Father in His Temple and Christ accepting His Call
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Open 1st–6th SEALS: Unfold history of the earth depicted as• 6,000 years divided into six seals of the book• 4 horses one for each of the thousand years from Adam to Jesus’s birth
7	<i>Interlude</i> for a glimpse of the purified and exalted state of the noble saints—144,000
8–9	Open 7th SEAL including <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 6 of the 7 angels/servants sound their trumpets• First woe
10	<i>Interlude</i> of John’s call
11	Continued 7th SEAL <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 Witnesses in Jerusalem• 2nd Woe Finished• 7th Angel sounds trumpet
12–14	Kingdom of God vs. Kingdom of Satan <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Woman as the Church of God appears• Premortal war with Lucifer continued on earth with Dragon or Serpent• Christ harvests His Righteous
15	<i>Interlude</i> of Heavenly Temple with 7 Angels with 7 Last Plagues
16	Final scenes of the world <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7 Angels Pour out Plagues• Battle of Armageddon
17–18	<i>Interlude</i> of Great and Abominable Organizations followed by the Fall of Wickedness/Babylon
19	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Marriage Supper of God and His Saints• The Conquering Christ Returns to Judge on a White Horse• Satan and His Devils are Cast Out
20	Millennium, and Afterward, the Final Scenes of the World <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Battle of God and Magog• Final Judgement
21–22	New Heaven and New Earth

Dealing with—

Symbolism⁵

GOD

Eyes	Light and Knowledge, Multiple Eyes is Omniscience
Cloud	Shekinah, God's Glory & Protection in the Wilderness
White raiment of Priests/Priestess	Robes of the High Priest (Ex 29:5; Dan 10:5)
Sword	God's Word: Command, Judgment
Bridegroom	Jesus the Messiah or Christ
Heavenly Things	
Angels	Heavenly Servants (JST)
Horns	Power and Strength, both Good and Bad
Wings	Power to Act
Incense	Ascending Prayers of the Righteous
Sun	Celestial Glory, the Son of God, Daily Reminder of Second Coming
Mountains	Temples, Patterned after the Heavenly Temple, Separation from the Word
Sea of Glass	Omniscience of Heaven or Celestialized Earth

MAN

Kings-Priests/Queens-Priestess	Heirs of God (Revelation 1:6; D&C 84:38)
Name	Personal Character, Authority, or New Name for the Initiated
Crown	Conqueror (laurel wreath in John's time)
Candlestick	Church (source of light is Christ)
Golden Sash and Bow	Clothing for Kings and Priests, respectively
Stars	Servants/Angels of God (i.e. church leaders)
Forehead	Desire, Thoughts (also associated with heart)
Sealing on forehead	Anointed with Calling and Election
Book eaten by John	Mission Call Internalized
Bride or Woman	God's Church Members or Covenant Israel

ANIMALS

4 Beasts	Individual Animals Representing their Classes in Heaven
Lamb and Sheep	Christ and His Disciples, Gentleness, Meekness, Humility, Submissiveness
Serpent or Snake	Originally a Symbol of Christ that was Usurped by Satan's Temptations
Horses	War Animal
Dragon	Evil, Destruction (in Greek snake and dragon are interchangeable)

NUMBERS

7 Seals	7,000-year History of Adam's Posterity on the Earth
1/3	Portion, Limited, Bounds Have Been Set
2	In Hebrew the Life Force, Creative Power, Male and Female, Witnesses
3	Godhead, Divine Involvement Related to Atonement (3 hours, 3 days, 3 crosses)
3 ½	Arrested Midway
4	Geographic Fullness, Totality, Four Quarters (not corners) of the Earth
6	Not Complete, Imperfect
7	Creation, Complete, Whole, Fullness, Perfection, Eternal Life (Egyptian)
8	Christian Sabbath, Rebirth, Covenant of Circumcision, and Baptism
12	Divine Order, Priesthood, Heavenly Order (12 months, etc.)
24	Fullness of Priesthood, Exaltation or One's Calling and Election Sure
40	Period of Purification, Trial, Testing, Probation, Mourning
144	Priesthood Power Perfected (any multiple of 12 speaks of God's order)
666	Trinity of Imperfection, Satan, Great and Abominable, Anti-Christ
1000	Large Number, Period of Time, Magnified Number, Length of Seal

COLORS

White	Victory, Purity, Righteousness, Spirit, Light, Revelation
Black	Sorrow, Grief, Mourning, Sin, Judgment, Darkness, Destruction
Red or Scarlet	Atonement, Mortality, Blood, Bloodshed, Sin, Violence
Brass	Judgment, Stability, Strength, Endurance, Permanence
Gold	Divine, Wealth, Celestial, or, Worldliness (depending on the context)
Pale	Impending Death, Cadaver
Green	Vegetation, Life

REVELATION 1

Prologue

Revelation 1:1–3

Revelation 1:1 “**The Revelation of John, a servant of God, which was given unto him of Jesus Christ, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass**” (JST) Joseph Smith felt inspired to make many changes to the first eight verses. The text speaks mainly of the future. The past is barely touched on, while the last days before Second Coming gets the most attention. The text was written for future readers—with keys to unlock it.

In the last phrase of this verse, John used the plural, “servants.” The Berean Bible (BSB) capitalizes “His servants” to clarify that it refers to servants of the Lord. We are the Lord’s servants when we do what the Master asks. Those who follow the promptings of the Spirit are the Lord’s servants. The Lord wants His servants to receive this information to help them prepare for the Second Coming. In that sense, the book is written to us. It will “shortly come to pass” in the sense that all is as one day with God” (Alma 40:8; also see D&C 63:53; 64:24).

“**He sent and signified by his angel unto his servant John**” The word “signified” is significant. John learned these things when an angel “gave a sign/*sémainó*/make known.”⁶ This means John was able to trust the angel as a servant of God because he recognized a divine “sign.” The Prophet Joseph Smith also warned that if we receive a spiritual visitor, we should ask them to shake hands to determine if they are from God or the devil (D&C 129:5 explains that if they are resurrected, they will shake hands with us). In this manner, the angel gave John some sort of a sign to identify himself as a divine messenger.

Revelation 1:3 “**Blessed are they who read, and they who hear and understand . . . and keep those things that are written**” (JST) John charges the saints with receiving this Apocalypse and seeking to understand it as a gift from God to prepare for His Coming. From the synagogue practice, the Christians read their sacred texts in their worship services. Joseph changed the text from “he who reads” to “they who read,” which opened the audience beyond the ancient initial audience.

Greeting to the Seven Churches

Revelation 1:4–8

Revelation 1:4–5a “**Now this is the testimony of John to the seven servants who are over the seven churches in Asia . . . who hath sent forth his angel from before his throne . . . Therefore, I, John, the faithful witness, bear record of the things which were delivered me of the angel, and from Jesus Christ**” (JST *italicized*) John testifies that he will accurately convey the Divine message that he received. The number seven is used 55 times in

the Apocalypses and represents whole, complete, or perfect. (In John's Gospel he also used seven symbolically, including only seven miracles and seven sermons of Jesus.)

Revelation 1:5b–6 “. . . Unto him who loved us, *be glory; who washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God*” (JST) John describes and honors our Redeemer by acknowledging several aspects of His atoning gift, including the potential to purify us to serve as priests to God.

Revelation 1:7 “*He cometh in the clouds with then thousands of his saints in the kingdom, clothed with the glory of his Father. And every eye shall see him. . . Amen*” (JST) Christ's triumphal entrance this time will be to earth in the clouds with God's glory. The children of Israel previously were blessed with a “cloud by day” (Numbers 14:14). When the Savior comes again, He will be the pillar of light along with the Divinely given clouds.

John's Vision of the Son of Man: A Throne Theophany

Revelation 1:9–11

Revelation 1:9–11 “**I, John, your brother . . . in the suffering . . . and patient endurance . . . was on the island of Patmos . . . on the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: ‘Write on a scroll . . .’**” (NIV) John had suffered for his testimony of Jesus Christ. As a translated being, his body changed to lengthen his life and remove physical pain, but he still “suffered” emotional pain. We learn in the Book of Mormon, “ye shall not have pain while ye shall dwell in the flesh, neither sorrow save it be for the sins of the world (3 Nephi 28:9; also see John 21:20–23; D&C 7).⁷

Revelation 1:12–13 “**I saw seven golden lampstands. And in the middle of the lampstands saw one like the Son of Man, dressed in a long robe reaching to his feet, and he wore a gold sash around His chest**” (NTC).⁸ John sees the heavenly temple with the glorified Savior. The seven-branched candlestick or menorah stood near the veil in all Israelite temples. It represented the Tree of Life from the Garden of Eden, and the way back to the presence of God.⁹ Jesus identified Himself as the “light of the world” and “I am the light which ye shall hold up” (John 8:12; 3 Nephi 16:24). In this vision, there are seven, or a complete amount of light, surrounding the Son of Man “of Holiness” (Moses 6:57). They represent John's seven churches (Revelation 1:20).

Revelation 1:14–15 “**His hairs are white like wool . . . eyes are like a flame of fire . . . feet are like fine bronze . . . voice is like the voice of many waters**” (BLB) John's Throne Theophanies are similar to those found in Isaiah 1:18; 6:1:–8; Daniel 7:9; etc.

Revelation 1:16 “**He is holding in His right hand seven stars**” (BLB) The Lord's right, or covenant hand, held “complete” light which may include healing and omniscience. Just as He did with His parables, the Lord explains the meaning to John. The stars represent the seven “angels” or “servants” over the seven churches (1:20, JST).

Both mean messengers of the Lord.

“and a sharp two-edged sword is going forth out of His mouth; and His face is like the sun shining” (BLB) His piercing voice is likened to the strongest sword known, probably representing the strongest words known (Hebrews 4:12). By the power of His word, He created the earth (Jacob 4:9; Mormon 9:17). The “sun” represents celestial.

Revelation 1:17–19 “when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead. And He placed His right hand upon me, saying, ‘Fear not. . . I have the keys of Death and of Hades”” (BLB) John is overwhelmed by the Lord’s grandeur. Jesus comforts John by touching him with His covenant hand and giving the assurance that he has nothing to fear, not even the pains of hell.

Revelation 1:19–20 “Write . . . the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter. The mystery . . .” When Jesus has to explain the images, we realize that John wrote what he saw. The strange figures and ideas require one to study to solve it.

Instruction to the Seven Churches

Revelation 2–3

Each of the seven churches receives a pattern of counsel.¹⁰ The following chart shows an abbreviated version of their message.

SEVEN CHURCHES

JESUS’ TITLE

CONDEMNATION

PROMISES

EPHESUS
(Revelation 2:1–7)

These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember . . . from whence thou art fallen, and repent

To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

SMYRNA
(Revelation 2:8–11)

These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not . . .

He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

PERGAMOS
(Revelation 2:12–17)

These things saith he
which hath the sharp
sword with two edges;

But I have a few things
against thee . . . to eat
things sacrificed unto
idols, and to commit
fornication. So hast thou.
. . the doctrine of the
Nicolaitans, which thing I
hate. Repent

To him that overcome will
I give to eat of the hidden
manna, and will give him
a white stone, and in the
stone a new name written
which no man know
saving he that receiveth it

THYATIRA
(Revelation 2:18–29)

These things saith the
Son of God, who hath
his eyes like unto a
flame of fire, and his feet
are like fine brass;

Notwithstanding I have a
few things against thee...
that woman Jezebel,
which calleth herself a
prophetess, to teach and
to seduce my servants to
commit fornication, and
to eat things sacrificed
unto idols

And he that overcometh,
and keepeth my works
unto the end, to him will
I give power over the
nations: And he shall rule
them ... even as I received
of my Father. And I will
give him the morning star.

SARDIS
(Revelation 3:1–6)

These things saith he
that hath the seven
Spirits of God, and the
seven stars;

I have not found thy
works perfect before God.
Remember ... how thou
hast received and heard,
and hold fast, and repent.
If therefore thou shalt not
watch, I will come on thee
as a thief

He that overcometh, the
same shall be clothed in
white raiment; and I will
not blot out his name out
of the book of life, but
I will confess his name
before my Father, and ...
angels.

PHILADELPHIA
(Revelation 3:7–13)

These things saith he
that is holy, he that is
true, he that hath the
key of David, he that
openeth, and no man
shutteth; the creation of
God; and shutteth and
no man openeth ... I
have set before thee an
open door

Behold, I will make them
of the synagogue of Satan,
which say they are Jews,
and are not, but do lie;
behold, I will make them
to come and worship
before thy feet, and to
know that I have loved
thee.

Him that overcometh will I
make a pillar in the temple
of my God, ... and I will
write upon him the name
of my God, and the name
of the city of my God,
which is new Jerusalem ...
and I will write upon him
my new name.

LAODICEA
(Revelation 3:14–21)

These things saith the
Amen, the faithful
and true witness,
the beginning of the
creation of God

Because thou sayest, I am
rich ...and have need of
nothing ... knowest not
that thou art wretch- ed,
miserable, and poor, and
blind, and naked.

To him that overcometh
will I grant to sit with me
in my throne, even as I
also overcame, and am set
down with my Father in
his throne

UNDERSTANDING MORE ABOUT THE SEVEN CITIES¹¹

Revelation 2:1–7 Ephesus

- Port city, largest city in Asia Minor (population 250,000), and fourth largest city in the Roman Empire.
- The beautiful Temple of Diana was claimed as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.
- Paul's third mission took him there for three years (Acts 19–20).
- Christians received God's love: "I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary" (Revelation 2:2–3, NIV).

Revelation 2:8–11 Smyrna

- Alexander the Great envisioned a newer bigger city as the region had great natural resources: the seacoast to the west and rich farmland to the east.
- As a port city, it flourished in trade, commerce, and the arts.
- The area was plagued with earthquakes.
- It was the western end of a major east-west Roman road. It was one of the earliest centers of emperor worship.
- Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, was martyred there in about AD 155.
- Christians received only God's praise, "I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich!" (Revelation 2:9, NIV).

Revelation 2:12–17 Pergamos

- Beautiful wealthy city with the second largest library known in the ancient world containing 200,000 volumes.
- A center for the imperial cult or emperor worship in the region (with three temples dedicated to Caesar).
- City also had temples to Asclepius (Greek god of healing) and healing spas from natural springs.
- It was also the home to temples dedicated to Zeus or Jupiter, Athene, Apollo, etc.
- Manufacturing center for parchment in Asia Minor; "parchment" comes from the name of this city.
- City was also known for its silver mines, school of sculpture, woolen textiles, and agricultural abundance.
- The Lord told the Christians: "You remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith" (Revelation 2:13, NIV).

Revelation 2:18–29 Thyatira

- The city was famous for its many commercial and industrial guilds.
- It was well known for its wool dyeing industry (See Acts 16:14).
- Worshiped a sun god, *Tyrimnos* (also known as Helios and Apollo).
- Lydia, the seller of purple, and Paul's convert, was from Thyatira (Acts 16:14–15).
- It was the smallest and least significant of the seven cities mentioned in the Book of Revelation (but John wrote the longest message to them).
- Christians received the Lord's praise, "I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first" (Revelation 2:19, NIV).

Revelation 3:1–6 Sardis

- Regional capital of Lydia, a fertile agricultural area on the crossroads of major highways.
- A center for the imperial cult, or Emperor worship.
- Locals dressed in soft leather boots, turbans, and developed a seven-stringed lyre.
- The city was built on cliffs, so they assumed they did not need night guards, but foreigners took the city.
- The Christians were warned by God: "Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God" (Revelation 3:2, NIV).



Revelation 3:7–13 Philadelphia

- The name in Greek is translated as “City of Brotherly Love.”
- Called the “Gateway to the East.”
- The city was known for its agriculture, especially for grapes and wine production. It became the center for the worship of Bacchus, god of wine.
- The city was also famous for its production of leather goods and textiles.
- Christians received God’s empathy and praise: “I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (Revelation 3:8–11, NIV).

Revelation 3:14–21 Laodicea

- Prosperous commercial and banking city built on a plateau in the Lycus River valley in Asia Minor.
- Center of learning—including a famous medical school—as well as art and culture.
- They were known for their arrogance and self-sufficiency, as demonstrated by their refusal of Rome’s offer to help repair their city after an earthquake in AD 60.
- They had no water supply of their own in Laodicea, but an aqueduct brought water from the natural spring four miles away. By the time it got to the city it was lukewarm. The water was used in their textile mill.
- Christians received God’s warning: “I know your works . . . you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth . . . I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent” (Revelation 3:15–16, 18–19, NKJV).

Summary of Temple Images

Revelation 1–3

The text is rich in symbolism from the Israelite temples. Earthly temples of God are patterned after the heavenly temple where God dwells in holiness. For example, in the first three chapters, John includes at least eight references to the Edenic and Creation themes from the temple sanctuary and the temple ritual. This pattern of temple symbols continues throughout the Apocalypse.

Left: Laodicea on the Lycus, Phrygia, Turkey. Photo by Carole Raddato via Flickr.

VERSES

- 1 Revelation 1:6 “made us kings and priests unto God and Levitical men to become his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever”
- 2 Revelation 1:12 “golden candlesticks”
- 3 Revelation 2:7 “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life”
- 4 Revelation 2:17 “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and [I] will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”
- 5 Revelation 3:4–5 “not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.”
- 6 Revelation 3:11 “hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown”
- 7 Revelation 3: 18 “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and *that* the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.”
- 8 Revelation 3:20 “I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him”

TEMPLE REFERENCE

- Initiation rites of Aaronic and priests. King’s coronation took place at the temple.
- Represented the tree of life, close to the veil
- In Eden, Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat of the tree of immortality because they were in a sinful state. But with Jesus’ atonement and repentance in place, all may now partake and return to His presence as the high priest demonstrated (1 Nephi 11).
- Hidden manna was in the original “ark of the covenant” (which represented the throne of God). The Messiah was to restore manna, and Jesus did by feeding thousands. He also introduced Himself as the “bread of life.” At Passover, He did not hide the *afikoman* but said, “this is my body” (Matthew 26:26).
- Priests washed and dressed in sacred white linen clothes before their temple work to represent purity. God recorded the names of the righteous who were sealed to eternal life in the book of life (see Psalm 69:28, Ecclesiastes 9:8; Ezekiel 10:7).
- Kings’ coronations took place at the temple (2 Kings 11:12; Mosiah 2:30).
- Adam and Eve were covered from their nakedness in skin, and the at-one-ment. Baptism by fire purifies one to receive God’s gold or celestial blessings. All priests and holy things in the temple were anointed.
- On the Day of Atonement, the high priest prepared and then approached the veil before the Holy of Holies to enter His presence (Leviticus 16). The door was a wide inviting opening. Jesus taught “knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7).

REVELATION 4

Vision of God's Throne

Revelation 4:1 “I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard . . . said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this’” (NIV) After God gave John messages for his ecclesiastical responsibilities over the seven churches, his vision continued. In language similar to Nephi’s dream of the Tree of Life, “the spirit said, “Look.” The open “door” that John sees is a wide welcoming door to the heavenly temple and throne of God. Our temples are patterned after God’s heavenly temple near Kolob which “is set nigh unto the throne of God” (Abraham 3:9).

Similar to Nephi, John had a guide through his visionary experience. The guide’s voice is as a trumpet—clear, profound, beautiful, penetrating, and inviting.

Revelation 4:2 “I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne” In the second part of John’s vision, his spirit saw into the heavens and saw the throne of God. Visions of the throne of God are called Throne Theophany, and were also recorded by Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Lehi, Nephi, Alma, Abraham, Joseph Smith, to name a few.¹² Seeing God’s throne is almost a rite of passage for prophets and other anointed ones.

Revelation 4:3 “the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne” (NIV) The stones mentioned mean more than just lovely gems to beautify the throne. They are specific stones that are found as the first and last stone in the High Priest’s breastplate.¹³ The colors were significant—red and green. The red of blood and the green of life. They speak of the gifts of God to humanity. There was also one “rainbow” color around the throne, and also green for life and creation. Noah was told that the rainbow would be a sign of His covenant between God and mankind.

Symbols have many meanings, but here it may symbolize that the covenant is still intact.

Revelation 4:4 “Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads” (ESV) The JST includes that these seats were in the “midst” of the throne. As mentioned earlier, a few numbers have special meaning in the Bible. When a special number was doubled or squared, it doubled in importance or even more than the initial special number. Twelve is used in scripture for God’s order. In the creation, He organized the rotation of the earth around twelve moons or months; He organized His people into twelve tribes and His leaders into twelve apostles. In the latter days, the twelfth year became the age to begin priesthood service.

The twenty-four elders wore white robes with gold crowns, referring to their roles and positions. The Lord explained to Joseph Smith that these specific twenty-four elders were the faithful deceased members of the seven churches who are now with God (D&C 77: 5).

Revelation 4:5 “from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God” (NKJV) John records that he observed by sight and sound, including a voice. The seven fiery lamps represent seven servants of God. Jesus asked His disciples to “let their light so shine” (Matthew 5:16). The symbol of a fiery light speaks of the light that accompanied the children of Israel every evening, later referred to as the *shekhinah* “dwelling.” The image was repeated in the Restoration with, “the Spirit of God like a fire is burning.” Servants of God are directed by, and work according to, the Spirit of God. The sanctifying work of the Spirit is the baptism by fire.

Revelation 4:6 “In front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal” (NIV) This is the first verse that Joseph asked about in D&C 77:1 “What is the sea of glass?” (Also see D&C 130:6–9). The “crystal” transparency may allow one to see into the past, present and future, like an Urim and Thummim. Later Joseph Smith taught: “Angels do not reside on a planet like this earth. But they reside in the presence of God—but on a Globe like a ‘sea of glass and fire’ where all things are manifest past, present, and to come—the place where God resides is a great Urim and Thummim.”¹⁴

“In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back” (NIV) The Prophet asked what the four beasts were (D&C77:2).¹⁵ They were the high form of each animal that represented classifications (not like the book of Daniel where they are figures of things on our earth).

Another symbol in this verse is the eyes that cover the four creatures. The Lord explained that these are filled with eyes to represent knowledge. They may have some degree of omniscience having the power to see things “before and behind” (KJV).

Revelation 4:7 “The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle” (NIV) John describes animals familiar to our planet.

D&C 77:1 “It is the earth, in its sanctified, immortal, and eternal state.”

D&C 77:2-3 “They are figurative expressions . . . describing heaven, the paradise of God, the happiness of man, and of beasts, and of creeping things, and of the fowls of the air; that which is spiritual being in the likeness of that which is temporal

D&C 77:4 “Their eyes are a representation of light and knowledge”

Yet, in their celestialized state they can speak and sing. Other visions of the throne of God include animals as well (i.e. Ezekiel's four creatures). Later the Prophet Joseph added "John heard the words of the beasts giving glory to God and understood them. God who made the beasts could understand every language spoken by them."¹⁶

Revelation 4:8 "The four animals each had six wings, and were filled with eyes all around on the inside. And day and night they never ceased saying "Holy, holy holy, Lord God Almighty" (NTC) John describes winged creatures. In Greco-Roman traditions, a few gods had wings adding speed to their travel.¹⁷ When the Prophet Joseph asked what the wings meant, he was told they are the power to move and act. Christian artists misunderstand the symbolism and portray heavenly beings incorrectly. When Isaiah sees the throne of God and describes angels with six wings, they, too, represent the power to move and act. The heavenly creatures praised God as He "who was and who is and who is coming."

Revelation 4:9–11 "whenever the living creatures give glory . . . the twenty-four elders fall down before the One seated on the throne, and they worship Him . . . They cast their crowns before the throne, saying: "You are worthy, our Lord and God" (BSB) The twenty-four elders joined with the creatures in worshipping God. These good saints are humbled and cast their crowns before the throne of God. They acknowledge Him as their creator. We know that all of God's work and glory is to "bring to pass the immortality and Eternal Life of man" (Moses 1:39).

REVELATION 5

The Lion and the Scroll of Destiny with Seven Seals

Revelation 5:1–5

Revelation 5:1 "I saw in the right hand of him who sits on the throne a scroll with writing on the inside and outside, sealed with seven seals" (NTC) It appears that Elohim sits on the throne (see 5:7 for Jehovah's location). The "book" was actually a scroll. It was customary to write on one side only, but this one is written on both

D&C 77:4 ". . . their wings are a representation of power, to move, to act, etc."

D&C 77:5 "These elders whom John saw, were elders who had been faithful in the work of the ministry and were dead; who belonged to the seven churches, and were then in the paradise of God.

D&C 77:6-7 "We are to understand that it contains the revealed will, mysteries and the works of God; the hidden things of his economy concerning this earth during the seven thousand years of its continuance, or its temporal existence. . . . the first seal contains the things of the first thousand years, and the second also of the second thousand years, and so on."

sides, possibly to represent that nothing was left out. Legal documents were sealed to prove authenticity. Documents were written in duplicate, with one of them closed and sealed, to be only opened by a Judge “if anyone challenged the content.”¹⁸ The witness wrapped string around the scroll, embedding it in clay or wax that was used to personalize the seal. Seven seals assured its safety.¹⁹ A judge (here Jesus) opened them when appropriate.

The Prophet Joseph learned that each of the seven seals stands for each millennial period of the earth’s human history (also D&C 88:108–110).

Revelation 5:2 “I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll by breaking its seals?’” (NTC) Many angels are specifically pointed out in the Book of Revelation. John hears this “mighty” or “strong” (KJV) angel calling for someone worthy or who is prepared with authority to open the seals. The strong angel may represent one with authority, or “one of the noble and great ones” (Abraham 3:22–23). The phrase, “loud voice,” signifies the importance of the message, and is repeated eleven times in the text.

Revelation 5:3–4 “I wept bitterly, because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look into it” (NTC) Similar to the practice of the Roman Empire, only a judge with the correct authority—or if he were worthy and qualified to open them--could open the seals (and disclose or comprehend them). John saw that the mighty angel could not find anyone qualified. So, the search was made beyond the inhabitants of earth into the heavens, but no one was found. John sensed the significance of this, as if he knew the importance of the role of the judge of the world, and he cried.

Revelation 5:5 “And one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep. See, the Lion from the tribe of Judah, even the branch of David, has overcome so that he can open the scroll’” (NTC) One of the elders seated around the throne who belonged to one of the seven churches comforts John with the wonderful news that someone worthy has been found. Only He has the qualifications as Judge to open the scroll and to act as the legal judge to read and determine the outcome of history. Only Jesus has the power of history. Jesus is the Lion, the King of Beasts, or a conquering Messiah. When Patriarch Jacob (or Israel) gave his father’s blessing to Judah he felt inspired to say, “Judah is a lion’s whelp . . . The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come” (Genesis 49:9). The Lion of Judah was Jesus of Nazareth.

This translation describes Jesus as a “branch of David,” derived from “netser.” Jesus is the Messianic branch of the House of David in Matthew 2:23, and Isaiah 11:1, “There shall come a rod out of the stem of Jesse and a *Branch* out of his roots.” This also fulfills other Old Testament prophecies, which describe a Messianic branch of the House of David.²⁰

The Worthy Lamb Slain

Revelation 5:6–7

Revelation 5:6 “in the midst of the throne . . . stood a Lamb as it had been slain” In this context, the Lion is also the Lamb who was slain with the marks of fatal wounds—the symbols are powerful. The names and symbols of the Lord teach us much about His roles. The name Jesus/*Yeshua* is a form of the word “save” or “Savior.” It is the lion who becomes the lamb who provides salvation. When John the Baptist introduced his cousin, Jesus, he said: “Behold the Lamb of God” (John 1:29, 36). Interestingly, none of the other Gospels use this title, but Paul refers to Jesus as our Passover lamb” (1 Corinthians 5:7, NIV, also see Acts 8:32). In the book of Revelation, John mentions “the Lamb” twenty-eight times. Jesus is the lamb taken to the slaughter, but here in Revelation the slain Lamb lives.

“having twelve horns and twelve eyes, which are the twelve servants of God sent forth into all the earth” (JST) The JST changes the *seven* horns and eyes to *twelve*. Symbolically, I like both—the Lamb is whole and perfect and also has God’s divine organization and priesthood power. Richard Draper and Michael Rhodes explain the twelve servants as apostles:

This seems to be a specific reference to the Twelve Apostles since the verb . . . “sent forth,” is cognate with the noun . . . “apostle” (literally “one who is sent forth”). In John’s day, the word carried more than one nuance. For the Greeks, the one sent was the one empowered or commissioned to act for the one doing the sending. For the Jews and Christians, the term designated anyone commissioned and empowered by God, one who had authority to speak His word and administer His ordinances.²¹

Another symbol used here are the “horns.” On each corner of the temple, the sacrificial alter horn represented power and salvation or cleansing power. The eyes have power to see giving them the symbol of omniscience. All these images may have other multiple meanings as well.

Revelation 5:7 “he came and took the scroll out of the right hand of him that sat on the throne” (NTC) Jesus, acting as the slain lamb, took the sealed scroll from Elohim who sits on the throne. Only our Savior had the preparation and power to implement all the terms of the Father’s plan. The heart or center of that plan in the history of the earth’s salvation is Jesus Christ.

The New Song

Revelation 5:8–14

Revelation 5:8 “when he took the scroll, the four animals and twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one having a harp, and golden bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of saints” (NTC) When the Lord takes the book/scroll, those surrounding the throne prostrate themselves in worship. We learn that they

had made music with harps and had something to do with the saint's prayers—either transporting or delivering them to the throne. Incense was also used to represent prayers in the Old Testament temple (Psalm 141:2).

Revelation 5:9 “And they sang a new song changing, ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, because you were slain and have purchased people for God by your blood . . .’” (NTC) Those around the throne sang a new song. (Other “new songs” are recorded in D&C 84:98; Psalms 33:3; 40:3 and Revelation 15:3–4.) The language of God includes music. The lyrics to this song powerfully praise the redemption made through the at-one-ment of Jesus Christ. He bought us back from being slaves to Satan and sin.

Revelation 5:10 “You have made them a kingdom and priests to our God” (NTC) The calling of a priest is to serve the Lord. By serving Him we can find freedom. The Prophet Joseph Smith restored the knowledge that this kingdom is also for priestesses.²² The Lamb's act of salvation not only saves us from our sins, but it also gives immortality to all on earth. By participating in the at-one-ment our Savior has also made it possible to become kings and queens, priests and priestesses, to reign under our Almighty God (Moses 1:39).

Revelation 5:11–12 “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain . . .” These two verses make up the lyrics of the new song mentioned above (and to Handel's Messiah). John's crying is turned into rejoicing as One worthy and willing is found to open the scrolls. The ancient numbers go up to one thousand and then are repeated. Literally, the vision describes ten with at least sixteen zeros, but it probably means a very large number of people all praising and honoring Jesus as the One slain for them.

Revelation 5:13 “Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, *be* unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb” The third hymn of praise is sung by “every created thing” both humans and animals (WNT).²³

Revelation 5:14 “Amen” This portion of the vision closes with all creation offering praise, glory, and authority to God the Father and His Son. The Greek word, *amen*, means “truly/verily/so let it be.”²⁴ Only in John's Gospel does he repeat it, “Verily, verily,” (which we find in fifteen different verses, i.e. John 1:51; 3:3, 5, 11; etc.) It is used as an epithet for the Lord Jesus Christ in Revelation 3:14. Paul uses it as “all the promises of God in him *are* yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us” (2 Corinthians 1:20). In the Old Testament, it is found singly and sometimes doubly at the end of prayers (Psalms 41:13; 72:19; 89:52), to confirm the words and invoke the fulfillment of them. It is used in token of being bound by an oath (Numbers 5:22; Deuteronomy 27:15–26; Nehemiah 5:13; 8:6; 1 Chronicles 16:36).

REVELATION 6

Opening of the First Six Seals or Known History of the Earth

TIMELINE OF THE SEVEN THOUSAND YEARS OF SCRIPTURAL HISTORY

4,000 BC 3,000 BC 2,000 BC 1,000 BC 0 AD 1,000 AD 2,000
Adam Enoch Noah Jaredites Abraham Moses David Elijah Isaiah Lehi Daniel Christ Mormon Reformers Joseph Smith

The First Seal

Revelation 6:1–2

Revelation 6:1 “I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, “Come!” (NIV) Once the singing stops, the Lamb starts the work of opening the seals. The Lord revealed that the scroll represents 7,000 years (D&C 77:6). It leads us to assume that each seal represents another thousand years (also see D&C 88:108–109). As the Lamb or Christ opens the first seal, the sound of thunder suggests something momentous is happening. John’s guide encourages him to “Come,” nearly paralleling the invitation the Lord gave John after their first interaction, “Come and See” (John 1:39).

Revelation 6:2 “I looked, and there was a white horse, and he who was sitting on it had a bow, and he was given a crown, and he went forth conquering” (NTC) The first of the four Horsemen of the Apocalypse is white for victory. In our world, white often means purity, but at that time, white was the color worn by the winner of the Olympics, for the victorious Caesar Augustus and his wife, etc. This period was victorious, when Enoch established Zion. Enoch was victorious also when he “led the people of God, and their enemies came to battle against them ... and all nations feared greatly” (Moses 7:13).

A horse in the Roman world was a war animal. The bow was also a weapon of war. The person on the white horse represents a conqueror wearing a victor’s garland or crown. If he conquered worldliness and selfishness, then the conqueror was Enoch, “because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness, and there was no poor among them” (Moses 7:18).

The Second Seal

Revelation 6:3–4

Revelation 6:3–4 “When he opened the second seal, I heard the second animal saying, ‘Come’ And another horse, fiery-red, came . . . to take peace from the earth . . . and he was given a large sword” (NTC) The second seal represents a time of “death through violence and bloodshed,” from the time after Noah through the Jaredites, tower of Babel, and Abraham.²⁵

The Third Seal

Revelation 6:5–6

Revelation 6:5–6 “When the Lamb opened the third seal . . . there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand” (NIV) The third seal represents the approximate time of 2,000–1,000 BC, from Abraham to King David. The black horse and balances symbolize death and hunger. Something is out of balance. As often follows times of war, famines make the price of food go up. The text describes a starvation diet: “a quart of wheat for a day’s pay, and three quarts of barley for a day’s pay” (NTC). To work an entire day to only keep one person barely alive represents meager times. This period of the world’s history is known for the terrible famines that devastated the earth’s population. The famine in the big city of Ur was so severe that Abraham’s brother starved to death (Genesis 11:28; also, Abraham 2:17, 21). We all know of the seven-year famine during Joseph’s reign in Egypt, but it also plagued most of the world (Genesis 41:42–57). The children of Israel’s forty-years in the wilderness was a complete famine save for the manna (Exodus 16) and occasional water and birds. A touch of mercy is shown at the end of the verse when limits are set on the oil and wine—symbolic of many things.

The Fourth Seal

Revelation 6:7–8

Revelation 6:7–8 “When he opened the fourth seal . . . I looked, and there was a pale horse, and the name of him who was sitting on it was Death, and Hell followed after him, and they were given power over a quarter of the earth to kill with the sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth” (NTC) The period from approximately 1,000–0 BC was symbolized by two horsemen—death and hell—riding a pale or cadaverous-colored horse. These are the last of the horses mentioned with the seals. This is the time when the Lord’s covenant people went to war amongst themselves over and over. We read of famines that Elijah participated in.

It was also the time when conquering powers grew and traded hands every few generations. This is the time period of the captivity of both the northern ten tribes to Assyria, and of Judea to Babylon and Persia. It also includes the Macedonian- Greek triumph of Alexander the Great and the conquest of the Roman Empire. In the “new world” it spans from Alma to 3 Nephi. China also became a powerful nation during this time and Egypt fell. The great nations of the earth all tormented each other and killed each other off. The fourth part of the earth may represent a limited area, or possibly the Mediterranean world whose history the Bible records in part.

The Fifth Seal

Revelation 6:9–11

Revelation 6:9 “When the Lamb opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony they had upheld” The fifth seal represents the period from the

Lord's birth to 1000 AD, but no more symbolic horses accompany the account. Instead we see a symbol of an altar. This includes the death of our Savior who sacrificed Himself on a type of altar for us. The early Christian saints sacrificed their lives as martyrs. This period of martyrdoms includes the Muslim world conquering the Christians as they come into power.

Revelation 6:10–11 “**And they cried with a loud voice saying, ‘How long, Holy and True Master, until you judge and avenge our blood?’ . . . And each of them was given a white robe and they were told to rest**” (NTC) This represents John's time. The martyred saints cry out with their heart-breaking pleas for justice. While they are waiting for the judgement day, they are rewarded with robes of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10). White linen robes represent priesthood service in the Old Testament (Leviticus 16:23; 2 Chronicles 5:12; also, Alma 13:12–16). They are given “rest” which is “the fullness of his glory” (D&C 84:24). Alma often spoke of martyrs entering into the rest of the Lord (Alma 16:17; 60:13; etc.). A similar martyrdom happened to the righteous Nephites in the time before 400 AD (Moroni 1:2–3).

The Sixth Seal

Revelation 6:12–17

Revelation 6:12–13 “**When he opened the sixth seal . . . there was a great earthquake, and the sun turned black as sackcloth made of hair, and the entire moon was like blood. And the stars of the sky fell to earth . . .**” (NTC) John gives us more details from the sixth seal, which covers from approximately AD 1,000 to 2,000. This time was associated with natural disasters, including a great earthquake that affected mountains and islands (the first of three mentioned in Revelation). In Revelation 16:18, earthquakes represent the judgment of God. The “point seems to be that humankind cannot sin without influencing heaven and earth.”²⁶ The sun and moon (and creation) are out of kilter in spiritual mourning. The scriptures are full of signs of the times, including the sun turning red and stars falling.²⁷

Revelation 6:14 “**The heavens *opened* as a scroll *is opened* when it is rolled together**” (JST) The JST changes accurately reflect the Greek, which speaks of the heavens “apochórizó/to separate, part asunder/split apart.” When scrolls are unrolled, they disclose what is written inside. This may be another natural disaster, or perhaps the heavens were opened at Joseph Smith's First Vision through the restoration of the Gospel.

“**and every mountain and island *was* moved out of *its* places**” The mountains and islands are moved out of their places after this opening of the scroll. The word choice of “every” may refer to all, or everyone known. In D&C 133:21–24, we read of a time when the land will connect, or “the islands shall become one land.”

Revelation 6:15–16 “**Then the kings of the earth . . . the rich, the mighty . . . both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called . . . ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits**

on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!” (NIV) All humans who have not repented will be frightened to meet God. But their hiding places will not remove them from His judgments. Famous, bond, and free people of the earth will be ashamed or afraid and hide themselves from all the calamities and troubles. They will rather hide their sins than face their Creator.

Revelation 6:17 “The great day of their anger is come; and who is able to stand?” (NTC) This translation identifies God’s wrath in the plural, “thus show the reference is to both God and Christ.”²⁸ From what we understand of God, emotions of wrath or vengeance belong more to humanity, awhile God’s justice will be carried out with love for the righteous and for justice.

According to the Puritans, we need to live in fear of it in order to avoid it; then, we can live beyond the fear and enter into the love and rest of the Lord. It is the “great and terrible” day of the Lord. Who will find it a great day and be able to stand in the presence of the Lord is answered in Revelation 7:14?

REVELATION 7

Those Sealed and 1st Interlude

This chapter begins as a continuation of the sixth seal. This portion describes the winding up scenes of the earth’s history—our day. But as we approach the climactic point right before the opening of the seventh seal, we are transported to the heavenly throne of God. This becomes the first of five “interludes” in the Book of Revelation. We see the “sealed 144,000” purified saints who have been gathered at the throne of God (Revelation 7:4, NIV). From this point on, the word “seal” takes on a double meaning: 1) the seals on the scroll and 2) God’s seal on the righteous. John provides a vivid description of those saints who have prepare in righteousness to be sealed prior to the Second Coming of Christ.

Revelation 7:1 “I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth restraining the winds . . .” (NTC) When the Bible refers to the four corners of the earth it usually means a geographic fullness, or the whole earth. The Lord explained to the Prophet Joseph Smith that these four angels had four roles. They each had special power:

1. to save or destroy life
2. to preside over the missionary work throughout the world
3. to shut up the heavens
4. to seal unto life or cast one into darkness

These angels spread the gospel as well as destruction. (A similar outcome was seen by Nephi in the vision of the Tree of Life, see 1 Nephi 13:9; 14:10–14).

“the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree” The angel stopping the wind may refer to stopping dangerous gusts up to hurricane levels, or possibly, a figurative use of holding back the *anemos*’ as empty doctrines.”²⁹

Revelation 7:2 “I saw another angel ascending from the east holding the seal of the living God, and he shouted with a loud voice to the four angels who had been appointed to damage the earth and the sea, saying . . .” In D&C 77:9, we learn that the angel from the east (or “from the rising of the sun,” ESV), is Elias. He has authority from “the living God” to direct other angels. He also has the assignment to gather the tribes of Israel. The name Elias is used for several different people, and also as a title.³⁰ With the help of modern revelation, it appears that in this book/scroll that Elias refers to John the Beloved. In chapter ten he receives the mission to “gather the tribes of Israel . . . and to restore all things” (D&C 77:14).

Revelation 7:3 “Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we seal the servants of our God on their foreheads” (NTC) Before the destructions of the seventh seal, and the work of the four angels who will damage the earth, the angel from the East, Elias, must make sure that the righteous are sealed and protected against harm. The timing is consistent with the surge in temple building over a few decades to allow this work to happen.

Anciently, putting a mark on the forehead had several implications. Some in the Greco-Roman world marked their foreheads with the god they worshiped for divine protection. Slave owners branded their slaves with a mark on their foreheads, forearm, or right palm. This came from the practice of slaves for life being

D&C 77:8 Q. What are we to understand by the four angels? **A.** We are to understand that they are four angels sent forth from God, to whom is given power over the four parts of the earth, to save life and to destroy; these are they who have the everlasting gospel to commit to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people; having power to shut up the heavens, to seal up unto life, or to cast down to the regions of darkness.

D&C 77:9 A. We are to understand that the angel ascending from the east is he to whom is given the seal of the living God over the twelve tribes of Israel wherefore, he crieth unto the four angels having the everlasting gospel, saying: Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And, if you will receive it, this is Elias which was to come to gather together the tribes of Israel and restore all things.

D&C 77:10 Q. What time are the things spoken? **A.** They are to be accomplished in the six-thousand years, or the opening of the sixth seal.

marked by their owners in order to identify runaways. Later Christians were tattooed for their beliefs.³¹

Yet, in the context of the sixth seal, the sealing is not a visible tattoo. In Revelation 14:1 we learn that the saints had the “Father’s name written on their foreheads.” The Prophet Joseph taught that the sealing on the forehead identified them.³²

D&C 77:11. Q. What are we to understand by sealing . . . twelve thousand out of every tribe?

A. We are to understand that those who are sealed are high priests, ordained unto the holy order of God, to administer the everlasting gospel; for they are they who are ordained out of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, by the angels to whom is given power over the nations of the earth, to bring as many as will come to the church of the Firstborn.

144,000 Sealed

Revelation 7:4 “Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel” (NIV) The number of souls who are sealed is symbolically significant. In scripture, twelve depicts God’s order or organization (i.e. twelve rotations of the moon around the sun every year, twelve tribes, apostles, and in the modern church, the twelfth year is the age to begin service in the priesthood). Any number squared has even more significance. By adding one thousand it represents perfection.³³ Thus 144,000 speaks of God’s complete or whole organization.

In D&C 77:11 we learn that those sealed are not the number saved, but representatives, like missionaries of the church of the First Born. Joseph Smith taught: “There will be 144,000 saviors on Mount Zion, and with them an innumerable host that no man can number. Oh, I beseech you to go forward, go forward and make your calling and your election sure!” Those endowed saints are on the right path, as the second anointings can be received in the life hereafter.

Revelation 7:5–8 “From the tribe of . . .” The Lord’s organization lists His covenant people into the traditional twelve tribes of Israel. Often in the Old Testament, Ruben or Simeon are missing. The heir Joseph (who was the first born of the queen wife) receives a “double portion” for Ephraim and Manasseh (Deuteronomy 21:17). In this list, Dan is missing, possibly because of an idolatrous temple set up in his land (Judges 18:30; 1 Kings 12:29). Also, there was a tradition that claimed the anti-Christ came from Dan.³⁴

The Lord’s explanation in D&C 77:11, says they are ordained high priests from “every nation” to build the kingdom or spread the gospel. In the Restoration we also believe this may include endowed women.³⁵

Revelation 7:9–10 “I looked, and there was a great crowd of every nation and tribe . . . standing in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb dressed in white robes and they had palm leaves in their hands” (NTC)

The innumerable group (far larger than the 144,000) of purified people praised God shouting, “Salvation belongs to our God and the Lamb” (RSV). Draper and Rhodes’ translation chose or “Victory belongs to our God” (NTC), because the palms and white dress symbolized a double symbol of victory in the Greco-Roman world. (Alma 5:21–24 also alludes to this grand experience too.)

Revelation 7:11–12 “All the angels . . . elders. . . four animals . . . fell before the throne on their faces and worshipped God, saying ‘Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks. . .’” (NTC) Those standing around the throne fall down in worship, and become a choir praising God. Their song includes seven attributes of God.

Revelation 7:13–14 “One of the elders asked me, ‘These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?’ . . . he said, ‘These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’” (NIV) The elder basically asks John, “Who will be able to stand the calamities of the last days?” Then the elder answers, “those who have been sealed.” Those in the white robes are defined as those who have applied the atoning sacrifice of the Son to their lives to be cleansed from the world and have endured through great tribulation to be accepted and thereby purified. The ancient priests are dressed in a similar fashion as a type of those heavenly purified saints (also see D&C 138:13).

Revelation 7:15 “They . . . serve him day and night in his temple . . . They shall hunger no more . . . For the Lamb . . . shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” These are those who have repented, accepted Jesus’ at-one-ment, and have been valiant in their testimonies and service to God. (Jesus taught the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well about these promises in John 4:10, 17; and again, in Capernaum in John 6:35; they are also described in D&C 76:70–79.) These saints serve God both in life and death. But, in heaven there is no hunger, excessive heat, no need for light, and God will comfort all sorrows (also see D&C 88:6–13; 97:21–16).

REVELATION 8

The Seventh Seal

Revelation 8:1–5

Revelation 8:1 “When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour” (NIV) The interlude is over, and we return to the opening of the last seal (following chapter 6). When Christ opens the seventh seal “silence” follows.

Similarly, God rested on the seventh day in His creation periods. Thus, again there is silence for a period after the seventh thousand year. (We see the same prophecy in D&C 88:95; 38:11–12; 77:12.) If one day is 1,000 years,

xsthen literally, 30- minutes is 21-years, but I do not think that is what the Apocalypse meant. In ancient world, time was measured with sundials, so thirty-minutes was just an approximate length of time. All we know is that we live in the last days, so this refers to our future. As the silence is in heaven, it may refer to a silence of revelation or the Spirit. It may refer to a period before God unleashes His wrath (Zephaniah 1:7,-18; Zechariah 2:13; Habakkuk 2:20; D&C 38:11-12). During the silence, angels are waiting to gather the wheat from the tares. This time is needed to complete the sanctification, judgment, redemption, and the putting of God's power in place through the sealing of His elect prior to His Second Coming.

D&C 77:12 “We are to understand that as God made the world in six days, and on the seventh day he finished his work, and sanctified it, and also formed man out of the dust of the earth, even so, in the beginning of the seventh thousand years will the Lord God sanctify the earth, and complete the salvation of man, and judge all things, and shall redeem all things, except that which he hath not put into his power, when he shall have sealed all things, unto the end of all things; and the sounding of the trumpets of the seven angels are the preparing and finishing of his work, in the beginning of the seventh thousand years— the preparing of the way before the time of his coming.”

Revelation 8:2 “**And I saw the seven angels which stand before God, and they were given seven trumpets**” (NTC) The sounding of the seven trumpets (a *shofar* or war horn) announces the last preparations before God finishes His work (D&C 77:12). Trumpets also announce the beginning of God's judgment. Each trumpet calls another calamity. In the Old Testament, seven priests blew trumpets before the battle of Jericho, and to announce notable events (Joshua 6:1-20; 1 Chronicles 15:24).

The positioning of the angels speaks of their importance. They serve God under His priesthood power. Because there are “seven angels,” it may refer to a figurative whole or perfect group of “all angels.”

Revelation 8:3-4 “**Another angel came and stood at the altar having a gold incense burner; and he was given a great quantity of incense, to offer for the prayers of all the saints upon the gold altar that was before the throne. And the smoke . . . arose from the hand of the angel before God**” (NTC) Through the Old Testament and much of the New Testament, incense is symbolic of prayer because it ascends heavenward with a sweet fragrance. In this model, the amount of incense given may correlate with the many prayers offered by the righteous saints. Perhaps it represents angelic assignments to fulfill the saints' request made in prayers.

The location before the throne is consistent with the incense altar in the temple just before the veil. The prayers were made symbolically from the incense altar directly in front of the Holy of Holies or throne of God. In modern temples, prayers are also offered right in front of the veil where one prepares to enter into the Lord's presence. The pattern of earthly temples are taken from the heaven temple.³⁶

Revelation 8:5 “The angel took the incense burner, and filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth, and there were peals of thunder and rumblings and lightnings flashes and an earthquake” (NTC) When heavenly fire is cast onto the earth, the quiet time is over. The martyrs’ prayer of “How long, Lord” will be answered soon (Revelation 6:10). Three forms of natural calamities may describe God’s intentional signs.

Revelation 8:6–12 “The seven angels who held the seven trumpets got ready to blow them” (NTC) Each of the seven angels has things to prepare to be ready to blow their trumpets. They each will bring different plagues as “a last-ditch effort to soften the hearts of the wicked.”³⁷ The earth will soon be in constant turmoil. (The amount of 1/3 represented a limited portion, or that God has set bounds to the destructions.)

Angel #1	Revelation 8:7	Hail and fire mingled with blood burn 1/3 of vegetation
Angel #2	Revelation 8:9–10	A fiery mountain falls into the sea killing 1/3 of sea life, ships/commerce/the god of worldliness
Angel #3	Revelation 8:10–11	A falling star poisons fresh waters named, wormwood/bitter, 1/3 of the water supply contaminated
Angel #4	Revelation 8:12–13	The sun, moon, and stars darkened, 1/3 less light seen
Angel #5	Revelation 9:1–2	Bottomless pit opened, Satan darkens humans like a scorpion, but not the vegetation nor the sealed
Angel #6	Revelation 9:13–19	Four angels loosed in the Euphrates/bottomless pit (JST), for a time when 1/3 humans killed
Angel #7	Revelation 11:15–19 Revelation 16:17–21	The kingdoms of the world become the Kingdoms of God, but not until after Armageddon Largest earthquake, islands and mountains move, nations collapsed, a plague of hail

The plagues at the end of time are described as some of the plagues the Lord commanded Moses to release on Egypt. At both times they were given to encourage repentance, but if they don’t repent, the plagues continue.

1	Hail fire	Moses’ 7th plague (Exodus 9:22–26).
2	Water turns to blood	Moses’ 3rd plague (Exodus 19:25)
3	Wormwood/bitter	Moses’ 6th plague (Exodus 9:8–12) “fine dust . . . festering boils”
4	Darkness, dims sun	Moses’ 9th plague (Exodus 10:21–29)
5	Bottomless pit—death	Moses’ 10th plague (Exodus 11:4–9) “death of the firstborn”

Revelation 8:13 “I heard an eagle as it flew in the midst of the sky crying with a loud voice, “Woe, owe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth because of the remaining trumpet blasts of the three angels that are about to sound” (NTC) The KJV speaks of an “angel” flying, but most of the Greek manuscripts use “eagle”/etos/“bird of prey.”³⁸ The eagle/angel’s message is a divine warning, “it is going to get worse!” The wicked who remain are so

hardened that God will send His full indignation (D&C 101:11). This is in preparation for the Battle of Armageddon.

REVELATION 9

The Fifth Angel's Trumpet Call

Revelation 9:1–2

Revelation 9:1 “The fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to *the angel* was given the key of the bottomless pit” (JST *italicized*). The half hour of heavenly silence must have ended as the next trumpet rallies attention (Revelation 8:1). Satan is the fallen star. He was divine before he fell, “Lucifer”/ *helel* “a shining one,”³⁹ and a “son of the morning” (Isaiah 14:12, 2 Nephi 14:12; D&C 76:26). In a sermon, the Prophet Joseph Smith explained, “When Lucifer was hurled from Heaven the decree was that he should not obtain a tabernacle and not those that were with him.”⁴⁰ The JST clarifies that God allows the angel to use the key to hell, but God is still in control. The “bottomless pit” means it has no foundation, and in Greek reads, “the unfathomably deep, shaft of the abyss.”⁴¹

Revelation 9:2 “he opened the abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke” The metaphor of the mists of darkness arising from hell may represent spiritual blindness as Satan and his devils are allowed to tempt mankind. The smoke of darkness or temptation blinds the judgment and hearts of humans (1 Nephi 12:7). The devils’ “realm is now unleashed upon those whose lives have made a hell of the earth.”⁴²

The Locusts

Revelation 9:3–11

Revelation 9:3–4 “out of the smoke, locusts descended on the earth, and they were given power like that of the scorpions” (BSB) Out of this smoke from hell came a plague worse than the Egyptian’s locusts because it affected humans as severely as a scorpion bite (Moses 8th plague in Ex 10:1–20). The symbolism of a scorpion speaks of a sting that brings excruciating pain, but not death. The hordes of locusts or evil ones are compared to armies. This may be a physical or a religious war.

Yet, in God’s plan, all of the plagues have their limits (as in Job 2:6). They destroy only certain things. These locusts don’t eat

D&C 77:13

Q. When are the things to be accomplished, which are written in the 9th chapter of Revelation?

A. They are to be accomplished after the opening of the seventh seal, before the coming of Christ.

plant life, but are to work on those not sealed to God. Again, we hear of the image of God's people having a seal on their foreheads.

Revelation 9:5–6 “**They were not permitted to kill them, but to torture them for five months . . . people will seek for death and will not find it**” (NTC) The locusts have power to torment people for a set time. Five months is the life span of a locust, so it may represent a life span. The pain of a scorpion bite is horrific and may represent spiritual torment (which is more eternally damaging than physical pain). The scorpion is used to represent danger and pain (also vs 10).

Revelation 9:7–8 “**The locusts looked like horses ready for battle, and on their heads they seemed to have crowns of gold, and their faces were like human faces. . . hair like a woman . . . teeth were like a lion’s**” (NTC) The agents of Satan or “locusts” are fighting a grievous war for the souls of humanity. They aim to conquer and claim strength, beauty, and destructive intents.

Their crowns are the type that athletic winners, not royalty, wear.⁴³ The devil's sinister motives are destructive; he wants to cause pain and destroy humanity.

Revelation 9:9–11 “**They had breastplates like . . . iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails with stingers . . . to torment people for five months. They had as king . . . whose name . . . in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer)**” (NIV) These locusts are far more destructive than the Egyptians are who have great armor and power (wings are the power to act, D&C 77:4). The weapons cause torment, probably in the form of physical, mental, and spiritual suffering. This may describe fighter aircraft, flame throwers, or missiles, but I fear Satan's war also uses subtle means to conquer, such as with pornography, addictions, greed, and anger. Satan's noise also drowns out the soft whisperings of the Spirit. Not surprising, the king of the locusts is Satan.

The Sixth Angel's Trumpet Call

Revelation 9:12–19

Revelation 9:12 “**One woe is past; but there are still two woes coming**” (NTC) Three woes are mentioned in Revelation 8:13. This entire, miserable, locust-scorpion war made up only the first of the three woes. Alonzo Gaskill sees symbolism in these numbers: “The

#4 implies everyone will be affected. The #3 implies that this is being sent by God as a punishment or warning. The #7 suggests that these plagues are a fullness of God's wrath and a completion of the day of repentance.”⁴⁴

Revelation 9:13–15 “The sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar . . . Loose the four angels which are bound in the *bottomless pit*. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour . . . a year, for to slay the third part of men” (JST italicized). Now the sixth angel is summoned from the voices or prayers associated with the power of God (from the symbolism of the altar horns). Four represents the earth’s cardinal direction or the fullness of the earth. These four who fill the earth are not from the “Euphrates” (KJV), but from “the bottomless pit” (JST). God appointed time carefully. The Jerusalem Bible reads, “this hour, of this day of this month of this year.” They have prepared to become destroying angels and attack a portion (a third) of humanity.

Revelation 9:16 “The number of cavalry troops was two hundred million” (NTC) The number in Greek is, “two myriads of myriads” indicating an incomprehensible number. (In comparison to 200 million warriors, there were 70 million combined Allied and Axis forces in WWII.) This number might represent demons or even epidemics or other pestilences that the devilish army brings. Note JST changes “heard,” to “saw.”

Revelation 9:17 “I saw the horses in the vision and their riders, who had breastplates the color of fire and sapphire and sulfur, and the horses’ heads were like lions, and out of their mouths came fire, and smoke, and sulfur” (NTC) The warriors—with lion-like heads, horse-like bodies and with snake-like tails—had armor empowered to destroy akin to fire and brimstone. John describes a picture of their diabolical ferocious intents in groups of three colors, body parts, and plagues.

Revelation 9:18–19 “From these three plagues, a third of mankind was killed, by the fire . . . smoke . . . sulfur . . . For the power . . . was in their mouths and . . . tails” (NTC) These three plagues kill a portion of “mankind” (NIV). Both ends of the demonic destruction were violent and lethal. This may refer to human’s spiritual, not physical, death.

Revelation 9:20–21 “The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands . . . idols of gold . . . murders, magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts” (NIV). This is the greatest tragedy. All the wicked are not killed, but they continue to worship the things of this world. Seeking material possessions and personal pleasure is the idolatry of our day. The rest of John’s list has sins such as seeking for personal gain or pleasure by breaking the law. John includes that they are guilty of breaking five of the Ten Commandments. “Sorcery” (KJV) or “witchcraft” (NTC) in Greek is: *pharmakos* / “a poisoner” or potions also referring to drug users. The KJV uses “Adultery” / *porneia*, but it refers to all forms of “sexual immorality” including pornography. Those who worship God will be spared from these plagues.

REVELATION 10

2nd Interlude—John’s Personal Assignment: Gather Israel

Another Mighty Angel

Revelation 10:1–7

Revelation 10:1 “I saw another mighty angel descending from the sky enveloped in a cloud. There was the rainbow on his head and his face was like the sun, legs were like columns of fire” (NTC) An interlude interrupts the horrors of the last days. In contrast to the destroying devils, we see a glorious being of light, covered with a halo or light, or a sign reassuring him that the covenant is intact (God’s message from the sign of the rainbow from Genesis 9:13). John describes the angel as he described the throne of God (Revelation 4:3). John often contrasts with opposites to emphasize that there are only two ways in life—we follow God, or we do not.

Revelation 10:2 “He held a small, open scroll in his hand. He put his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the earth” (NTC) Metaphorically, the angel stood on the sea and earth—communicating that he had authority over land and sea. This might symbolize the breadth of his influence or message, too. The little scroll or “book” (KJV), included John’s mission to gather the tribes of Israel, according to D&C 77:14.

Revelation 10:3–4 “He shouted with a loud voice like a lion roaring . . . the seven thunders spoke with their own voices . . . I was about to write, and I hear a voice from heaven saying, ‘Seal up the things . . . do not write them’” (NTC) The voice of God is often described as the voice of thunder, so it is appropriate that the messengers that utter His message should do the same (Revelation 6:1). In the Jewish world of the time, “the thunders” referred to the thunders of Sinai, which a later rabbi recorded as “the seven voices” of God (Exodus 19:16–19).⁴⁵ As seven represents complete or whole, the message probably had something to do with the completion of the perfection of the earth. We will have to wait to learn what was actually said.

Revelation 10:5–6 “The angel . . . raised his right hand to heaven . . . and swore by him who lives forever . . . that there will be no further delay” (NTC) The angel lifted his *right* hand (BSB, NIV, ESV, etc.) to heaven or to God using several beautiful names for God, and swore or *omnuó!* “promised with an oath”—as if he were making a covenant. The oath was that there would be no more delay; time was up (only the KJV refers to “time no longer,” even the NKJV changes it to “delay”). This answers the martyrs’ cry, “How long O Lord?” (Revelation 6:10).

Revelation 10:7 “In the days of the voice of the seventh angel . . . the mystery of God will be fulfilled” The seventh angel will be introduced in Revelation 11:15, when the “mystery” or work of God will be made known and finished. John is told, just as Amos 3:7 promised, that God will proclaim His works first “to His servants, the prophets.” Until then, we have John’s commission to cover in this chapter-long interlude.

The Little Scroll/Book

Revelation 10:8-11

Revelation 10:8-9 “Come take the open scroll in the hand of the angel . . . and I went up to the angel . . . He said to me, ‘Take and eat it, and it will be bitter in your stomach, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey’” (NTC) John was commanded to eat, or take the mission that was described in verse two. (Jeremiah and Ezekiel were also given a book to eat in Jeremiah 15:16; Ezekiel 2:6-10, 3:1-3.) The imagery speaks of internalizing his assignment and fully taking his calling into his life.

D&C 77:14 “The little book . . . Was a mission, and an ordinance, for him to gather the tribes of Israel; behold, this is Elias, who, as it is written, must come and restore all things.”

The Lord revealed to Joseph Smith that John’s mission was the call of Elias, “to restore all things.” We read more in D&C 27:6, “Elias, to whom I have committed the keys of bringing to pass the restoration of all things spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began, concerning the last days.” This is a new mission call and title given to John (and possibly a new name). D&C 77: 9 and 14 describe Elias as the one responsible for the gathering of Israel. Later, in the Kirtland Temple Joseph recorded an experience when, “Elias appeared, and committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, saying that in us and our seed all generations after us should be blessed” (D&C 110:12). This may be John, as the calling sounds similar. (However, there was another man named Elias who appeared on the Matthew of Transfiguration, Matthew 17:3; D&C 138:45.)

John’s new mission was received as sweet news, but the assignment became difficult and even bitter over time. Perhaps the bitterness is sorrow from seeing those who reject the message of God.

Revelation 10:10-11 “I took the little scroll . . . and it was sweet as honey . . . they then said to me, ‘You must again prophesy about many peoples’” (NTC) Early in the Apocalypses, we read of the Savior taking the large scroll, and now John follows His example and takes his little scroll that revealed his next calling. He will prophecy to many inhabitants of the world across nations and languages. His assignment was partially fulfilled in writing his Gospel, letters and this Book of Revelation. His new assignment is still in progress.

One of Joseph Smith’s scribes recorded that he spoke on this topic in June of 1831:

The Spirit of the Lord fell upon Joseph in an unusual manner, and he prophesied that John the Revelator was then among the Ten Tribes of Israel who had been led away by Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, to prepare them for their return from their long dispersion, to again possess the land of their fathers. He prophesied many more things that I have not written.”⁴⁶

REVELATION 11

Second Woe and Two Prophets in Jerusalem

This interlude of John's call explains why in the following chapters, he is no longer an observer, but a participant. We return from the interlude, to examine the second woe mentioned in Revelation 9:13–21. The seventh Angel is still waiting to trumpet the final call, following the testimony and martyrdom of the two witnesses.

Revelation 11:1–2 “I was given a reed like a stick and was told, ‘Come and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship in it. But omit the outer courtyard . . .’” (NTC) John used a measuring reed or rod (which grows about 15–20 feet) to scope out the size of a visionary temple and worshipers. (Titus had destroyed Herod's Temple over twenty years earlier in AD 70.) John measures the worshipers, the altars of sacrifice, and incense, as well as the sanctuary, which included the Holy Place and Holy of Holies. The message suggests that everything in the temple proper is safe, but not in the court of the Gentiles.

We learn that the “holy city” or the city of Jerusalem, will be trampled by gentiles for 42 months before God intervenes. The timing of three and a half years becomes significant in the Apocalypse. Three-and-a-half-years is half of seven or 1,260 days. This number is also found in Daniel 7:25. It is also the approximate length of Jesus' ministry. This number is repeated over and over in this section.

Revelation 11:3 “I will appoint my two witnesses to prophesy one thousand two hundred sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” Consistent with Old Testament scripture, the Lord gives two witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). These two witnesses are mentioned in several scriptures and in religious speculation (i.e. D&C 77:15; 2 Nephi 8:19–20; and Isaiah 51:19–20, JST). Elder Parley P. Pratt thought they were Jewish prophets. Bruce R. McConkie thought they would be members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.⁴⁷ In the Bible, though, a prophet is one who testifies of Christ, and not necessarily an Apostle.

D&C 77:15 “The two witnesses. . . are two prophets that are to be raised up to the Jewish nation in the last days, at the time of the restoration, and to prophesy to the Jews after they are gathered and have built the city of Jerusalem in the land of their fathers.”

John records much about what happens during those 1,265 days. Their clothing is described as the coarse and uncomfortable camels' hair clothing that was worn at times of mourning. This may describe the prophets' heavy burden they carry, or the rejection they will receive. The sack cloth may represent the hardship of their message—repent. They will prophesy of the distress, grief, and sorrow that will come if the Jews do not turn to the Lord.

Revelation 11:4 “They are ‘the two olive trees’ and the two lampstands, and ‘they stand before the Lord of the earth” (NIV) John’s account cites the prophet Zechariah’s text of these symbols, but leaves out that they also “are two anointed ones” (Zechariah 4:14; also see 4:3, 11). These two witnesses have been close to God and are referred to as two candlesticks. Symbolically, candlesticks hold light. As God is the source of light, the olive oil burns to make light. Olive oil is also used for healing, nourishment, and anointing. Other prophets have compared godly men to an olive tree (Judges 9:8–9; Psalms 52:8; 128:3).

Revelation 11:5 “If anyone wants to harm them, fire comes out of their mouth and consumes their enemies” (NTC) The witnesses cannot be physically harmed during their 3½ year mission. According to John’s Gospel, the Lord’s mission was also 3½ years.⁴⁸ All servants of God who have been sealed by Him, will not die until their missions are complete. The torture devised to harm them will be reversed and kill the wicked designer.

Revelation 11:7–8 “When they have completed their testifying, the beast that came out of the abyss will . . . kill them” (NTC) After their mission is complete, like the Lord, they will be killed. The prophets who join the martyrs have their testimonies sealed with their blood. The offensive war that their enemies have raged for 42 months will end abruptly when they are killed.

Revelation 11:8–10 “Their corpses will lie in the main street of . . . spiritually Sodom and Egypt where also the Lord was crucified. . . for three and a half days . . . the inhabitants of the earth will gloat” (NTC) While their dead bodies lie in Jerusalem for 3½ days, the wicked city will rejoice and celebrate their deaths. Nations will look at their corpses—possibly on the evening news or on satellite internet coverage. The parallel time period testifies of Christ again.⁴⁹

Revelation 11:11–12 “After three and a half days, the spirit of life from God entered into them . . . they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘Come up here’ And they went up into the sky in a cloud” (NTC) Their resurrection is patterned after the Lord’s three days and three nights in a tomb, and their ascension as His 40-day ministry (Acts 1:19). The lives of the prophets typify of the Savior before and after His resurrection (Hosea 12:10; 2 Kings 2:11). Those celebrating will all see the error of their judgement, but they will not have long to ponder before the next event.

Revelation 11:13–14 “At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe has passed” (NIV) The third great earthquake arrives in Jerusalem and kills one tenth or a tithe of the city’s inhabitants. Seven thousand may be symbolical as a tithe of a portion of the greater whole. It speaks symbolically of all the wicked being killed, especially as those who are saved “gave glory to God,” suggesting the possibility of their conversion, too.⁵⁰ They learn to trust in the Lord’s hand and glorify God. “For

the first time in Revelation, we have a people who actually respond positively to the punitive judgments meted out by God.”⁵¹

Revelation 11:14 “The second woe is finished. Now the third woe comes quickly” (NTC) Two woes are complete with good overcoming evil. The third woe is announced, but not explained.

The Seventh Angel’s Trumpet Call and Third Woe

Revelation 11:15–19

Revelation 11:15 “The seventh angel blew his trumpet. And there were loud voices in heaven saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord’” (NTC) The trump and angel now announce the imminent return of Christ. The angelic praise is sung in Handel’s Messiah and will be on the lips of the heavenly choirs at that time. All kingdoms will bow to the Savior as He reigns in righteousness.

Revelation 11:16–18 “The twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God.” (NIV) The same 24 elders from John’s seven Churches of Asia (who may represent all exalted beings), rejoice with the purification of the earth and worship God. They acknowledge God’s power and praise Him for His imminent righteous reign. They sang or chanted a beautiful poem thanking God for His judgment—for punishing the wicked and rewarding the righteous.

“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
the One who is and who was,
because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.
The nations were angry, and your wrath has come.
The time has come for judging the dead,
and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people who revere your name,
both great and small—
and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

Revelation 11:19 “The temple of God in heaven opened, and the ark of his covenant appeared in his temple” (NTC) John sees the heavenly temple again, but this time, it is opened to reveal the Ark of the Covenant. This ancient golden throne, with its lid as the golden mercy seat, had been missing since the destruction of Solomon’s Temple (2 Samuel 6:15; also see Exodus 25:16; 40:20; Numbers 7:89). It represents God’s authority, justice, mercy, nurturing, and law all returning to the earth. By so doing, the earth will return to its paradisiacal state. The verse ends with God’s cosmic earthquakes, lightening, and hail closing the telestial history and opening the next era.

Header Image: The Apocalypse of Saint John the Evangelist on the Island of Patmos by Jan Matsys, 1563.

ENDNOTES

1. Strong's #602, <https://biblehub.com/greek/602.htm> (accessed 11/18/19)
2. Tertullian, *The Sacred Writings of Tertullian, Annotated Edition* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2017), Chapter 36. Available on Google Books. (accessed 11/17/19)
3. Peter was crucified upside down, Andrew, Philip, Thaddeus (Jude), and Simon “the Canaanite” were all crucified, Bartholomew was skinned, Thomas and Matthew were run through with spears, James, son of Zebedee executed with a sword, Judas took his own life after betraying Jesus, and Paul was beheaded.
4. The information in D&C 77, was first published in the Nauvoo Newspaper, *Times and Seasons*, under the title: “A Key to Understanding the Revelations of St. John, in a Series of Questions and Answers.” From there it was later collected with the writings in the Pearl of Great Price, and finally placed chronologically in the Doctrine and Covenants. See Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, *Brigham Young University, New Testament Commentary: The Revelation of John the Apostle* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2016), 33.
5. Alonzo L. Gaskill, *The Lost Language of Symbolism*, Deseret Book, 2003, adapted.
6. Strong's, #4591, https://biblehub.com/greek/ese_manen_4591.htm (accessed 11/18/19).
7. For more on “translated beings” see Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4.1485–6.
8. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 104. This translation is abbreviated NTC.
9. Welch, *Allegory of the Olive Tree*, 427–428.
10. Welch and Hall, *Charting the New Testament*, 17–2. The seven areas include: Divine Commission, Recognition, Criticism, Admonition, Descriptive Statement about Jesus Christ, Call to Hear, Sacred Promises. The chart above is adapted from this source.
11. Sources for this information came from the NIV, Paul J. Achtemeier, *Harper Collin' Bible Dictionary* (1996), Alonzo Gaskill, *Commentary on Revelation*, unpublished, and xx
12. Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1:1–28; 1 Kings 22:19; Daniel 7, 10; 1 Nephi 1:6–14; D&C 76:21; 137:3; etc. Look at the similarities between Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon record of the vision of the degrees of glory. „We beheld the glory of the Son, on the right hand of the Father, and received of his fulness; and saw the holy angels, and them who are sanctified before his throne, worshipping God, and the Lamb, who worship him forever and ever“ (D&C 76:20–21).
13. The high priest wore one stone for each of the tribes of Israel. The “ruby” (NIV) is also translated as also “sardine” (KJV) and “carnelian” (BSB). He also wore two stones known as “Urim and Thummim” or “lights and perfections” in Hebrew (see Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8; 1 Samuel 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Nehemiah 7:65; JS-H 1:35.)
14. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 171. The quote continues: “This earth in its sanctified and immortal state will be a Urim and Thummim for all things below it in the scale of creation, but not above it.” Given, April 2, 1843, in a General Conference sermon in Nauvoo, IL.
15. See also Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith (TPJS)*, 287–294.

16. Ibid., 291–92.
17. Hermes, Mercury, and Cupid.
18. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 225.
19. Ibid., 226. “One such type of covenant was the Roman will that also bore seven seals. Such testaments could not be administered until all the seals were broken. Only a person of authority could legally break the seals and execute the will.”
20. In considering the Messianic impact of *netser*/branch, there are many scriptures with the same idea. For example, in Jeremiah 23:5 the Lord says, “I shall raise up a righteous shoot for David; as king he will reign and govern wisely.” The Suffering Servant Song of Isaiah 53:2 compares the servant to a “sapling” and a “root.” At the time of the New Testament, the Jews in Qumran used “branch” or *netser* in an eschatological sense of God’s plan of salvation. The Dead Sea Scroll community described itself as “an everlasting planting” (Dead Sea Scrolls (1QH vi 15, vii 19, vii 6,8,10). This is probably an echo of Isaiah 60:21, “a branch of His planting.” Thus a secondary connection of Nazorean comes from applying Jesus to the prophetic “branch of David” passages in Revelation 5:6. For more see Raymond Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 211–212.
21. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 232.
22. “Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book,” p. 22, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 20, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book/19>.
23. Also see D&C 128:23; Smith, *TPJS*, 291–292.
24. Strong’s, #281, <https://biblehub.com/greek/281.htm> (accessed 11-20-19).
25. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 252.
26. Ibid., 274.
27. Also see: D&C 88:87–91; 29:14–21; 34:9; 43:23–26; Isaiah 2:19; 13:9–11; 34:4; Matthew 24:29–30; Haggis 2:6–7.
28. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 273.
29. Strong’s #417, <https://biblehub.com/greek/417.htm> (accessed 11-21-19).
30. Elias is used in scripture most often as the Greek name for prophet Elijah (Matthew 11:14; 16:14; 17:3; etc.); but also, Elias visited *Zacharias* (D&C 27:7); a title used for John the Baptist (Matthew 17:12; Luke 1:17;); someone to gather Israel and restore all things (D&C 77:9, 14); carried keys for “the dispensation of Abraham” (D&C 110:12); etc.
31. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 287.
32. Smith, *TPJS*, 321.
33. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 292.
34. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 291.
35. M. Russell Ballard, “This Is My Work and Glory,” *Ensign*, May 2013, 19. “In the eternal perspective, both the procreative power and the priesthood power are shared by husband and wife.” Also see D&C 124:25–30; and 131:1–4.
36. Donald Parry, *Temples in the Ancient World* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 443.
37. Alonzo Gaskill, *Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 104.
38. Strong’s #105, <https://biblehub.com/greek/105.htm> (accessed 11-21-19).

39. Strong's #1966, <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/1966.htm> (accessed 11-21-19)
40. Joseph Smith, "Discourse, 21 May 1843, as Reported by Howard Coray," p. [42], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 22, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-21-may-1843-as-reported-by-howard-coray/7> The quote continued, "but go abroad upon the earth exposed to the anger of the elements naked & bare, but oftentimes he lays hold upon men binds up their Spirits enters their habitations laughs [sic] at the decree of God, and rejoices in that he hath a house to dwell in."
41. Strong's #12, <https://biblehub.com/greek/12.htm> (accessed 11-21-19)
42. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 335.
43. *Ibid.*, 346.
44. Alonzo Gaskill, *Revelation*, 114.
45. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 371.
46. Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:176.
47. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah: The Second Coming of the Son of Man* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1982), 390. "The word that comes from the Lord is: 'I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and three score days, clothed in sackcloth.' Who are these witnesses, and when will they prophesy? "They are two prophets that are to be raised up to the Jewish nation in the last days, at the time of the restoration, and to prophesy to the Jews after they are gathered and have built the city of Jerusalem in the land of their fathers." (D&C 77:15.) Their ministry will take place after the latter-day temple has been built in Old Jerusalem, after some of the Jews who dwell there have been converted, and just before Armageddon and the return of the Lord Jesus. How long will they minister in Jerusalem and in the Holy Land? For three and a half years, the precise time spent by the Lord in his ministry to the ancient Jews. The Jews, as an assembled people, will hear again the testimony of legal administrators bearing record that salvation is in Christ and in his gospel. Who will these witnesses be? We do not know, except that they will be followers of Joseph Smith; they will hold the holy Melchizedek Priesthood; they will be members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is reasonable to suppose, knowing how the Lord has always dealt with his people in all ages, that they will be two members of the Council of the Twelve or of the First Presidency of the Church."
48. Jesus' mission was 3½ years as John records in his Gospel. It begins several months before Passover (including His baptism, gathering disciples, the wedding at Cana, and time in Capernaum before Passover John 2:13), and ends at the third Passover (John 4:45; 6:4; 12:1–18:28). The other Gospels telescope everything into only one year, with one Passover.
49. For the 3½ days to parallel Jesus' body lying in the tomb, we need to use the timing from John's Gospel, where Jesus was in the tomb three days and three nights. John claims Jesus' Last Supper was the evening before Passover, so that He is killed on Passover, and laid the tomb that Passover afternoon, then night one is Thursday night, night two, their Sabbath on Friday night, and night three, Saturday before His resurrection early before sunrise on Sunday morning "the first day of the week" (John 20:1). This, then, was actually 3 ½ days in the tomb, just as these prophets who typify Him will.
50. Truman G. Madsen, *The Radiant Life* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1994), 109. "A Jewish apocalyptic tradition says that those two prophets who are to one day testify in the streets of Jerusalem to prepare the hearts of the Jews to be turned to the prophets (see D&C 98:16–17), and are then to literally be killed and lie in the streets—martyrs just prior to the coming

of the Messiah— are Elijah and Enoch. Elijah has been patient through millennia awaiting the opportunity to bring earth and heaven back together, to tie together the old and new worlds, to take the estranged and the alienated and the embittered and somehow transform their hearts, and to prepare all of the family who will to be family, welding them indissolubly in order to greet the Christ.”

51. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 413.



REVELATION 12–22

THE KINGDOM OF GOD VS. THE KINGDOM OF SATAN

Introduction to the Second Half of Revelation

John describes his record as a “revelation of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:1). In the second half, we see our Savior in even greater majesty, with wisdom, judgment, and love. His goodness and glory are contrasted with the most sinister and sadistic creatures in the universe. This section closes with His victory over all evil to enjoy His reign in righteousness from a newly created celestial home. A second theme in the second half is the critical role that the saints play in preparing for the Lord’s triumph. He cannot come until His people are ready to receive Him.

The wickedness of the Last Days dominates seventy percent of the second half. By the sheer volume in this section, it appears that this is also a main focus of the book. Furthermore, since the restoration, we have received many clues on how to decipher the riddle of the Apocalypse. These tools reveal that much of the content is unfolding in our day. The messages are directed to us. We will also be held accountable for understanding it and heeding its warnings.

Outline

VISION	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE	NUMBER OF VERSES
Throne of God	1, 4–5	36
Seven Churches	2–3	51
BC 4000–1000	6:1–11	11
AD 1000– AD 2000	6:12–7:3	14
AD 2000 Last Days & Second Coming	8:1–19:2	201
Millennium 20XX–30XX	20:1–6	6
Final Scenes	20:7–15	9
Celestialized Earth	21:2–22:6	33

REVELATION 12

Interlude of a Pivotal Flashback

Chapter 12 is a pivotal point. “It is the key to understanding all that went before and all that comes after.”¹ It concludes the vision of the seven seals and introduces the other series of visions. This interlude explains who, how, and why Satan became the source of evil. It includes the premortal war in heaven. We learn of the war between Satan and the Church (represented by a woman) and God’s people. It explains how and why the earth arrived at such a state of hatred, which we see in the last half of the Apocalypse.

In the next two chapters three devilish figures are introduced, which are often referred to as a Satanic Trinity:

1. The dragon who represents Satan
2. The beast on the sand
3. The counterfeit horned lamb

JST IN REVELATION

The JST changed only 21% of the Book of Revelation (81 of 393 verses). As a comparison, the JST changed over 50% of Genesis (771 of 1,532 verses), and added 15% or 225 new verses; and the JST changed 64% of Matthew (682 of 1,071 verses). The JST of Revelation 12 does rearranges the order (which are found in the LDS Bible JST).

THE FIRST OF SEVEN SHORT VISIONS²

The Woman and Her Son

Revelation 12:1–6

Revelation 12:1 “There appeared a great *sign* in heaven in the likeness of things on the earth” (JST *italicized*)

The word, “great” is used five times in this chapter—starting with this first great sign of a woman. Most English translations change the KJV “wonders” to “sign.” This sign is given as a token or validation of what he saw. The sign communicated that the forthcoming vision or information “was authentic and came from God via a true messenger.”³ Similar this sign likening the heavens to the earth, Hebrews 8:4–5, explains that that earthly temples are patterned after God’s heavenly temples.

“**a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet**” The woman represents the church clothed in celestial clothing and wearing God’s power (Revelation 12:7, JST). In the Old Testament, Jerusalem and Zion are a woman, and her son is God’s people or Israel.⁴ We find the same pattern in the Book of Mormon.⁵ The moon or terrestrial existence is subject to her.

“**and upon her head a crown of twelve stars**” There are two different Greek words used for “crown” in the KJV. This one, *stephanos*/“garland, honor, glory,” was a laurel wreath garland worn by victorious soldiers, generals, or athletes at the Olympics. In most occurrences in the Book of Revelation, it is given as a divine reward from God (see Revelations 2:10; 3:11; 4:4, 10; 14:14). The second word, *diadems*/“a royal crown,” was used for political domination (see Revelations 12:3; 13:1; 19:12). In this verse, the woman’s *stephanos*/laurel garland, speaks of her victory in overcoming the world and Satan. The “twelve stars” fit into our understanding of the number twelve as representing God’s power or order, and the stars represent the twelve apostles standing at the head of His church.

Revelation 12:2 “The *woman* being with child cried, **travailing in birth. . .**” (JST *italicized*) The challenge of the Church to bring forth a generation of righteous or even the millennial kingdom is likened to labor pains (i.e. Isaiah 13:8; 21:3; 21:3; etc.). Her labor is not in vain but represents the creative suffering that will bring life and joy. The Old Testament uses the image of suffering in childbirth to bring forth Zion (i.e. Isaiah 13:8; 26:17; 66:7–8; Micah 4:10; etc.) This may refer to the primitive Christian church and the beginning of apostasy.

Revelation 12:5 “**And she brought forth a man child**” The JST moves verse five up to announce the birth of the woman’s son after verse two. Changing the verse order helps the continuity of knowing what is the work of the church/woman. Here the son is the offspring of the church, or of perhaps a Zion society, or the millennial kingdom of God. We learn in the JST modern scripture that the child is “the kingdom of our God and his Christ” (D&C 76:28; Revelation 12:7, JST).

“to shepherd all nations with a rod of iron” (NTC) The word in KJV, “rule” is actually, *poimainó* / “to act as a shepherd, tend, herd; hence: I rule, govern).⁶ The inevitable plan for the offspring of the church is to tend the nations. Three times in the Book of Revelation, John refers to a protecting, kind shepherd who still rules with a stern “rod of iron” (Revelation 2:27; 19:15). In the Book of Mormon, the “iron rod” is “the word of God” (1 Nephi 11:25).

“But her child was taken away to God and to his throne” (NTC) But, God snatched away the baby boy to heaven. This has been interpreted as the early saints leaving the earth preceding the apostasy, or some see it as the Savior. The son may also refer to a Zion society, like Enoch’s and Melchizedek’s people. Whoever it was, God protected the child with a mighty power. The “imagery suggests that the Lord took certain priesthood keys away as a means of preserving both the Kingdom and Church.”⁷

Satanic Forces Gather Pre-mortally and on Earth

Revelation 12:3–6

Revelation 12:3 “Another sign appeared in the sky, a great, fiery-red dragon that had seven heads and ten horns, on his heads were seven diadems” (NTC) This sign is fierce and dangerous. The KJV, “great red dragon,” is actually in Greek, a Leviathan, or sea-monster (Job 40:25; Psalms 73:14; 103:26; etc.). The Greek word did not mean a dragon who breaths fire, but one that personifies “malevolent and seething chaos, often represented as the dark primeval waters, which oppose not only God but all that is holy.”⁸ Verse 9 tells us the dragon is the “old serpent, called the Devil.” The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “There is a mistranslation of the word dragon . . . The original word signifies the devil, and not dragon, as translated.”⁹

The numbers are not necessarily numerical but significant for understanding the meaning. The devil’s seven heads and “crowns”/ *diadems* / “political domination,” represent complete domination or “insatiable cruelty.”¹⁰ He has usurped his power and only carries false sovereignty. His crown contrasts with the woman’s garland of victory. The horns are signs of power. Daniel also wrote of dreadful ruler with ten horns who fought against God (Daniel 7:7, 20, 24).

Revelation 12:4 “His tail dragged off a third of the stars of the sky, and he threw them to the earth” (NTC) The third part refers to a limited part. In this context, the stars represent the spirit children of God who were deceived by Satan pre-mortally and became devils, unable to progress (also see Dan 8:10; D&C 29:36–37).

“and the dragon stood before the woman” Satan stood in a position of confrontation or attacking; the devil is especially interested in the baby boy.

“ready to devour her child after it was born” (JST *italicized*) This does not sound like the birth of Jesus because Satan was not allowed to destroy Him at birth, but some see it as referring to the Holy Family fleeing to Egypt (Matthew 2:13–15). If the “son” represents Zion, Satan only has a short opportunity to snatch it because he is not allowed to destroy Zion, which is never destroyed in scripture.

Revelation 12:6 “the woman fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore years” (JST *italicized*) Satan did not destroy the church, though God prepared a place to keep it. The timing can be interpreted as God’s period prior to the Restoration. The Lord’s priesthood power, saving ordinances, and people (represented by the woman, meaning the Church) come out of the wilderness or apostasy (D&C 5:14; 33:5; 109:73). This may refer to those described in D&C 89:9, “lawful heirs according to the flesh, and have been hid from the world with Christ in God.” It may refer to the period of time the people of Enoch and Melchizedek are hid from the earth until the Second Coming (Moses 7:62–64). Others interpret this as “certain bloodlines were preserved.”¹¹ In any case, eventually the Church/woman’s offspring will overcome the Adversary.

The War in Heaven

Revelation 12:7–11

Revelation 12:7 “There was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon . . . and his angels fought against Michael” (JST *italicized*) This “interlude” in the story is a flashback giving more details about the premortal war where Michael fought Lucifer or Satan.¹² It is actually the same war now, just a change in battlefields. Elder Bruce R. McConkie discussed this war:

What kind of war? The same kind that prevails on earth; the only kind Satan and spirit beings can wage—a war of words, a tumult of opinions, a conflict of ideologies; a war between truth and error, between light and darkness, between the gospel of Jesus Christ, with all its saving power, and the false religions of the world, which have a form of godliness but are devoid of saving grace. And the battle lines are still drawn. It is now on earth as it was then in heaven; every man must choose which general he will follow.¹³

Michael is the only angel named in this book. We learn in modern revelation that he is Adam (D&C 107:54).

Revelation 12:8 “the dragon prevailed not against Michael, neither the child, nor the woman which was the church of God, who had been delivered of her pains, and brought forth the kingdom of our God and his Christ neither was there place found in heaven for the great dragon” (JST *italicized*) The JST emphasizes Satan’s loss both in the past and the future. God will assist His Church, to bring forth His Kingdom.



The Fall of the Rebel Angels by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1562. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Revelation 12:9b “the great dragon *who* was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and *also called Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels . . .*” (JST italicized)

This verse lists five of Satan’s names. They describe his sinister motives: Dragon (as one who is out to destroy), old serpent (the deceiver and counterfeit in Eden), “Devil” means “slanderer,” and Satan is a Hebrew word meaning “adversary or accuser.” A decade after he recorded the JST, the Prophet Joseph Smith spoke on this verse in Nauvoo. His scribe recorded with a quill as much of the sermon as he could as Joseph spoke extemporaneously:

[Revelation] ch. 12 v. 9 it there reads ‘that old serpent called the devil, [’] and it ought to be translated devil in this case and not dragon. Every thing that we have not a key word to, we will take it as it reads. The beasts that <which> John saw and speaks of as being in heaven were actually living in heaven, and were actually to have power given to them.¹⁴

Even though God allowed the devils to have power on the earth, God also gives His disciples power to avoid satanic temptations and to cast the devil out. Faith-filled Christians the world over have been empowered by God to call on the name of the Lord Jesus the Christ and cast out devils. It is a gift of the Spirit (Matthew 10:8).

A Voice from Heaven

Revelation 12:10–12

Revelation 12:10 “Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters . . . has been hurled down’ (NIV) Another loud voice proclaims victory in a two-verse poem of praise. God’s supreme power will conquer. We learn that the devil accuses people day and night (after he sets the traps to tempt us). Through God’s infinite mercy, our desperate need for a redeemer was met in Jesus of Nazareth. Once the devil and his henchmen were cast out, Christ offered salvation to the rest in heaven.

Revelation 12:11 “They *have overcome him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word for they loved not their own lives but kept the testimony even unto death*” (JST *italicized*) This infers giving our will to God and living selflessly. Power to overcome Satan and his forces comes through the Atonement of Jesus (2 Nephi 9:25–26). We can tap into that power if we are faithful to our testimony to the end and are willing to sacrifice all that is required to enjoy the companionship of the Holy Ghost.

Revelation 12:12 “rejoice, O heavens, and ye that dwell in them. And *after these things I heard another voice saying, Woe to the inhabitants of the earth yea, and they who dwell upon the islands of the sea! for the devil . . . knoweth that he hath but a short time*” (JST *italicized*) Satan’s work accelerates because of his limited time. He wants to cause as much damage and misery as possible knowing that there is no ultimate victory for him. His greatest triumph is destroying eternal families and, thus, their exaltation.

The Dragon and the Woman

Revelation 12:13–18

Revelation 12:13–14 “The dragon . . . drove off the woman who . . . was given the two wings of a great eagle, so she could fly into the wilderness . . . where she was sustained for a time, times, and a half time, away from the serpent” (NTC) When Satan was cast to the earth, the Church or people of God were persecuted by devils. So, the woman/Church was given power to fly away and be nourished (D&C 77:4). Exactly what these times mean is unknown, but Daniel 12:7 uses the same phrase.¹⁵ The important part is that God kept the church away from Satan’s powerful pollutions for a season.

Revelation 12:15 “from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent” (NIV). Satan tries to destroy the woman from her protected hiding place. The Serpent’s flood is filled with lies, corrupt counterfeits, and apostate doctrine.

Revelation 12:16 “the earth helped the woman and opened her mouth and swallowed the river” (NTC) Behind the scenes we have an omniscient God protecting the woman/Church. The prophet Joseph Smith taught



Left: Woman of the Apocalypse, 12th century.
Image via Wikimedia Commons.

that the earth also has a spirit and it acts in harmony with God's will to protect the Church. The imagery evokes the waters moving for Moses, Joshua, and the children of Israel. God's creations act together to carry out His directions. In one way or another God will support His people and deliver them.

Revelation 12:17 “The dragon was angry because of the woman and went away to make war with the rest of her offspring who kept the commandments” (NTC) Note with whom Satan wars his fiercest fight—it is against disciples of Christ or those who keep God's commandments. This is why “any compromise with the world is actually a concession to Satan. Such a view should shock modern disciples out of spiritual complacency and move them to full-hearted resistance to the world and its allure.”¹⁶

REVELATION 13

Revelation 13 focuses on two of Satan's henchmen:

1. A beast from the sea in the first half, and
2. A beast of the land in the second half of the chapter.

2nd Short Vision: Beast from the Sea

Revelation 13:1–10

Revelation 13:1 “I saw another sign, in the likeness of the kingdoms of the earth; a beast rise up out of the sea, and he stood upon the sand of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns . . . ten crowns” (JST italicized) As the blaspheming beast stands on the sand, he reflects the “foolish man” from Jesus' counsel when he advised His disciples to build on the rock (Matthew 7:26). The heads, horns, and crowns depict Satan's attempt to counterfeit God's power. The word for “crown”/*diadems* describes the devil's political kingdoms (see Revelation 12:1). It comes from the water, which is often a reference to chaos in scripture.

Biblical scholars see this as referring to the Roman Empire coming out of the Mediterranean Sea and the seven heads as Rome's seven mountains. But, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “where God ever gives a vision of an image, or beast or figure of any kind he always holds himself responsible to give a revelation or interpretation of the meaning thereof, otherwise we are not responsible or accountable for our belief in them.”¹⁷

During the first week of April 1843, he publicly preached on several parts of the Book of Revelation.¹⁸ On Saturday, April 8, he discussed this beast: “the beast that rose up out of the sea should be translated as the image of a beast.”¹⁹ This ten-horned-beast-of-blasphemy may represent organizations or ideologies that are opposed to Christ’s teachings.

“and upon his heads the name of blasphemy” In the KJV, this new beast has blasphemy written on each of his seven heads. Another translation emphasizes, “the beast does not carry the name of blasphemy but rather has a blasphemous name.”²⁰ In the ancient world, knowing the name of a god allowed one to control it. Blasphemy can refer to claiming you are God when you are not, or attempting to be worshipped, or acting in God’s place without authority.²¹

Revelation 13:2 “The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority” (NIV) The dragon or Satan works closely with the blaspheming beast and delegates power to it. Each of the attributes are described as wild, ferocious, and flesh eating. Rather than visualize a ten horned beast, look for the meaning of these symbols. It is described as the most heinous of all its predecessors. Daniel 7:1–7 describes a similar beast, but Joseph Smith explained that it represented an apostate tradition:

[There] was a nice distinction between the vision which John saw as spoken of in Revelation, [and] the vision which Daniel saw, the former relating only to things as they actually existed in heaven—the latter being a figure representing things on the earth. God never made use of the figure of a beast to represent the kingdom of heaven—when they were made use of, it was to represent an apostate church.²²

Revelation 13:3 “One of the heads . . . dealt a death wound, and [it] . . . was healed . . . And the whole world marveled at the beast” (NTC) The beast’s head is wounded so severely that he will die from it, but he still functions for a time. Biblical scholars have labeled this as the death of certain political leaders, the protestant reformation, or specific national divisions. John used the same word for the Divine Lamb’s wound (Revelation 5:6). This is consistent with Satan constantly striving to usurp Jesus’ position. It suggests that “the beast is a parody of the Lamb.”²³ Whatever causes the wound, with the help of Satan, it continues to coexist for a period of time. As the beast had power to live, the world “marvels,” or admires it enough to put their trust in the beast.

Revelation 13:4 “They worshipped the dragon, because he had given power to the beast: and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast? And who can fight against him?” (NTC) Myopic humans worship devilish ideology when they trust or pursue godlessness. They follow out of fear, though, not love.

Illustration of Apocalypse 21 and Revelation chapter 13, a beast with seven heads. Illustration from the Scheits print-Bible, 1710, of the Phillip Medhurst Collection. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Revelation 13:5–7 “The beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months . . . to make war on the saints and to conquer them.”(ESV) This satanic influence slandered God, things heavenly, and the saints for 3 ½ years (again!). The number signifies a *temporary* victory for Satan and his minions, but it is not the complete “whole.”

Revelation 13:8 “All . . . will worship him, whose names have not been written in the scroll of life of the Lamb” (NTC) Those written in “the Book of Life” (NKJV) have been sealed on their foreheads (D&C 77:9). On October 25 and 26, 1831, Joseph taught “when we have a testimony that our names are sealed in the Lamb’s Book of Life we have perfect love and then it is impossible for false Christs to [deceive] us.”²⁴ The Book of Mormon also taught more about this verse and quotes God as saying, “the names of the righteous shall be written in the book of life and unto them will I grant an inheritance at

my right hand” (Alma 5:58). This may be those 144,000 from Revelation 7:4 and 14:1.

“The Lamb who had been slain from the foundation of the world” (NTC) The last phrase of this verse may be paraphrased, “the Lamb who was foreordained to be slain from the foundation of the world” (also see Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:20).²⁵ It describes God’s planning and omniscience before time on the earth began.

Revelation 13:9–10 “Whoever has ears, let them hear . . . This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God’s people” (NIV) We may hear God’s message, but the challenge is in understanding it. This is why we need living prophets to direct us. The timing of our lives and the history of the world is under God’s care. The Calvinistic predestination of the KJV is actually a warning to persecuted Christians that we must submit to death rather than deny our faith.

3rd Short Vision: Counterfeit Lamb or Anti-Christ

Revelation 13:11–18

Revelation 13:11–12 “I saw another beast rising out of the earth, and it had two horns like a lamb, and it spoke like a dragon” (NTC) The third member of the devil’s trinity is a double-horned-lamb and they all work together. We learn that it is a cunning counterfeit, or wolf in sheep’s clothing, as it receives its power/horns and words from the dragon. As “the word” of the dragon or Satan, it imitates the “the Word of God” (John 1:1–4). It does not come from heaven, but under the earth. This is a land beast (or the anti-Christ described in 1 John 2:18–22; 2 John 1:7). The counterfeit lamb or beast will influence or “morph” into false prophets and the great whore as the account unfolds (Revelation 16:13; 17:3–5).²⁶ It represents evil in many forms—pride, hate, materialism, philosophy, secular humanism, etc. With selfishness as the core desire, humans want what they want more than what God wants. The worldwide idols of lust, power, status, and self-gratification speak to those under the influence of the land monster.

Revelation 13:13–14 “He performed great wonders such that he even made fire come down out of the sky . . . in behalf of the beast” (NTC) Satan’s henchmen can also counterfeit miracles (as Pharaoh’s magicians did in Egypt, Exodus 7:11; etc.). These “wonders” or magic acts stem from satanic deceptions rather than from God. Jesus warned, “they shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that . . . they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:24).

Revelation 13:15–16 “The beast spoke and he caused anyone who would not worship the image of the beast to be put to death . . . He caused all . . . to put a mark on their right hand or upon their forehead” (NTC) God is still behind the scenes, as we see with an individuals’ agency allowing the false image to function. The counterfeits continue. Rather than disciples receiving the Lamb’s sealing, the poisoned sinners accept Satan’s mark on their foreheads or hands. Similar to the ancient practice of branding slaves with a mark of their owner or tattooing a deity on one’s palm or forehead, this branding speaks of Satan’s ownership.²⁷ Hands represent one’s actions, so these people act for Satan The right hand is significant, too, as it is the clean and covenant hand. The forehead represents their focus, thoughts and desires (Ezekiel 9:4).

Revelation 13:17 “He also made it so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark” (NTC) If there is no commerce without the mark of the beast, then one of the meanings of the mark is money. Hugh Nibley saw the root of Satan’s scam developed from “Satan’s first article of faith . . . you can buy anything in this world for money.”²⁸

Revelation 13:18 “Let he who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is a human number . . . six hundred sixty-six” (NTC) The answer to the riddle requires “wisdom” or God’s inspiration. With seven as the Lord’s number for whole and complete, “666” falls short of wholeness. The full meaning of Satan’s number is

unknown—though theologians and mathematicians have theorized hundreds of ideas. The use of *gematria* and other number games have labeled emperors Titus, Nero, Napoleon, Hitler, the Roman nation, Luther, Saxon, and many more—all the devil. Significantly, the word here for “beast”/*thrion*, transliterated into Hebrew also equals 666.²⁹ The NIV reads, “it is man’s number,” or the number of *mankind*, generally speaking. Who is engraven on our heads and hands?

REVELATION 14

Revelation 14 swings back like a pendulum from the trinity of terrifying satanic beasts, to the hopeful message of the restoration of all things. Just like the former saints, the latter-day saints are called to follow Christ. The chapter is divided by three more visions from the cycle of seven (Revelation 12:1–15:4).

4th Short Vision: The Lamb and 144,000 Sealed Servants

Revelation 14:1–5

Revelation 14:1 “I looked . . .” This phrase, “I looked” or “I saw,” is repeated seven times and opens the next few visions (found in chapter 14: 1, 6, 14, and 15:1, 2, 5, 11). The phrase divides each part of this chapter into three visions. The Book of Revelation repeats this phrase to separate sections thirty-six times. A similar phrase is used twenty-two times in Nephi’s record of the Tree of Life vision (1 Nephi 11:8, 12–13, 19–20, etc.).

“The Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with him were 144,000 people who had this name on their foreheads” (NTC) The Lamb of God is Jesus Christ (spelled with a capital L, to distinguish it from the counterfeit). The Lamb of God stands on the firm land of Mount Zion—specifically meaning the place of God’s kingdom. “Zion” is used 150 times in the Old Testament to describe 1) God’s dwelling place on earth, 2) the saints’ community, or 3) the central city where God rules at the end of the world.³⁰ Physically, He stands ready to work either at Mount Moriah (the temple mount in Jerusalem), or the New Jerusalem (in Independence, Missouri). The Lamb’s name on their forehead’s contrasts with the wicked beast’s mark (Revelation 3:12; 7:3–8).

A similar prophecy is recorded in D&C 133:18. Section 133 also refers to the 144,000 and gives a condensed overview from the preparation for the Second Coming through the Millennium. The 144,000 represent a large host of God’s faithful servants who are sealed and protected by Him (see Revelation 7:4). They are “high priests,” who serve with all their intellect, heart, and strength (D&C 77:11). Their important mission is “to bring as many as will come to the church of the Firstborn” (D&C 77:11).

The number is symbolic on two fronts. Twelve represents God’s order, perfected (12 x 12), and is tied to their largest number, “thousands.”³¹ In Revelation 7:4, we learned the number included 12,000 from each of the twelve

Tribes of Israel, or “every nation” (D&C 77:11). It helps to understand the symbolism by looking at the etymology of the word, “Israel”/ *Yisrael* / “God strives” / “he will rule as God.”³² Jacob first received the title Israel, in Genesis 32:28, because “as a prince” he had “power with God and with men,” and “prevailed” (KJV), or “struggled with God and with humans and have overcome” (NIV).

When the Prophet Joseph Smith spoke on the 144,000, he “indicated that the conferral of the fullness of the priesthood was a ‘sealing...on top of the head,’ of which the phrase ‘sealed on their foreheads’ was symbolic.”³³ Furthermore, Joseph taught that it was through an ordinance conferring the fullness of the priesthood that these high priests could be qualified to be a part of the special missionary force in the last days (D&C 77:11).

Below: Angels Holding the Four Winds / The Sealing of the 144,000, ca. 1530–1532. Painting by Matthias Gerung from the Ottheinrich Bible via Wikimedia Commons.



Elder Bruce R. McConkie went even further to suggest, “At his Second Coming . . . these 144,000 are Gods, as the name on their foreheads specifies; their callings and elections have been made sure; they are exalted personages; they are ‘redeemed from among men’ (Revelation 14:4–5.), they have attained perfection.”³⁴ If this is the case, then it includes the righteous men and women who have received their second anointings.

Revelation 14:2–3 “I heard a sound from heaven . . . lyre players . . . They sang a new song in front of the throne . . . no one was able to learn the new song except the 144,000 people . . . redeemed from the earth” (NTC) Music fills the heavens. The sacred lyrics of the “new song” are possibly tied to the ordination of those redeemed people. They have been bought back from slavery to Satan, sin, and selfishness. A possible text for this “new song” is recorded in the D&C 84:98–102. The song is sung before the throne with the four creatures and twenty-four elders from chapter 1.

Revelation 14:4–5 “These . . . are morally clean . . . follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been redeemed . . . in their mouths no lie is found—they are blameless” (NTC) The KJV describes the redeemed as “virgins,” which refers to their purity, lack of idolatry, deceitful words, and sexual sins. As the “firstfruits unto God,” they offer their converted, tried souls.

5th Short Vision: Three Angels Proclaiming the Gospel

Revelation 14:6–7



Revelation 14:6 “I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach . . . to every nation . . .” Like a flashback, this vision takes us back in time to the sixth seal. John’s vision gives the needed background on the Restoration to understand the work of God in the latter days. We often identify the angel flying through the midst of heaven as Moroni. However, many heavenly messengers brought forth the Restoration (D&C 128, 27, 133:36–39). The use of: “everlasting gospel,” is unique to this verse. It is a universal message of repentance available for all who will. This is our work today.

Revelation 14:7 “He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens . . .’” (NIV) The warning voice

Left: Photo of the angel Moroni atop the Reno Nevada Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Photo by gh5046 via Wikimedia Commons.

commands all to give glory to God and prepare for the judgment day. This is the first time the word “judgment” is mentioned in the text (also see Revelation 16:7; 18:10; 19:2). The Day of Judgment is not in the past or future, but the present.

Torment of the Wicked

Revelation 14:8–11

Revelation 14:8 “A second angel followed saying: ‘She has fallen, Babylon . . . that provided all nations drink from the wine of her passionate lust . . .’” (NTC) The fall of wickedness and worldliness is more than just the fall of a city (see D&C 133:14). It will include the fall of false theories, sinful secrets, and wicked selfish motivations. Satan’s kingdom will finally be destroyed.

Revelation 14:9–11 “A third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and its image . . . he will be tortured by fire . . . there will be no rest day or night . . .’” (NTC) We hear again about the third angel (as introduced in Revelation 8:10) who warns that those who follow the beast will receive God’s full punishment (D&C 84:24; Alma 34:34). The punishments are described with the worst things known at the time—burning sulfur, constant smoke, no rest, and endless torment. Satan’s counterfeits will all be made known and God’s condemnation will fall on the wicked.

Blessings for the Saints

Revelation 14:12–13

Revelation 14:12 “This will require the steadfast endurance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and who have faith in Jesus” (NTC) To develop faith rather than lose it, the saints must steadfastly live and internalize God’s commandments as they patiently endure.

Revelation 14:13 “I heard a voice from heaven say, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them’” (NIV) John’s divine revelation offers another beatitude for the righteous. The Lord taught Joseph Smith that “the Lord’s rest is fullness of his glory” (D&C 84:24). A later section of the D&C also corrected this verse to read: “They shall rest from all their labors here, and shall *continue their works*” (D&C 124:86). Our “rest” is not from serving with our God but resting from the labors of this life. All through the Book of Revelation, God actively participates in the affairs of men. He is not an absentee Lord.

6th Short Vision: Harvesting the Earth

Revelation 14:14–20

Revelation 14:14 “I looked and there was a white cloud and on the cloud sat one like a Son of Man. He had a gold wreath . . . and a sharp sickle” (NTC) When the Savior descends from heaven, His “crown” (KJV) is the

victor's "wreath"/*stephanos*. His sickle represents the need to harvest the wheat from the tares—the righteous from the wicked (Matthew 13:30).

Revelation 14:15–16 "Another angel came out of the temple crying with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, 'Wield your sickle and begin reaping . . . and it was harvested'" (NTC) The message coming from the heavenly temple represents God the Father directing the timing of the harvest or judgment. Harvesting requires speed; "Once the grain is ripe, the harvest must begin immediately."³⁵

Revelation 14:17–18 "Another angel came out of the temple . . . who also had a sharp sickle. And another angel . . . shouted . . . 'Wield your sharp sickle . . . the grape-clusters from the grapevine of the earth'" (NTC) God's servants come and go with directions and assignments. The image of the grape harvest evokes wine, the symbol of Jesus' sacrificial blood atonement. The angel from the temple's altar had fire, but nothing is burned yet. Instead, the messenger encourages the reapers to harvest and gather the fruits of the vine.

Revelation 14:19–20 "The angel wielded his sickle . . . and harvested . . . the great winepress of the wrath of God. The winepress was trampled outside of the city, the blood came out of the winepress as high as a horse's bridle" (NTC) Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would tread the winepress alone when He suffered in Gethsemane and on the cross. Jesus described it, "I have overcome and have trodden the wine-press alone, even the wine-press of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God" (D&C 76:107).

"A thousand six hundred stadia" (NTC) The amount of destruction is horrific. Blood and killing are rampant. The literal measurement stretches from the northern to the southern border of Old Testament Israel (from Dan to Beersheba was 184 miles). It may also be figurative as the numbers are ten and four squared. Biblically, four often represents the complete earth ("the four corners of the earth," Isaiah 11:12; Ezekiel 7:2; Revelation 7:1). Both numbers represent "some form of completeness" which may mean that it "symbolizes the breadth of the judgment that will encompass the whole world."³⁶ Yet, we learn that Zion will be safe and aloof from the chaos.

REVELATION 15

After the seventh and last short vision in this cycle, John returns to the timeframe from Revelation 11:19, to prepare for the Lord's Second Coming. John saw a vision of the seven last angels who prepared vials or bowls of judgment to be poured out on the earth. Chapters 15 and 16 describe the seven last plagues poured out to cleanse the earth for the Millennium.

7th Short Vision: Saints' Victory of Land and Sea Beasts

Revelation 15:1-4

Revelation 15:1 “I saw another great and marvelous sign in the sky, even angels who had the seven final plagues, for with them the wrath of God was completed” (NTC) The number seven is again significant, as it represents the whole heavens that are going to complete the last and final plagues. A perfect group will finalize God’s work. As the numbers are highly symbolic, there may be more or less than seven plagues. Before these angels open their plagues on the earth, we have a celebration of victory.

Revelation 15:2 “I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, also those who had overcome the beast . . . were standing on the sea of glass holding lyres of God” (NTC) Right before we learn what happens to the wicked, John’s seventh of seven short visions tells of the celestial state of the righteous, or all who “overcome the beast.” The musicians include vocalists and instrumentalists who praise God. The “sea of glass” is mentioned twice in the Bible and twice in the D&C (Revelation 4:2; 15:2; D&C 77:1; 139:7). The Prophet Joseph Smith described a similar celestial sphere where angels “reside in the presence of God, on a globe like a sea of glass and fire, where all things for their glory are manifest, past, present, and future, and are continually before the Lord. The place where God resides is a great Urim and Thummim” (D&C 130:7–8).

When Joseph asked the Lord what “the sea of glass” meant, he learned: “It is the earth, in its sanctified, immortal, and eternal state” (D&C 77:1). Joseph also taught that “the Urim & Thummim is a small representation of this globe.”³⁷ When the celestialized earth is as a “sea of glass,” it does not mean it is a flat surface, but rather that it will have the capacity to see the past, present and future. Those who are valiant in their testimonies of Christ will inherit the celestialized sphere.

Revelation 15:3–4 “They were singing . . . the song of the Moses . . . and the song of Lamb, saying, ‘Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations’” (NTC) As the words are not found in our Old Testament, the text may cite a newly revealed “song of the Lamb.” Moses sings a victory song after the plagues and destruction of the Egyptian army is complete, and at the end of his leadership (Exodus 15:1–19; Deuteronomy 32:1–43). As in many things, this experience in Egypt is a type or shadow of future events as well, including the great destruction of the end of the terrestrial earth.

The opening stanza: “Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty” may have been lost from an earlier text, though, because Lehi’s begins his preaching in Jerusalem with it (1 Nephi 1:14), and a similar version is found in Jacob 4:8. The opening phrase became popular as, “great and marvelous,” is found twenty-four times in the Book of Mormon with various meanings. Different variations of “a great and marvelous work” are also used in five sections of the D&C—all referring to the Book of Mormon and restoration.³⁸

Seven Angels with Seven Plagues

Revelation 15:5–8

Revelation 15:5–6 “I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened. The seven angels . . . came out of the temple dressed in pure, bright linen with gold sashes around their chests” (NTC) John describes the heavenly temple open clear through to the Holy of Holies where the ark of the covenant served as God’s throne. The focus is on the law or covenant that light up the upcoming judgments. The angelic dress speaks of their purity through receiving the Savior’s atoning gifts.

Revelation 15:7 “One of the four animals gave the seven angels seven gold bowls filled with the wrath of God” (NTC) The “vials” (KJV) or *phial* “shallow bowl,” held liquids. The similar dish was used to catch the blood of the sacrificial animal in the temple (Exodus 37:16; Numbers 4:7). Priest’s sprinkled blood at the altar when making sacrifices (Leviticus 1:5; 3:8). Here the content of the bowls is not blood, but a plague that will shed blood. It represents the wrath of God poured out in its fullness against the wicked. In the following chapters the angels pour out the great plagues from the bowls.

Revelation 15:8 “The temple was filled with the smoke of God’s glory and power so that no one could enter until the seven plagues . . . were finished” (NTC) The Old Testament also describes times when the glory of the Lord as manifested as a cloud of smoke filled the tabernacle and thus prohibited the priests from entering (Exodus 40:34–38). It again demonstrates the Father’s active presence in the history of the world.

REVELATION 16

Seven Plagues of God’s Wrath

Taking a broad view of this chapter in context with the preceding chapters, we return to the scene right before the Lord’s Second Coming, but from a different perspective. Like a sculpture in a museum that is placed in the middle of the room, we return to look at these events from different angles four times. God’s punishments have already been discussed in chapters 8, 9, and 14. Different symbols are used each time. Here, in chapter 16, God’s recompense is delivered through the content of the vials or bowls, similar to the plagues from Moses (Exodus 7–12). Furthermore, we can find even more consistent patterns of the numbers: “The first seals are linked together into a unified group of four (four seals, four horses, four horsemen, four statements from four beasts), while the final three seals belong to a second group. This pattern of one group of four and one group of three parallels that pattern set forth for the seven trumpets (Revelation 8–9) and the seven vials (Revelation 16).”³⁹ This view of the last days emphasizes the final nature and severity of these seven plagues before Christ’s return.

The First Six Plagues

Revelation 16:1-16

Revelation 16:1 “I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels . . .” (NTC) A call to action comes again from the heavenly temple which assures us that God is in His temple carefully directing His plan. The imagery echoes Isaiah, “a voice from the temple, a voice of the Lord that rendereth recompense to his enemies” (Isaiah 66:6).

“Go and pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath on the earth” (NTC) God’s wrath is mentioned at least twenty-five times in the New Testament, but we see it enacted best in the Book of Revelation. He is not only a just God who issues punishments, but also a passionate God who weeps, denounces, loves, and empathizes. His wrath will be especially keen on those who have harmed children and persecuted the righteous.⁴⁰ Also, God chastens those whom He loves (Hebrews 12:6; Proverbs 3:12). We can find comfort in knowing that even though God refers to Himself as a “jealous God,” His pure motives are for our good (Exodus 34:14; Moses 1:39).

Revelation 16:2 “The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly, festering sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast” (NIV) The first angel’s plague is grievous sores, which are also described in other scriptures. Zechariah 14:12 describes similar epidemics of the flesh: “Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth” (also D&C 29:19). We live in a world that causes painful sores from atomic fallout, pollutions, addictions, diseases, cancers, and drugs. Those that do not have the mark of the beast will escape, in part because they “have faith in the Lord and who exercise the power of the priesthood to rebuke the evils that otherwise would afflict them.”⁴¹ Yet, the saints will not be spared from all the plagues of the last days.

Revelation 16:3 “The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it turned into blood . . . and every living thing that was in the sea died” (NTC) Like Moses and the Egyptian waters, blood will fill the seas, or perhaps the sea life will die in the last days (also Ezekiel 32:6; Revelation 17:1). The Lord also taught the Prophet

PLAGUES IN REVELATION PARALLEL OLD TESTAMENT

1. Grievous Sores—Exodus 9:9 Boils
2. Sea to Blood—Exodus 7:19 Water to blood
3. Rivers to Blood—Exodus 7:20 Nile to blood
4. Scorching Heat—Deuteronomy 28:22
5. Darkness and Pain—Exodus 10:21
6. Waters dried up, drought—1 Kings 8:35
Froglie spirits—Exodus 8:11-12 Frogs
7. Earthquake and Hail—Exodus 9:23-25 Hail



Above: The Giving of the Seven Bowls of Wrath / The First Six Plagues, Revelation 16:1-16, ca. 1530–1532. Painting by Matthias Gerung from the Ottheinrich Bible via Wikimedia Commons.

Joseph Smith, “There are many dangers upon the waters, and more especially hereafter; for I, the Lord have decreed in mine anger many destructions upon the waters . . . by the mouth of my servant John, I cursed the waters. Wherefore, the days will come that no flesh shall be safe upon the waters” (D&C 61:4–5, 15). The ancients identified matter in the four elements of air, fire, water, and earth. A different angel controlled each different element starting in Revelation 7:1—air, Revelation 14:18—fire, and here, water.⁴²

Revelation 16:4 “The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers . . . and they became blood” (NTC) We see many pollutants affecting our waters. In the twentieth century, Elder Bruce R. McConkie wondered,

perhaps we are seeing even now a little trickling prelude of what John foretold as we struggle to maintain the natural purity of our rivers and seas into which great floods of contaminating chemicals and stinking refuse are poured as men seek to rid themselves of the rubbish and garbage of our so-called civilization.⁴³

In contrast to this deadly water, Jesus taught the woman at the well, “the water I give . . . will become . . . a spring of water welling up to eternal life;” and later in Jerusalem, “Whoever believes in me . . . has . . . rivers of living water . . . from within them” (John 4:14; 7:38).

Revelation 16:5–7 “I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus . . . I heard another *angel who came out from the altar saying: Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments*” (JST) The JST clarified that it was an angel not an altar who spoke. The third angel expressed appreciation for God’s eternal omniscience and righteous judgment. We all will get what we deserve. The angel’s witness also communicates evidence of God’s active and continual involvement.

Revelation 16:8 “Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire . . . and [they] would not repent” (NTC) The scorching heat severely burned the wicked, but they do not humble themselves to acknowledge God’s hand. It seems to be a matter of pride, as they do not want to give God glory. Earlier when John described the angels around the throne of God, he said they were protected from “any scorching heat” (Revelation 7:16, NIV).

Revelation 16:10–11 “The fifth angel poured out his bowl onto the throne of the beast, and its kingdom tuned dark, and they were gnawing their tongues in agony. They cursed God . . . yet they did not repent” (NTC) The plague will attack the devil’s throne or “power base of Satan.”⁴⁴ The darkness will impede Lucifer’s ability to reign. An opposite of the last plague of a scorching sun, this plague brings darkness. The excruciating pain was described earlier in Revelation 9, when out of the darkness came something that stung like a scorpion. The plague of darkness in Egypt represented the sun god, Ra, losing power. This darkness may refer to the lack of spiritual light that leaves one lost and in pain or may refer to the pollutants and natural disasters that block the sun’s light. Whatever its cause, John emphasized that the wicked will refuse to repent and “curse God,” which includes becoming atheists.

Revelation 16:12 “The sixth angel poured out his bowl into the great river Euphrates. And its water dried up to prepare the way of the kings of the east” (NTC) The plague of drought prepares for “the way of the kings.” This phrase is repeated four times in the Old Testament—always referring to wicked Israel (2 Kings 8:18; 16:3; 2 Chronicles 21:6, 13). We also find two references in Numbers 20:17 and 21:22 to a “king’s highway.” In the New Testament, the magi from the east are later referred to as kings.⁴⁵ In the past, the Euphrates River had been a barrier, but now any invasion may occur in that part of the middle east.

Revelation 16:13–14 “I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon . . . beast, and . . . false prophet . . . demonic spirits who perform signs, who go forth to . . . gather them together for battle” (NTC) Three unclean spirits came from Satan’s trinity: the devilish dragon, his servants the beasts of the sea, and beast of the land (the latter was also a counterfeit horned lamb, now called a false prophet). The three spirits were “like frogs,” which were unclean animals in the Law of Moses, but gods to the Egyptians (Leviticus 11). Were the spirits froglike because they will come in three different phases—egg, tadpole, frog—or just an unclean animal?

John pointed out that the frogs come from the mouth of the dragon. As a counterfeit of “the Word,” these spirits spread evil. These demonic spirits spread unholiness and deception. They provide false signs that delude the rulers of the whole world. They spread lies and other forms of counterfeit truth. In contrast, the Savior had a sword coming from His mouth (Revelation 1:16). A contemporary of John, the Jewish priest, general and historian, Josephus, associated evil spirits with the mouth.⁴⁶

Revelation 16:15 “I come as a thief. Blessed is he who watches and takes care of his clothing so that he does not have to walk around naked and the people see his shame” (NTC) The Lord is the “I” in this verse. He gives another beatitude or blessing for those who watch or are on guard in preparation for His Coming. They are to keep and care for their “clothing”/*himation* /“a long flowing outer garment, tunic, or robe,”⁴⁷ or possibly a sacred covering. John uses this word, *himation* /“garment” (KJV), seven times in Revelation. All of the other usages in the book are for either God’s sacred clothing or represent the saints’ purity through clothing (Revelation 3:4, 5, 18; 4:4; 19:13, 16). In the restored Church, the saints also have sacred clothing that they are to keep and wear night and day.

The Lord’s blessing is that they will not be “be shamefully exposed” (NIV) or indecent. In the Jewish world, being naked was horrendously humiliating. The clothing may also denote the Hebrew roots for “atone”/*kaphar* /“to cover.”⁴⁸ God will bless those who keep the covering of the Atonement and not be ashamed at His Coming.

Revelation 16:16 “The spirits gathered the kings together at . . . Armageddon” (NTC) The froglike spirits work for Satan, but it all fits into God’s plan for the great last battle to be held at Armageddon. Traditionally, the location

is 60 miles north of Jerusalem, at the base of Mount Carmel, between Galilee and Samaria. The valley that surrounds it has the most fertile plains in Israel also known as the Jezreel Valley. It was the location of many ancient battles from the Old Testament (i.e. Zechariah 12:10–11).⁴⁹ Yet, this may not be what John meant, as it can also be translated, “his fruitful mountain,” which may refer to other places, including Jerusalem.⁵⁰ We will have to wait to know. The Book of Mormon also refers to the great battle to come (1 Nephi 22:16–19; 2 Nephi 27:1–3).

Revelation 16:17–18 “The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, ‘It is done!’ And there were lightning bolts . . . and also a great earthquake” (NTC) This is the fifth time an earthquake is mentioned in the Book of Revelation, but this one is the most destructive. The seventh plague includes the worst natural disasters the world has ever known. Yet, they are all carried out under the miraculous timing of God’s direction from His throne. We learn in modern revelation that this earthquake is so large that it will split the Mount of Olives and the glorified Jesus will convert the Jews there (D&C 45:48–53).

Revelation 16:19–20 “The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell . . . Every island disappeared and no mountains were found” (NTC) The great city is probably Jerusalem, but it sounds as though all nations will be affected by the earthquake, as well as by horrific geographic destructions (also mentioned in D&C 133:21–24). The islands and mountains change. The Greek can be interpreted as they “ceased to exist as continents shifted and consumed them.”⁵¹ Across scripture Babylon symbolizes worldliness, pride, and self-gratification. Finally, this division destroys her.

Revelation 16:21 “Large hail stones weighing about ninety pounds fell from the sky on people, and they cursed God . . .” (NTC) Unlike the hail that plagued Egypt under Moses, these stones of ice will weigh “a talent” or between 75 and 90 pounds each. We also read of similar violent natural disasters in Daniel 12:1, D&C 84:118, and 133:21–25. It may not be hail as we know it. John’s point is that the wicked people will receive a harsher judgment than ever imagined. It will bring all to their knees—but they will still curse God. They will not repent because they love the things of this world.

Brigham Young explained: “God has given us the things of this world to see what we will do with them.”⁵² Hugh Nibley added,

The test will be whether we will set our hearts on the four things that lead to destruction. Whoever seeks for (1) wealth, (2) power, (3) popularity and (4) the pleasures of the flesh, anyone who seeks those will be destroyed says the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 22:23, 3 Nephi 6:15). Need we point out that those four things compose the whole substance of success in the present-day world? They are the things that money will get you.⁵³

To avoid this satanic trap, we must live the principles taught in the Doctrine and Covenants on the Law of Consecration (D&C 42:30–36, 55; 104:13–15). As saints, we are asked to give of our time, energy, and substance to those in need. The underlying principle is that the earth is the Lord’s and we need to act as stewards of His property for everything He gives us. We are accountable to Him. We can either choose to serve Him and share His gifts, or we can pretend they are ours.⁵⁴

REVEALTION 17–19

John’s greatest emphasis falls on the years right before the Second Coming of the Lord. The Lord gives him more symbols of selfish satanic decadence in the character of the whore. John described her in chapter 17 and her destruction at Jesus’ triumphal Second Coming in chapter 19. The satanic images of the beasts, whore, and Babylon are a composite or all ungodly forces that work under the direction of Lucifer. They work together at times to attack God’s truth, and then they destroy each other. In this section, John offers his interpretation as he narrates his visions.

The Whore Rides on the Devil-Beast

Revelation 17:1–5

Revelation 17:1–2 “One of the seven angels . . . spoke . . . ‘Come, let me show you the condemnation of and punishment of the great whore that sits on many waters . . .’” (NTC) Early we learned that the “woman” represented the Church (Revelation 12:1), and now we are introduced to her opposite or counterfeit: “the Great Whore.” The woman had a son, while the whore is barren. The whore represents satanic forces and the mother of harlots and abominations as the symbol of Babylon (which is the opposite of Zion). She rides on another beast. All of these beasts seem to overlap as satanic forces on the earth. We are not told if this beast is the fiery dragon who was described earlier as the devil with seven heads and ten horns (Revelation 12:3; 13:1).⁵⁵

When Nephi’s vision of the tree of life developed into the history of the world, he, too, saw “the whore.” Nephi does not describe the beast but focusses on the whore as the “church of the devil.”

Whosoever belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations; and she is the whore of all the earth . . . and she sat upon many waters; and she had dominion over all the earth, among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people. And it came to pass that I beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few because of the wickedness and abominations of the whore who sat upon many waters (1 Nephi 14:10–12; also see 22:22–23; 2 Nephi 10:16).

Both Nephi and John are consistent in describing the whore as personified wickedness, not as an institution. Revelation 17:15 explains that the “waters” here represent the peoples of the earth. She inebriates them with the vices of the devil and by abusing the Lord’s Church.



Above: The Whore Babylon, Revelation 17:1-18, ca. 1530–1532. Painting by Matthias Gerung from the Ottheinrich Bible via Wikimedia Commons.

In Revelation there are only two ways: following God or following Satan. In the Book of Revelation, it is always black or white.

Revelation 17:3–4 “He carried me in the spirit to a deserted place, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet-colored beast that was filled with blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns . . . dressed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls, with a gold cup in her hand . . .” (NTC). A deserted place is barren and has no life. John described the whore’s clothes and the beast with the colors of scarlet and purple. Isaiah described sin with the color “scarlet” (Isaiah 1:18). At the time of John, red and purple were expensive dyes, and thus were the colors worn by royalty, the elite or the wealthy (Matthew 27:26–28; Hebrews 9:19).⁵⁶

We see the whore's forgery as she mimics temple attire. The stones may also counterfeit the high priest's breastplate filled with twelve stones (Exodus 28:15–20). The gold cup “filled with abominations” and sexual obscenities, mimics the gold cups used for wine offerings before God (Exodus 25:29). The great counterfeit is trying to appear like the great priest or king, but it is all a sham. The whore wears signs of wealth and worldliness but she is barren and can only go where the devil takes her. Sadly, nearly the entire world follows the whore “committing economic, political, and religious immoralities for both pleasure and gain.”⁵⁷ She is alive and well in our society.

Revelation 17:5 “On her forehead was written, ‘Mystery, Babylon the Great, The Mother of Whores and of the Abominations of the Earth’ (NTC) Six hundred years before John's time, the nation Babylon conquered Jerusalem and most of the Mesopotamian world. After that it became a figurative word for all wickedness and worldliness. The whore represents a secular secret society and that which nurtures it. In our day she represents pornography, human trafficking, drug cartels, and other deceitful and dishonest peoples and practices.

Revelation 17:6 “I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints . . . martyrs of Jesus . . . and I was greatly amazed” (NTC) John had to observe the filth and insanity of it all, including the devil's attacks on the righteous. The Whore is drunk, representing the inebriation of sin. Sin, like alcohol and drugs, has the ability to alter peoples' minds to keep them from seeing its foolishness.

Angel's Explanation

Revelation 17:7–13

Revelation 17:7–8 “The angel said to me, ‘Why are you amazed? I will tell you the mystery . . . the beast . . . is going . . . to destruction . . . because he was, and [now] is not, and will come” (NTC) While John is trying to understand all this, his angelic guide offers an explanation to the symbolism of the vision. The angel works backward starting with the beast in verse 8 and ending with the whore in verse 18.

John learns of another henchmen for Satan who will go to Perdition. It shares characteristics with the seven-headed, ten-horned beast from the abyss in chapter 13. The beast again opposes Christ, as an anti-Christ. John highlighted the differences between the beast and Christ by using similar phrases to contrast them:

- “The beast . . . was, and is not, and yet is” (Revelation 17:8)
- “Him which is, and which was, and which is to come” (Revelation 1:4).

We learn that even though the beast will be gone for a period, he will come back, “yet is.” While Jesus will return in glory for His Second Coming, so, too, the diabolical work of Lucifer will return after the Millennium. But that beastly force is only a brief reality; God has him under His control. Jesus, on the other hand, will eternally reign as “King of Kings” (Revelation 17:14).

“Whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world” (NTC) The Book of life has two meanings in scripture:

1. Figuratively, the Book of Life “is the complete record of one’s life, the sum total of thoughts, words, and deeds written in the soul, of which the Lord will take account in the day of judgment.”⁵⁸
2. Ultimately, it records only those names who qualify for exaltation through the Lord’s sealing.

Christ will record the names of those who have been sealed by this great gift of God.⁵⁹ Completing one’s saving ordinances is not enough, as “the Holy Spirit of Promise” will not ratify those who break their covenants (Ephesians 1:13; D&C 132:7, 18–19, 26; etc.). Those sealed learned to avoid the “beast’s allures,” with practice and developing spiritual sensitivity from valiant efforts in both the first and second estates.⁶⁰

Revelation 17:9–10 “This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come” (NIV) The angel gives John a clue on how to understand the beast, but not an answer. We still must ponder, pray, and study to understand. Since Rome is built on seven hills, many have interpreted this as Rome. It may also be symbolic of complete corruption of the world centers or high places.

Revelation 17:11 “the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition” (KJV) Many identify this beast as Domitian, the eighth Roman Emperor. But, by using the broader timing of seven thousand years of history as D&C 77 outlines, there are many other options. It may refer to a group or ideology rather than a specific person.

Revelation 17:12–13 “the ten horns . . . are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast” (KJV) Horns represent “power.” These powerful things are unified together, all receiving their strength from the beast. As these they have no kingdom, I assume they are philosophies or theories that Satan empowers, not leaders of nations. Their day of glory is short lived, or it is at least a limited time, as their unity includes a hatred of Christ.

ANGEL’S EXPLANATION

17:8 —The beast . . . shall . . .

17:9 —The seven heads are . . .

17:12—The ten horns . . . are

17:15—The waters . . . are . . .

17:16—The ten horns . . . shall

17:18—The woman . . . is . . .

The Victory of the Lamb

Revelation 17:14–18

Revelation 17:14 “They will make war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will triumph over them . . . and He will be accompanied by His called and chosen and faithful ones” (NTC) The victorious forces include all those who have been faithful. The prophet Joseph Smith learned who are the called and chosen ones:

There are many called, but few are chosen. And why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson—That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and . . . only upon the principles of righteousness. . . . It is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion. Hence many are called, but few are chosen (D&C 121:35–40).

This definition fits exactly into the message of the vision— aspiring for things of the world is working for the anti-Christ, not the Savior.

Revelation 17:15 “The waters you saw . . . are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages” (NTC) The angel gives an all-encompassing interpretation of the waters as all the inhabitants of the earth. In the OT, waters often represent chaos (Genesis 1:2; Psalms 18:16; 29:3; 32:6; 77:19; etc.).

Revelation 17:16–17 “The ten horns and the beast that you saw will hate the prostitute. . . . For God has put it into their hearts . . . to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled” (BSB) The wicked fight the wicked—an interesting paradox. As mentioned previously, power is represented by the horns that grow from this devilish thing, yet the horns shall turn on the whore and help to destroy her. An old proverb says that there is no honor among thieves, meaning that though thieves may be allies for a time, in the end they will steal from each other. In the same way, those who do the work of the devil often turn on each other.

John explained that God allows and even directs this destruction. He will “put it into their heart,” to foster them to become “united in their purpose” to “give their kingdom to the beast” (NTC). This way the saints do not need to fight because they will be safe in Zion (D&C 45:68–70; 115:6; 124:36). God directs the boundaries and direction of the destruction. However, God does not cause wickedness. The Book of Mormon teaches that by the wicked, the wicked are punished (Mormon 4:5). Also, Satan will abandon his followers at the last day, but God will open another way for them to repent (Alma 30:60).

Revelation 17:18 “The woman . . . is the great city which holds royal authority over the kings of the earth” (NTC) This refers to the whore, the “mother of harlots,” who sat on the scarlet beast wearing all the riches of the

world (note that cities are always female in Hebrew). She represents many forms of wickedness and ideologies more than a person or place. Whatever she is, avoid her.

REVELATION 18

Two Angels Direct the Destruction of Babylon, after the Saints are Warned to Leave

Revelation 18:1 “I saw another angel descending from the sky having great authority. And the earth was illuminated by his glory” (NTC) A glorious and powerful “celestial messenger” opens the next vision or section. John Taylor described it: “A light bursts forth from the heavens; a celestial messenger is deputed to convey to men tidings of salvation.”⁶¹ This angel acts under the authority of God’s priesthood or shared power. God’s power will bless his angelic messengers and all who receive His light. God blesses all His mortal and immortal messengers and servants with the gifts and fruits of His Spirit—faith, hope, charity, visions, healings, miracles, and the like—male and female, young and old (D&C 46:8–30; 88:7–13; Galatians 5:22–23; etc.).

Revelation 18:2–3 “He shouted with a loud voice saying . . . ‘Babylon the Great has fallen, and has become the dwelling place of demons . . . the merchants of the earth have grown rich through her excessive luxury’” (NTC) The first angel loudly proclaims that Babylon is fallen. It no longer refers just to a city, but all that is the opposite of Zion. Babylon represents all the contamination through worldliness. It is where the unclean live—where millions of people starve while others spend millions of dollars on luxurious excess.

Revelation 18:4–5 “I heard another voice from heaven saying, ‘Come out of her, O my people so that you will not take part in her sins, so that you will not share in her plagues . . . God has remembered her crimes.’” (NTC) All are given the opportunity to leave the wickedness of the world (a place of pride, money, insatiable appetites, and corruption), in favor of living God’s laws in the city of Zion. For the time being, we are to build up Zion in our stakes scattered across the world. This call may refer to the final gathering of the righteous geographically. In the last days we will be called to leave the cities of the world before their destruction and form a city of Zion. The same call is referred to in D&C 133:5, 7, 14. “Go ye out from Babylon. Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord . . . Go ye out from among the nations, even from Babylon, from the midst of wickedness, which is spiritual Babylon.”

Revelation 18:6–7 “Render unto her as she herself has rendered . . . a double portion . . . of suffering and grief. Because she says in her heart, I sit enthroned as a queen” (NTC) When God determines that Babylon is ready or ripe for destruction, her punishment will parallel how she lived. In April 1899, Elder Brigham Young, Jr. warned:

Hear it Latter-day Saints—you are cultivating the spirit for the whole world. Not for you and your posterity, but for all of the children of men whom God has placed here. You have come out of the world, not to bring Babylon with you. But people have come here from Babylon and are among the Latter-day Saints with their sins and filth, and we gather it up by the handfuls, sometimes to the extinction of that power that God has placed in every man.⁶²

It is far worse today. The saints must be careful not to bring Babylon into our lives through our Sabbath practices, media, time, etc.

Revelation 18:8 “**In a single day plagues will come upon her—death and sorrow and famine—and she will be consumed by fire, because mighty is the Lord God who judges her**” (NTC) Babylon that lived in luxury will suddenly receive God’s vengeance. Her collapse will be in “a single day”— meaning quickly. D&C 64:24 adds, “For after today cometh the burning . . . and I will not spare any that remain in Babylon.”

Three Lament Babylon’s Fall: Kings, Merchants, and Maritime

Revelation 18:9–19

Revelation 18:9–10 “**The kings of the earth who committed fornication with her and lived with her in luxury will weep and mourn**” (NTC) Figuratively speaking, we commit fornication when we break covenants, live in sin, or live with pride, greed, and opulence. The kings will look at its speedy fall and burning in fear. We will see a similar pattern of destruction that we find in the Book of Mormon, where the wicked work through “secret combinations,” or societies of corruption (Ether 8:14–26). Wickedness never was happiness (Alma 41:10).

Revelation 18:11–16 “**The merchants of the earth weep . . . because no one buys their cargo . . . gold and silver . . . pearls, fine linen, purple, silks . . . wine, olive oil, fine flour . . . human lives . . . fruit . . . laid waste**” (NTC) In opposition to the heavenly city of eternal rewards, the counterfeit Babylon is where one tries to gain wealth through selfish desires (Revelation 17:4; and Nephi refers to Babylon as the “the great and abominable church,” 1 Nephi 13:7–8). The problem with seeking for wealth is that it easily erupts beyond the desire to meet one’s needs, to levels of insatiable craving to flaunt itself and to seek for power.

John included “slaves” in his list of abominable luxuries. One third of the Roman Empire, and one half of its large cities were populated with servants and slaves. Draper and Rhodes observed: “It is of note that with the exception of Rome, Asia Minor—the area in which the seven churches were located—had the heaviest slave triad in the Roman Empire”⁶³ Our generation continues to battle with human trafficking and societies that degrade humanity to the level of livestock. John’s use of “fruits” is figurative for the “good things of life.”⁶⁴ John listed nearly every imaginable luxury from his day. Our list would be much longer.

If the Lord's people selfishly seek riches or worldly possessions, they break His law. The Lord instructed ancient Israel, "Neither shall [you] greatly multiply to [your]self silver and gold" (Deuteronomy 17:17). God commanded Israel to seek Him rather than the riches and carnality of this world, including every wicked practice.

Revelation 18:17–19 Every ship's captain and every sea traveler . . . cried out . . . weeping and mourning . . . for in a single moment she has been laid waste" (NTC) John first described those who sought wealth by land, and now by sea. Most trade occurred in the ancient world via the seas and rivers. But, in a short time, God will burn all the great wealth and wickedness of the earth. The ancients of John's day expressed their remorse or mourning by throwing "dust on their heads."

The Great Rejoicing

Revelation 18:20–24

Revelation 18:20 "Rejoice over her, O heaven and you saints, apostles, and prophets for God has given judgment against her for you" (NTC) In contrast to the mourning of the money makers, the saints on earth and in heaven rejoice at the destruction of Babylon. Unlike the wicked, the righteous can rejoice when God's judgments are manifest. The meaninglessness of materialism will end. Babylon is the great counterfeit of God's plan: "Men mistook lust for joy, sought happiness through possessions, and pursued security through materialism."⁶⁵ Babylon is the kingdom of the devil, so it cannot be converted, but her prideful lusts and tempting falsehoods must be destroyed.

This section opens and closes in harmony with Jeremiah's prophetic rejoicing over Babylon's destruction (that occurred under Cyrus the Persian King in 539 B.C.).

JEREMIAH 51:48

"Then the heaven and the earth, and all that is therein, shall sing for Babylon: for the spoilers shall come unto her from the north, saith the LORD."

JEREMIAH 51:49

"As Babylon hath caused the slain of Israel to fall, so at Babylon shall fall the slain of all the earth."

REVELATION 21:20

"Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her"

REVELATION 21:21

"Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all"

Revelation 18:21 “A mighty angel picked up a stone, like a large millstone and threw it into the sea saying, **‘Thus Babylon, the great city, will be violently thrown down, and will no longer be found’**” (NTC) The figurative millstone, repenting a half ton or more of weight, not only speaks of the strength of the angel, but also the destructive power and immediacy of God’s action against Babylon. The book of Revelation has led up to this point—the fall of Babylon in the last days—at least six times (see Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21). The D&C also discusses Babylon’s fall (see D&C 1:16; 35:11; 64:24; 86:3; 133:14). Old Testament prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah also included similar denunciations against Babylon (Isaiah 13:1, and Jeremiah 51). In the Book of Mormon, Nephi’s vision was similar, except that Babylon is referred to as “the great and abominable church” (1 Nephi 14:15–16; 22:14). God promised “the covenant people . . . who were scattered upon all the face of the earth” redemption even if it required heavenly power and fire (1 Nephi 14:14; 22:17).

Before the Savior institutes His millennial reign, He must first cleanse the wickedness, for every knee will bow and every tongue confess, with thankfulness, that Jesus is the Christ (Isaiah 45:23; Mosiah 27:31). He will claim His own and reject those who have opposed Him (Malachi 4:1–3; 2 Thessalonians 2:6–10; 1 Nephi 22:23–26; see Jesus Christ: Second Coming of Jesus Christ).

Revelation 18:24 “. . . trumpeters will never be heard . . . lamplight will no longer shine . . . In her the blood of prophets and saints was found and all of those who have been slaughtered on the earth” (NTC) This is the third time John used the phrase, “blood of saints,” as though the martyrs’ blood cries to the Lord for vengeance against their murderers (Revelation 16:6; 17:6; also see Mormon 8:27; Ether 8:22; and D&C 87:7). It indicates that a murder that takes one’s life requires God’s justice. Killing the saints and prophets may also refer to killing spiritual sensitivities. Those who promote ideas that deaden people’s sensitivity to truth will also be met by God’s justice.

REVELATION 19

A Hymn of Praise: Fourfold Hallelujah Over Babylon’s Fall

Revelation 19:1–8

Revelation 19:1–2 “I heard a loud sound like a large crowd in heaven saying, **‘Hallelujah! Salvation, glory and power belong to our God. For his judgments are true and just . . .’**” (NTC) The great rejoicings from chapter 18 continue on as a beautiful hymn of adoration for eight more verses. John included “Hallelujah” four times in this hymn (Revelation 19:1, 3, 4, 6), which represents the whole earth praising Him.⁶⁶ This the only place in the New Testament that this is found. The word is borrowed from Hebrew, meaning, an “adoring exclamation” or “praise God”⁶⁷ It is made up of two roots: “praise”/halal, and a suffix of God’s name abbreviated: Yah[weh] or Jah[ovah]! The word is used by the heavenly hosts to praise God for His gift of salvation, and then for His “true and just” judgments.

Revelation 19:3–4 “A second time they said, ‘Hallelujah! The smoke goes up from her for ever and ever. And the twenty-four elders and the four animals fell down and worshipped . . . Amen. Hallelujah!’” (NTC) The smoke may come from the burning of Babylon’s fires, as the Old Testament and New Testament use fire to represent God’s judgment (Isaiah 34:10, 66:24; Jeremiah 4:4; 17:27; Matthew 18:8; 25:41; Mark 9:43, 48; etc.) or it may reference the smoke/prayers from the temple incense (Psalm 141:2; Leviticus 16:12–13). Those around God’s throne (Revelation 4–5) fall down and add their praise and approval and witness, with a choral or chanted, “Amen. Hallelujah!”

Revelation 19:5 “A voice came out of the throne . . . ‘Praise our God all ye his *saints* . . . both small and great” (JST *italicized*) The voice of the Lord came from His throne, commanding His servants all to praise God. The JST change “servants” to “saints,” speaks of what it means to be a “saint.” During Jesus’ ministry He set the example as one who served. He was born to serve His Father, and He asked His disciples to likewise and become the servants of God. It is through our service to Him that we become saints. The least shall become the greatest (Matthew 19:39; Mark 10:31; Luke 9:48). The heavenly hosts respond to His call to offer praise.

Revelation 19:6–7a “I heard a sound . . . of loud thunder saying, Hallelujah! For the Lord God Almighty has begun to reign. Let us rejoice . . . give glory to him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come” (NTC) All rejoice that the Marriage Feast is approaching. Christ is the groom and the Church is His bride. Jesus taught two parables that seem to teach of this event (Luke 14:16–24; Matthew 22:1–14).

Revelation 19:7b “His bride has prepared herself” (CSB) The point that John made is that the wife/bride/church is finally ready. Jesus reigned in heaven before and after His mortal life. But, the timing of His reign on earth depends on when the bride or His people are ready to receive Him. This is why the timing of Lord’s Second Coming could be cut short in righteousness. At the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, the Prophet Joseph plead with the Lord to help with “the gathering of thy people” so that Zion “may roll on in great power and majesty, that thy work may be cut short in righteousness” (D&C 109:59; also 52:11). The prophetic call to keep the Sabbath holy, to learn how to receive personal inspiration from the Spirit, to study the Book of Mormon, and increase our temple worship is all part of this preparation, to cut short the work through righteousness. The earth is plenty wicked, but Elder D. Todd Christofferson taught what is “crucial for the Lord’s return, is the presence on the earth of a people prepared to receive Him at His coming.”⁶⁸ The saints are not ready to receive Him now.” President Nelson similarly implored: “Do the spiritual work to find out for yourselves, and please do it now. Time is running out.”⁶⁹ Once the saints are worthy of their King, He can come again to the marriage supper.

Revelation 19:8 “To her it has been granted to be clothed in splendid, pure linen. For the linen is the righteous deeds of the saints” (NTC) The bride is “granted”/*edothel* “bestowed,” or “given” (BSB) or “permitted” (WNT) to wear special clothes. She is “clothed”/*periballól* “invest” (as in initiation investiture)⁷⁰ in “utterly clean

and brilliantly white” clothing of fine white linen—made from the righteousness of the saints (as in Revelation 6:9–11).⁷¹ In Israelite temples, the priests wore white linen robes, and the High Priest was dressed in a similar garment for the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 17:4). The two probably represent those who have been cleansed by the Savior so that their sins are also “white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). The bride’s white linen contrasts symbolically with the whore’s red and purple robes.

The Marriage Supper of The Lamb

Revelation 19:9–10

Revelation 19:9 “He said to me, ‘Write. “Blessed are those who have been invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb” and he told me “these words are true and of God”’ (NTC) The angel who acted as John’s guide (Revelation 17:1), instructs him to record the vision and testifies of its truthfulness. The angel’s message includes another beatitude or blessing for all those who have received a wedding invitation. It signifies that they are worthy to come. Covenants were often tied to feasts in the ancient world.

We learn in modern revelation that the marriage of the Lamb is to take place in the New Jerusalem on Mount Zion. The feast is for the House of Israel. The rich and learned, wise and noble will be invited, then the poor, lame, blind, and deaf will come (D&C 58:6–12). At the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, the Prophet Joseph Smith prayed that we would be prepared to rise and meet Christ. In preparation, our garments are to be pure, with palms in hand and crowns (D&C 109:72–26).

Revelation 19:10 “And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, ‘Look, do not do that! I am your fellow servant and one of the brethren who have a testimony of Jesus. Worship God”’ (NTC) John was so overwhelmed that he fell to worship the angel who was showing him the vision. The angel immediately redirects John’s worship to God and Jesus, the Anointed One. Being less familiar with angelic beings, Nephi also made this mistake.

“For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (NTC) This is the only time in the Bible that the phrase, “spirit of prophecy” is used. The phrase became a favorite of the Prophet Joseph Smith and he used this verse to teach that all who testify with the Spirit, that of Jesus as the Christ have the spirit of prophecy. It is used seventeen times in his translation of The Book of Mormon,⁷² twice in the Doctrine and Covenants, and ten times in Joseph’s History of the Church⁷³ (with four more occurrences of a slight variation, “spirit of prophecy and revelation”).⁷⁴ Four of those references occurred on January 1, 1843, in response to the Illinois State Legislature’s request for Smith to define a prophet:

If any person should ask me if I were a prophet, I should not deny it, as that would give me the lie; for, according to John, the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy; therefore if I profess to be a witness or

teacher, and have not the spirit of prophecy, which is the testimony of Jesus, I must be a false witness; but if I be a true teacher and witness, I must possess the spirit of prophecy, and that constitutes a prophet; and any man who says he is a teacher or preacher of righteousness, and denies the spirit of prophecy, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; and by this key false teachers and imposters may be detected.⁷⁵

A witness of Jesus Christ is one of the most important roles of the Holy Spirit. The Restoration emphasized that this divine revelation was available to all seekers.

Another Vision: The Divine Rider on the White Horse

Revelation 19:11–16

Revelation 19:11 “I saw the heavens opened, and there was a white horse, and he who rode on it is called faithful and true, and in righteousness he judges and makes war” (NTC) This is a new vision that depicts the Savior riding on a conquering animal of war. When Jesus first came to the world, He came as a baby in the pastoral town of Bethlehem and arrived in Jerusalem on a peaceful domestic donkey. He died as the “suffering servant” described by Isaiah.⁷⁶ But, at His Second Coming, He will ride a horse. The horse was the animal of warfare in the ancient world, and He then comes as the conquering Messiah. His horse is appropriately white (just like Adam/Enoch’s in Revelation 6:2). The two names for the rider are capitalized in most English versions as “Faithful and True,” assuring us that the rider is Christ the Lord.

Revelation 19:12 “His eyes were a flame of fire, and on his head were many diadems, and he had a name written which no one but he himself knows” (NTC) The conquering Redeemer is wearing so many crowns that the Greek suggests “John could not count them.”⁷⁷ His crown or diadem, now focuses on His political power and authority. In the Prophet Joseph Smith’s vision after the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, he described Jesus’ eyes similarly: “His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters” (D&C 110:2–3).

These symbolic statements teach us important truths about Christ: He is the source of light—even controlling such great powers as the sun. He is omniscient and will come forth with great judgments on the earth. Eyes can represent knowledge (D&C 77:4). “Flame of fire” also describes brilliant glory. The “new name” (Revelation 3:12) may be referred to again here as a name that no one knows.

Revelation 19:13 “And he was dressed in a robe dyed with blood, and his name is called ‘The Word of God’” (NTC) In restored scripture, we have even more on the Savior’s Second Coming where “the Lord shall be red in his apparel, and his garments like him that treadeth in the wine-vat” (D&C 133:48, see verses 46–51). The Greek word that John used for dyed or “dipped” (KJV) is “*baptó* . . . a primary verb; to overwhelm, i.e. cover wholly with a

fluid.”⁷⁸ Interestingly, it is related to the verb, “baptize.” During His mortal ministry John and his older brother James asked Jesus if they could sit by Him in heaven, and Jesus responded: “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (Mark 10:38). Perhaps this vision gave John a better feel for what the baptism of Jesus entailed.

Five times in Revelation, John used the phrase, “word of God”/*logos* (Revelation 1:2, 9; 6:9; 19:13; 20:4). Only here is it a proper name as it is at the opening of his Gospel (John 1:1).

Revelation 19:14 “The armies of heaven followed him on white horses, clothed in pure, white linen” (NTC) Those servants and disciples who will come with Christ at the time of His Second Coming will also be on white horses clothed in their covenant clothing symbolizing their righteousness or “righteous deeds” (Revelation 9:8). They are soldiers on the “front line” as it were. Yet, this war will not be fought with arms, but with the power of God’s priesthood.

Revelation 19:15 “Out of his mouth *proceedeth the word of God, and with it he will smite the nations: and he will rule them with the word of his mouth; and he treadeth the winepress in the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God*” (JST *italicized*) John described the “word of God” with the strongest weapon known at the time, the two edged Gladius. God’s word is even stronger and can cut all nations (also see Hebrews 4:12; D&C 64:23–25; etc.).

Isaiah prophesied Messianically with similar images, and emphasized the humble nature of the Son of God’s servitude: “He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword . . . and said unto me, Thou *art* my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified” (Isaiah 49:2–3). His righteous power and strength enabled Him to be the best servant ever to live. We, as His disciples, seek the same divine profession, “servants of God” (1 Peter 2:16).

The JST changed that Jesus will rule the nations “with the word of his mouth,” rather than with a “rod of iron.” In the NTC, Draper and Rhodes translated this: “he himself will shepherd them with a rod of iron,” or the Good Shepherd ruling with “a strong shepherd’s crook” (John 10:11–18).⁷⁹ With His words, the Word treads the winepress with God’s “fury and wrath” (NTC). The JST changed the preposition from “of” to “in,” which highlights God’s fury as the motivation to Jesus’ action. We have a powerful and passionate God, who directs the world for humanity’s “immortality and eternal life” (Moses 1:39).

Revelation 19:16 “On his cloak and on his thigh he has a name written, ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’” (NTC) The double title is found in Daniel 4:37, also to describe the Son of God’s power to destroy and rule. It meant “the most powerful king.”⁸⁰ Two locations of the two titles may be symbolic as well. His cloak, like a Roman citizen’s toga or a priest’s robes, were worn to identify their position and identified the nature of their

position. In addition to the angel touching Jacob's thigh during his celestial vision, during John's era, the thigh "was where the battle sword hung . . . and the place where the hand was placed in swearing an oath.... Combined, the two images suggest that judgment comes with force as a result of God's promise to His people."⁸¹

Defeat of the Beast and False Prophet by the Great God

Revelation 19:17–21

Revelation 19:17–18 "I saw an angel standing in the sun . . . saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings . . . and the flesh of all *who fight against the Lamb . . .*" (JST *italicized*) John's record continues to compare events and images—now he contrasts two feasts where the Lord will attend: the fowl devouring the wicked in contrast to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb just described (Revelation 19:9). The feast of fowls was described by Ezekiel too, "I will give you as food to all kinds of carrion birds" (Ezekiel 39:4; also see D&C 29:18–21). The antithesis to that vulgar scene is the "well refined" Marriage Supper of the Lamb as described in modern revelation (D&C 58:8).⁸² John's account seems to beg readers to realize that we can choose which feast to attend.

Revelation 19:19 "Then I saw the beast and the kings . . . gather together to make war against the rider on the horse and against his army" (NTC) The destruction of the wicked is a theme of much of Revelation. Satan is assisted with at least ten kings and the wicked (Revelation 17:14). The devil prepared for this battle with three froglike spirits who tempted the kings (Revelation 16:13–16). This is all part of the judgments against the wicked and God's cleansing the earth from the whore and the beast. The destruction will also allow the wicked or misguided humans to go to a different place to try again to learn and change without the false teachings of Satan influencing them.

Revelation 19:20 "The beast was captured, and the false prophet with it . . . by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped its image" (NTC) The Anti-Christ and their followers will be "cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone" (KJV), which we refer to as "spirit prison" (D&C 76:73; 138:7–8, 28). The prophet Daniel also saw this: "I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame" (Daniel 7:11). The beast and the false prophet conspire together against God, and thus will receive God's punishment. They will not be slain either, because their spirits are immortal. In the Book of Mormon, we learn that all can repent, but the unrepentant will:

- "Stand with shame and awful guilt before the bar of God" (Jacob 6:9)
- "[Have] an awful view of their own guilt and abominations" (Mosiah 3:25)
- "[Endure a] state of misery and endless torment" (Mosiah 3:25)
- "A lively sense of . . . guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever" (Mosiah 2:38)

This is why Alma taught his son, that this life is “a probationary time . . . a time to repent and serve God” (Alma 42:4).

Revelation 19:21 “The remnant were slain with the word of him that sat upon the horse, which *word proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh*” (JST *italicized*) The JST clarified that the weapon will not be a sword, but the word of Christ in judgment. No unclean thing can stand against the power of God’s word. John returned again to the image of rotting carcasses being devoured by animals. This had even more revulsion to ancient people because it “show[ed] the greatest disrespect and the utter contempt for one’s enemies and to inflict the deepest humiliation, victors refused the dead burial.”⁸³

REVELATION 20

John finally described the Millennium. He moved chronologically from the Lord’s Second Coming through His millennial righteous reign in six verses. John’s purpose was not to dwell on the era of peace, but on the preparatory era when we live. The last half of the chapter discusses the loosing of Satan; the ultimate battle of Gog and Magog and the great judgement receive nine verses.

Outline of John’s Apocalypse

VISION	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE	NUMBER OF VERSES
Throne of God	1, 4–5	36
Seven Churches	2–3	51
BC 4000–1000	6:1–11	11
AD 1000– AD 2000	6:12–7:3	14
AD 2000 Last Days & Second Coming	8:1–19:2	201
Millennium 20XX–30XX	20:1–6	6
Final Scenes	20:7–15	9
Celestialized Earth	21:2–22:6	33

Satan is Bound

Revelation 20:1–3

Revelation 20:1–2 “I saw an angel come down *out of heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand . . . he laid hold on the dragon . . . the devil . . . and bound him a thousand years*” (JST *italicized*) The next angel arrives, which according to Jewish tradition was Michael.⁸⁴ If it is Angel Michael, then

we know he was Adam our forefather (D&C 88:110–112). This would be a wonderful assignment for him as he fought with Satan premortally, tangled with him again in the Garden of Eden, and then returns to bind him for the Millennium.

“Key” and “chain” are symbolic terms. Satan is only a spirit, so he will not be chained but the Book of Mormon teaches us that he becomes powerless because of the righteousness of the saints (1 Nephi 22:26). To appreciate the symbolism of “the key,” the ancients’ hand-carved their locks out of wood, or hand-forged them out of metal. They were large, bulky, and expensive. They were used only to protect valuable treasures or stores of the wealthy. Highly trusted people wore these large keys around their necks. If one saw someone with a key around his neck, one knew they had authority. This symbolism helps us understand Michael.

Revelation 20:3 “He threw him into the abyss, and he locked and sealed it over him so that he would no longer deceive the nations until a thousand years had passed. Afterwards he must be released for a short time” (NTC) Satan will be securely locked away. The “seals” in scriptures are varied and interesting. Here, I think it refers to the priesthood power of God. It is also a legal term from the ancient world. The reason that Satan will be loosed at the end of the Millennium is to give a “trial” to those who have never been tempted by Satan. Or, perhaps because the people will begin to sin again thus releasing the devil. After one thousand years, the devil will only be loosed for a “little season” (KJV).

A Millennium of Peace for those of the First Resurrection

Revelation 20:4–6

Revelation 20:4–5 “I saw some thrones, and they sat upon them and were given the authority to pass judgment . . .” (NTC) The vision changes to some sort of a throne room. Those who become judges were martyrs on earth (like John the Baptist, “beheaded for the testimony of Jesus”), and prophets of dispensations. D&C 29:12 tells us that the Twelve Apostles will come and judge “the whole house of Israel, even as many as have loved me and kept my commandments.” Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni also tell us that they will meet us at the judgement bar of God (2 Nephi 33:11; Moroni 10:34).

“and those who had not worshipped the beast nor . . . received the mark upon their foreheads and their hands” (NTC) Those who did not receive the wicked mark on their “foreheads” and “hands” in life may represent those who kept their thoughts and actions pure. The forehead may also refer to what we see, smell, and hear, or those who kept their senses pure. These pure disciples will also be resurrected and join Christ’s Millennial reign. This second group will receive one of God’s thrones at some era, as the Lord promised that all those “who overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne” (Revelation 3:21; similarly, 2:26–27; 1 Corinthians 15:23).



Cloisters Apocalypse, First Resurrection of the Dead, ca. 1330. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

“They came to life again and ruled with Christ a thousand years” (NTC) The morning of the First Resurrection will begin with Jesus and will continue for all faithful until His Second Coming. John described the Millennium in three verses (after 211 on the preparatory destruction). He is the only New Testament author to speak of this, which is why many Christians vacillate between theologies of pre- and post-millennialists.⁸⁵ Fortunately, we have more in modern revelation that speaks of this glorious day:

The graves of the saints shall be opened; and they shall come forth and stand on the right hand of the Lamb, when he shall stand upon Mount Zion, and upon the holy city, the New Jerusalem; and they shall sing the song of the Lamb, day and night forever and ever (D&C 133:56; also D&C 88:96–101).

Those who did not receive the fullness of the gospel on earth but were honorable will be included (D&C 76:71-80).

Revelation 20:6 “Blessed and holy *are they who have part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years*” (JST *italicized*) The JST changes this to the plural, which includes men and women of God. I feel it will be those members who worthily live their temple covenants, or who will when they are vicariously made for them. They will receive the attributes of the Lamb—“Blessed and holy.” It is our goal as disciples to come forth in the first resurrection (or else be “twinkled” as described in 3 Nephi 28:8; D&C 43:32; 63:51, etc.). The priests and priestess of God and Christ will reign during the Millennium. Elder Heber C. Kimball recorded a vision that Joseph Smith had, “when he saw Adam open the gate of the Celestial City and admit the people one by one. He then saw Father Adam conduct them to the throne one by one, when they were crowned Kings and Priests of God.” Elder Kimball, then summarized, “I merely bring this up to impress upon your mind the principles of order, but it will nevertheless apply to every member of the Church.”⁸⁶

The Final Battle: Gog and Magog

Revelation 20:7-10

Revelation 20:7-8 “When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released . . . to deceive the nations... Gog and Magog to gather them for war, whose numbers are as the sand of the sea” (NTC) God ends the millennial era by freeing Satan to deceive again. This is one reason why the Lord taught us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation” (Matthew 6:13). The result is worldwide horror and one last battle. We saw the same pattern in the Book of Mormon (4 Nephi). The great battle before the Millennium is referred to as Armageddon, and afterwards as Gog and Magog. This will be the decisive battle from the war that began in the premortal life. Michael will command the heavenly forces and Lucifer, the devils (D&C 88:111–115). In the Old Testament, Ezekiel also described this final battle as “Gog of the land of Magog” (Ezekiel 38:2; also 39:17–22).

Revelation 20:9–10 “They went up upon the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, And fire came down . . . and devoured them. The devil . . . was thrown into the lake of fire” (NTC) God will fight our battles now and in the future. We learn that Michael/Adam will lead that last battle in D&C 88:112–115. He will fight under God’s direction. It will be God who ends the battle by a cleansing. The Adversary will be cast into the “lake of fire and brimstone” forever. This is John’s imagery for torture (seven of the eight times it is mentioned in the New Testament are in Revelation).

Brimstone is sulfur, a yellowy green, highly combustible element commonly found along the shores of the Dead Sea. The same substance is used to make matches, gun powder, paper, etc. When ignited with fire, sulfur liquefies and produces a sharp and suffocating burning odor that can desolate and kill. Apparently in those days, no harsher picture of the hellish fate of the wicked could be portrayed than that of being thrown into a lake of fire, burning with brimstone.

The Book of Mormon teaches that this is just a symbol for God’s torment for those who are unfit to inherit His kingdoms of glory (2 Nephi 9:12; 28:23; Alma 12:17; Helaman 14:19; also see D&C 63:17; etc.).

The Final Judgment

Revelation 20:11–15

Revelation 20:11 “I saw a great, white throne, and one sitting . . . from whose presence the earth and heaven fled . . .” (NTC) After Satan is cast out, the scene returns to God’s white throne—probably even brighter than before as God’s glory is strengthened with His children’s Eternal life. It sounds as if heaven and earth will find a new place in space, too—either figuratively or literally.

Revelation 20:12 “I saw the dead . . . standing before the throne. And all the books were opened, and . . . the book of life . . . then the dead were judged on the basis of what was written . . . [and] their works” (NTC) All will have to stand before our Redeemer and Judge (John 5:22). The judgment will occur from the records that are kept in heaven and earth that record God’s words and our works. In addition to the record “kept in heaven” known as the Book of Life (D&C 128:17), the earthly books may include the scriptures, church records, temple recommends, tithing receipts, mission papers, journals, and histories. The Lord also explained, “whether they themselves have attended to the ordinances on their own . . . or by the means of their own agents, according to the ordinances which God has prepared for their salvation” (D&C 128:7). Obviously, there are many who were illiterate or without records, but John’s message is that all will have to be accountable (which includes our words and thoughts).

Revelation 20:13 “. . . hell gave up the dead . . . and each one was judged according to his works” (NTC) Finally, the wicked will be judged and resurrected in the Second Resurrection. The Lord taught the Prophet Joseph Smith that even these wicked will receive a kingdom of glory (D&C 76:81–119; also see D&C 29:26–28; 132:17).

Revelation 20:14–15 “This is the second death . . . if anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire” (NTC) Perdition or the Second Death is something only those who knowingly fought against Christ will receive. It is only a problem for those who had a testimony and denied it, and those who do these things to get money will be punished, “like unto the son of perdition” (3 Nephi 29:5–8). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught it is only a condition for whom those who had the full truth are susceptible.⁸⁷ (Perdition is also discussed in Revelation 21:8; D&C 76:33; 88:35.)

REVELATION 21

Outline of John's Apocalypse

VISION	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE	NUMBER OF VERSES
Throne of God	1, 4-5	36
Seven Churches	2-3	51
BC 4000-1000	6:1-11	11
AD 1000- AD 2000	6:12-7:3	14
AD 2000 Last Days & Second Coming	8:1-19:2	201
Millennium 20XX-30XX	20:1-6	6
Final Scenes	20:7-15	9
Celestialized Earth	21:2-22:6	33

The eternal drama continues to unfold chronologically as we are shown the celestial city of the New Jerusalem. God promises to bless His people in this celestial city. Another contrast unfolds as we earlier saw the mortal and flawed seven churches of Asia; we now see the eternal and perfect Church of the Firstborn in its celestial glory.

The first five verses form a chiasm with the holy city at the center (the Greek words repeat in a pattern).⁸⁸

A 21:1 New heaven and earth

B 21:1 First heaven, earth, and sea pass away

C 21:1 The sea exists no longer

D 21:2 The Holy City descends from heaven

D' 21:3-4 God dwells with His people

C' 21:4 Death exists no longer

B' 21:4 First things have passed away

A' 21:5 God creates everything new

Earth Receives Celestial Glory

Revelation 21:1 “I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and . . . earth have passed away, and the sea is no more” (NTC) John’s vision skips through galactic time to see a new celestialized heaven and earth. Although this globe is to be purified by fire and the “elements to melt with fervent heat,” it will not be

annihilated. The Lord showed other prophets this same event, “the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me” (Isaiah 66:22; also 2 Peter 3:10–13; Luke 17:39, JST). As “the flood,” cleansed the earth, symbolically baptizing it with water, so, too, a baptism of fire will make it ready for a celestialized state of righteousness. God may dwell among men to commune with them as He did before sin entered the world.

The lack of sea may be symbolic of a lack of chaos or division of unrest. The seas will be changed because “the islands shall become one land . . . and the earth shall be like as it was in the days before it was divided” (D&C 133:23–24).

Revelation 21:2 “I saw the holy city of New Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride . . . adorned for her husband” (NTC) Again we see that symbolically, the bride is the righteous city, the groom is Christ, and their union is described as a wedding feast. If the timing has not reversed again, the Heavenly New Jerusalem will come after the Millennium. The Prophet Ether also wrote of this, and Moroni translated it in Ether. Restored scriptures speak of three Jerusalems: one in Israel, Missouri, and Heaven. Moses 7:62–64 describes the city of Enoch, including Melchizedek’s people, returning from heaven at the beginning of the Millennium. So, this heavenly New Jerusalem may be different.

Revelation 21:3–4 “I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See the dwelling place of God with men . . . and God himself will be with them. And he will wipe away every tear’ (NTC) When this happens, we will experience the fulfilment of Christ’s name, Emmanuel, “God is with us” to the degree that God is with women and men. We assume “God” includes both Christ and Heavenly Father by D&C 76:92, “the celestial . . . where God, even the Father, reigns.” We know God created worlds without number and that He lives near Kolob, so we do know how often He will dwell on the celestialized earth (Abraham 3:3–4, 9, 16).

Revelation 21:5–8 “He who sat on the throne said . . .” (NTC) Throughout the Book of Revelation, it appears that the silent person on the throne is God the Father. If that is the case, this is the first time that He speaks. A case can be made for both the Father and Son, as He uses the same title that His Son used in Revelation 1:8 (also in 3 Nephi 9:18; and John 4). He offers seven statements (a substantial number meaning whole or complete).

1. “See, I am making all things new”
2. “Write for these words are trustworthy and true”
3. “They are done!”
4. “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end”
5. “I will give to those who are thirsty freely from the fountain of living water”
6. “He who overcomes will inherit these things and I will be his God, and he will be my son”
7. “But as for the cowardly . . . liars, their portion will be . . . the second death”

I appreciate the universality of the NIV translation of Revelation 21:7 “Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children” (NIV). In modern revelation both genders are referenced as well: “Sons and daughters of God” and “all that my Father hath shall be given unto him” (D&C 84:38). They “overcome” (KJV), or “conquer” (ESV) the natural man, sin, and satanic temptations.

Revelation 21:8 “. . . the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur . . .” (NIV) In contrast to the inheritors who have sought the will of the Father in all things, the damned include those who become fearful and unbelieving, murderers and liars, and all who are spiritually dead. They will not continue in their eternal progression but will be stopped (also see 2 Nephi 9:10–14; Helaman 14:15–16; D&C 76:106). Once they complete their probation, repent, and accept their Savior, they will also receive a merciful judgment and inherit a kingdom of glory, the Telestial Kingdom (D&C 76:98–113).

The Bride of the Lamb: Celestial City of Jerusalem and Church of God

Revelation 21:9–14

Revelation 21:9 “One of the even angels which had the seven bowls . . . spoke with me . . . ‘Come, I will show you the bride, and wife of the Lamb” (NTC) In the past the bride was the Church, and the bride takes on the Old Testament symbol of the city of Zion. John used an interesting literary parallel as emphasis here. In this verse, the entire opening phrase, up until, “the bride,” is identical to Revelation 17:1. The changed two verses separate their two women—chapter 17 is the whore, and here the woman is the Lamb’s bride. John’s constant contrasts help to emphasize their total opposite nature. Everything in this section is of the symbol of God’s celestialized city or Church of the Firstborn.

Revelation 21:10 “He carried me away in the Spirit onto a great and high mountain . . . the holy city of Jerusalem descending out of the heaven from God” (NTC) The Spirit transported John to a high mountain to see this portion of the vision, which also represents a spiritually high perspective. Here the *Holy Jerusalem* will come from heaven.

Revelation 21:11 “It had the glory of God. Its radiance was like a very precious stone . . .” (NTC) John describes the city in three sentences. It is filled with light—it even sounds like a Urim and Thummim type of explanation of precious stones. It symbolizes the celestialized earth in a state of constant revelation. The green color represents life, but here it is a clear crystal-like green, which represents its purity and value. Earlier, John associated jasper with God the Father (Revelation 4:2–3). In Greek “jasper” referred to a broad category of precious gems.⁸⁹ The stones represent the value of the city as a place of eternal ordinances—life giving power.



Cloisters Apocalypse, New Jerusalem, ca. 1330. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Revelation 21:12–13 “It had a massive high wall with twelve gates . . . twelve angels . . . named of the twelve tribes of Israel. On the east . . . north . . . south . . . west three gates” (NTC) In the ancient world, walls represented the safety of a city. Here the walls receive a lot of attention, including their openings, or the city gates. Brigham Young also taught that angels guard the entrance(s) to heaven and require those who want to enter to provide “signs and tokens” before entering.⁹⁰ Each gate had the name of an angel written there with three gates on each side. John uses his numbers symbolically again—God’s order or priesthood organization (twelve), geographic wholeness (four), and the Godhead (three).

Revelation 21:14 “The walls of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (NTC) God’s bride or city has an apostolic foundation, which included John’s name on one of the twelve stones. (Mathias, Barnabas, or Paul perhaps took the place of Judas Iscariot.) Ephesians 2:20; 4:11 also speaks of apostles and prophets as the foundation of God’s church organization.

Measuring God’s City, Walls, and Gates

Revelation 21:15–21

Revelation 21:15–17 “The angel . . . held a golden ruler to measure the city and its gates and its walls. And the city was laid out as a square . . . twelve thousand stadia” (NTC) Previously, John was asked to measure the temple (Revelation 11:1). Now the angel uses a golden “reed to measure” (KJV) to symbolically show the perfect nature of the celestial New Jerusalem. The numbers represent perfection, as a perfect cube. The Holy of Holies was also a perfect cube as the math literally works out to 12,000 *stadia*, or 14,000 miles in each direction.⁹¹ That covers most of the USA, plus extends about a million stories high. That approaches three-billion cubic miles of living space in the New Jerusalem. Symbolically, it is the perfect center of a temple with space for all who choose to enter God’s presence (Mormon 9:3–5). The entire city is the temple sanctuary, because God dwells there.⁹²

Revelation 21:17–18 “Its wall . . . was one hundred forty-four cubits by human measurement . . . made of jasper, and the city of pure gold as clear as glass” (NTC) The city is secured by the symbol of twelve-squared—meaning God’s full authority and organization. The angels speak and measure in a way that can relate to people’s understanding. This would have represented the most beautiful, valuable, and amazing thing imaginable to John. It speaks of the complete security and beauty that God has provided for the inhabitants. It also speaks of purification through great heat and pressure that is required to make pure gold, polished gems, or glass.

Revelation 12:19–20 “The foundations of the walls . . . were decorated with . . . precious stone . . .” (NTC) The description of the protective wall is a foundation of fabulous colors, longevity, and value. They reflect the twelve tribes of Israel, and the high priest’s stones worn in his breastplate (Exodus 28:17–20). Another list of twelve colorful stones is in Ezekiel 28:13. Although, the three lists differ in order and a few names, they share the symbolism of a brilliant means of reflecting the Light of the World:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Jasper | 7. Crystallite |
| 2. Sapphire (lapis lazuli) | 8. Beryl |
| 3. Chalcedony | 9. Topaz (citrine quartz) |
| 4. Emerald | 10. Chrysoprasus |
| 5. Sardonyx (onyx) | 11. Jacinth |
| 6. Sardius (carnelian) | 12. Amethyst |

Revelation 21:21 “The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate being made of a single pearl. The main street . . . was pure gold” (NTC) Pearls were the most valuable gem of all at that time. To find a pearl the size of a gate is the most beautiful and valuable (see discussion from Matthew 13:46). Pearls are also the product of long suffering and polishing. Just as in the Holy of Holies, the city street is pure gold, at the same time being like “transparent glass.”

Divine Light for the City

Revelation 21:22–27

Revelation 21:22 “I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty is its temple, as is the Lamb” (NTC) The city is a living Temple. All is holy. Earthly temples were patterned after the Heavenly Temple (Hebrews 8:4–5; 9:1). In God’s presence, there is no need for a special place of sacred worship.

Revelation 21:23 “The city had no need for the sun or the moon . . . for the glory of the God illuminated it, and its lamp is the Lamb” (NTC) God is the source of Light because He is “the power thereof by which it was made” (D&C 88:7).

Revelation 21:24–27 “The nations will walk in its light . . . the gates of the city will never close . . . and nothing unclean will come into it . . . only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (NTC) The gates will always be open and others will receive its light. John mentioned previously that only the most righteous whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life are allowed in (Revelation 13:9). Parley P. Pratt recorded his thoughts on the saints who will live in the celestial city:

A Saint, who is one in deed and in truth, does not look for an immaterial heaven, but he expects a heaven with lands, houses, cities, vegetation, rivers, and animals; with thrones, temples, palaces, kings, princes, priests, and angel; with food, raiment, musical instruments, &c.; all of which are material. Indeed, the Saints’ heaven is a redeemed, glorified, celestial, material creation, inhabited by glorified material beings, male and female, organized into families, embracing all the relationships of husbands and wives, parents and children where sorrow, crying, pain, and death will be no more. Or to speak still more definitely, this earth, when glorified, is the Saints’ eternal heaven. On it they expect to live, with body, parts, and holy passions; on it they expect to move, have their being; to eat, drink, converse, worship, sing, play on musical instruments, engage in joyful, innocent, social amusements, visit neighboring towns and neighboring worlds.⁹³

Whether or not Parley envisioned celestial life correctly, the details about life after death restored through the Prophets Joseph Smith and his nephew, Joseph F. Smith have multiplied what we learn from the Bible many times over.

REVELATION 22

John moves inside the celestial city to describe more of its paradisiacal beauty. The Apocalypse closes and Jesus speaks personally to John promising to return and offering a formal conclusion. It closes with a warning to any who alter his record.

The Waters and Tree of Life

Revelation 22:1–5

Revelation 22:1–2a “He showed me a river of living water, shining like crystal that flowed out from the throne of God and the Lamb down the center of the main street of the city” (NTC) The chapter continues with an angelic tour of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2). A crystal-clear river of water, the symbolic source of life, runs continually from the throne shared by the Father and Son. The river of living water can refer to potable water, as well as “living”/“zól”/“life”, both of physical (present) and of spiritual (particularly future) existence.”⁹⁴ In John’s Gospel, he recorded Jesus’ description of His own “living water” as a “spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:10, 13). These waters of life are also described in 1 Nephi 11:25 as God’s love:

I beheld that the rod of iron, which my father had seen, was the word of God, which led to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life; which waters are a representation of the love of God; and I also beheld that the tree of life was a representation of the love of God.

In the Holy City, God’s love refreshes, nourishes, and gives life.

Revelation 22:2b “A tree of life extended over the river on both sides producing twelve kinds of fruit, each month . . . and the leaves of the tree are for healing the nations” (NTC) This huge tree of life, spanning both banks of the river grew twelve different crops symbolizing nourishment and abundance. The “tree of life” is mentioned thirty-six times in the scriptures and even more in legends from extra-canonical writings.⁹⁵ Nibley says,



Many hundreds of books and articles have been written on the Tree of Life as a symbol and a cult-object, but in no land on earth is the sight of a real tree, and especially a fruit-bearing one, greeted with more joy and reverence than in treeless Arabia, where certain trees are regarded as holy because of their life-giving propensities.”⁹⁶



“The Tree of Life”... A print from the Phillip Medhurst Collection of Bible illustrations in the possession of Revd. Philip De Vere at St. George’s Court, Kidderminster, England. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

It is a favorite theme from Eden. In Moses’ Tabernacle the Menorah represented a “tree of life.” In Lehi’s dream, we learn we can reach it and eat of its fruit if we hold to the “word of God” or iron rod. Jesus himself represents the Tree of life, as the presenter of Eternal Life. His cross is sometimes drawn as a tree of life. The fruit has been likened to Eternal Life. An independent biblical scholar, Margaret Barker, described an old version of the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden:

The tree that had been intended in Eden for human food, was the Tree of Life, and the perfumed oil of that tree anointed humans and made them like angels—Sons of God. That was the tradition of the ancient priests in the temple, who thought of *themselves* as angels—messengers from heaven. The Tree of Life gave wisdom and eternal life, but the human pair disobeyed and chose knowledge that could be used for good *or* evil. Only then did they discover that they were barred from the Tree of Life. . . .

Satan’s deception in Eden was to imply that *both* trees, the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, had the same benefit—that both made humans like angels. It was the disobedience that was the problem, not the state they aspired to; and, they had to be barred from eternal life because they

had disobeyed. In the Book of Revelation, this is reversed, the faithful Christian is promised access again to the Tree of Life, and this meant access to the angel-state.⁹⁷

Revelation 22:3 “No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him” (NIV) The curse may be referring to the one from Eden, or possibly a general reference: “any accursed thing” (NTC). God the Father and the Lamb will be there. Their servants will follow Jesus’ example serve God (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; Luke 22:26; John 12:26; 13:1–17). God is often translated as a singular “him,” but in the Greek it can also be used for third person, *autos* / “them.”⁹⁸

Revelation 22:4 “They will see his face, and his name will be upon their foreheads” (NTC) Early John recorded that the servants of God were “sealed . . . on their foreheads” (Revelation 7:3, ESV; also, in 2:17; 3:12). Now we learn that the name of God is on their foreheads (which is the opposite of the counterfeit mark of the beast).

Those who served God on earth will continue to serve Him in heaven, but in the celestial city, face to face. Just as Jesus taught, it is those who serve who will be exalted (Matthew 23:12; etc.).

Revelation 22:5 “There will no longer be night . . . because the Lord God will illuminate them” (NTC) God is the source of light (see Revelation 21:23 and D&C 84:46; 88:6–13; 93:28, 36–37). This refers to multiple levels of illuminations. Those who share Christ’s light will also share in His power. When we want to receive more light and power, we must adopt His nature. His nature is filled with love; “In God, we meet love in its purest form.”⁹⁹

John and His Angelic Guide

Revelation 22:6 “The angel said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord . . . sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place” (NIV) The “angel” / *aggelos* / “messenger” for God has also visited other servants (or prophets) to tell them of the future (also Amos 3:7).¹⁰⁰

Revelation 22:7 “I am coming quickly. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of prophecy in this book” (BSB) The angel says “I” in reference to the Savior. This happens often in scripture as prophets speak for God. We refer to it as God’s divine investiture of authority (i.e. “Whether by mine own voice or the voice of my servants the prophets it is the same” D&C 1:38). This is the seventh beatitude that John has recorded. The whole message is finished, and the blessing promised for those who guard this sacred message.

The word “quickly” or “soon” (NIV) is not giving a time-table of the eternities from our perspective. The word also means “without any delay” or “properly.”¹⁰¹ God’s judgments and work with humanity are around us all the time or “quickly.” As mortals, it is certainly more motivating to have a deadline, even for God’s judgment. The phrase “I come quickly” is found three times in these last few verses of the Book of Revelation, and ten times in the D&C.

Revelation 22:8–9 “When I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel . . . And he said . . . ‘See here, do not do that! I am a fellow servant . . . of your brethren the prophets . . . keep the works of this book. Worship God” (NTC) John reacts as if not just the message, but also the messenger was the Lord. This is the second time he makes that mistake (Revelation 19:10). He may not have recognized the “I” was not God. But the angel immediately corrects him and identifies himself as a fellow servant. Messengers of God on either side of the veil are empowered by the same source. They carry God’s message to obey and to prepare to meet the Lord whenever His coming happens.

Revelation 22:10 “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near” (NTC) Unlike Nephi, Daniel, Ether, and other prophets who had this vision, John was told that he had the assignment of writing the Apocalypse for all to study. His time was nearer to the Second Coming than the other prophets who saw the vision (1 Nephi 14:24–26; Daniel 12:4, 9; Ether 3:25–27). “Time” could be translated, “the era is near,” as the Greek word for “time”/*Kairos*”fitting season, opportunity, occasion, time” has a broader definition.¹⁰²

Below: Final Judgment by Jesus, St. Isaac’s Cathedral in St. Petersburg, Russia. Photo by Espino Family via Flickr.



Revelation 22:11–12 “Let those who do evil continue . . . I am coming soon, and my reward is with me to pay to each according to his deeds” (NTC) When the time comes for the judgment, it will not be the time for repentance. However, repentance is the message of our dispensation, “Say nothing but repentance unto this generation; keep my commandments” (D&C 6:9; 11:9). When the judgement does come, Jesus will individually judge each person “according to what they have done” (NIV). The reward for the righteous will be the visitation with God.

Revelation 22:13 “I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (NTC) Even the names chosen to describe God communicate opposites. The first and last letter in the Greek alphabet express an unchanging God—a sense of eternity. Whether the Lord has come to speak, or John’s angelic guide is still relaying God’s message, the promises are the same.

Revelation 22:14 “Blessed are they who wash their robes so they will have the right to the tree of life and will enter into the city through the gates” (NTC) Significantly, this is the seventh time, “blessed are,” has been included in Revelation (Revelation 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7). The blessing associated with this beatitude is to eat from the tree of life. We wash our robes by applying the Atonement in our lives through repentance. There was an Old Testament tradition of washing one’s clothes before the Lord appeared (Exodus 19:10–11, 14; Numbers 8:7). Also, the priests washed and clothed before serving the Lord in the temple (Leviticus 8:13). The word “atonement” shares the roots of the word “cover,” which adds meaning to washing one’s clothing “in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:14). The Atonement allows the Lord to cover repentant saints in “robes of righteousness” (2 Nephi 9:14; 4:33).

Revelation 22:15 “Outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie” (NKJV) Outside the holy city are the unrighteous. As mentioned earlier, to the Jews, a dog was an “unclean” animal, and in most of the ancient world a despised predator or scavenger. Also, “dog” in Greek can mean, “a man of impure mind.”¹⁰³ A sorcerer is often described as a person using witchcraft, but it is also one who worked with drugs. The drug cartels are a major source of evil in our generation. These immoral liars are not welcomed into the city of God.

Witnesses, Warnings, and Exhortation

Revelation 22:16–21

Revelation 22:16 “I am Jesus who sent my angel to testify to you all concerning these things . . . I am . . . the bright morning star” (NTC) It appears that this is not the voice of the angel, but Christ Himself. When the change between angel and Lord occurred, we do not know. Jesus testified that the apocalyptic visions were given to John under His direction. John was told of his next mission, which was to testify to the early Church and share this vision with them. Whether he is to do it after his incarceration on the Isle of Patmos or perhaps from there via a letter, we are not told.

The titles that Jesus used to describe Himself are first filled with Messianic promises—the “Seed of David,” and, “the Morning Star.” He is the “star that shall come out of Jacob” (Numbers 24:17). As discussed earlier, Jesus is also the power of the sun. Yet, it is also an ironic contrast to Satan’s premortal name, “son of the morning” (Isaiah 14:12; D&C 76:26; 2 Nephi 24:12).

Revelation 22:17 “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who is thirsty come” (NTC) The Holy Spirit and the Bride (referring to God’s covenant children or the city of Zion) join as two more witnesses to invite John’s audience to come unto Christ and be cleansed by Him, to enter into the heavenly city. John’s and Moroni’s last words share this theme (Moroni 10:32). The living waters are available for free to all who want to drink enough to come unto Him! It is our true and earnest desires that led us where we go in life.

Revelation 22:18–19 “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of the book: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues . . . and if anyone takes away . . . God will take away his share of the tree of life” (NTC) I do not know if this is Jesus’ or John’s warning. The severe penalties sound as if it were the Lord’s words. This verse may also speak to people within the Church who know of the Apocalypse and try to intentionally pervert it. It specifically refers to John’s scroll of the Book of Revelation. Similar warnings are also found in Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32 and 2 Nephi 29:3–14, for Moses’ and Nephi’s records. The curse for altering scripture is great because so much is at stake. Millions may be led astray, so the punishments are eternal.

This verse is often quoted as an attack against accepting the Book of Mormon as scripture. It is a misunderstanding of how the books of the New Testament were collected and canonized. Those who claim this assume John’s warning refers to adding anything to the entire Bible. Yet, none of the Epistles and Gospels were gathered into a scriptural cannon at that time. In fact, the Old Testament and New Testament were an open cannon for three centuries after John’s writing. The Bible canon was not closed until 393 AD.

Revelation 22:20a “He who is a witness of these things says, ‘Yes! I come soon.’ Amen” (NTC) This may be John or Jesus speaking, but the message is that He will come. The futuristic tense leaves the timing open for any time; and we have record of many visitations that our Savior continues to make to seeking disciples. (D&C 93:1). This message motivates disciples to prepare to for that visit whether in this life or beyond. The best way to prepare for this reunion was given by Mormon:

My beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure (Moroni 7:48).

Revelation 22:20b–21 “Come, Lord Jesus: The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all of you” John closes with his witness that the Lord is Coming. It is a phrase found in other Christian writings that expresses “the urgency of the speaker.”¹⁰⁴ In addition to praying for the Second Coming, it may also call on the Spirit, the Second Comforter, and a call for the Lord to help John or the saints. John’s epilogue voices his desire that the saints will seek to understand the Lord’s message. The best way to end all admonitions, includes a call to remember our Redeemer.

CONCLUSION

These are the last canonized words in our New Testament, but John’s voice is heard again in restored scripture. In April 1829, during the early translation of the Book of Mormon, the Spirit revealed more of John the Beloved’s conversation with the Lord while the two were still on the earth together, “he has undertaken a greater work; therefore I will make him as flaming fire and a ministering angel; he shall minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation who dwell on the earth” (D&C 7:6).¹⁰⁵ The revelation notified the young Prophet Joseph that Peter, James, and John held the “power and the keys of this ministry until I come” (D&C 7:7). That message prepared Joseph to receive John the Beloved sometime between May 1829 and April 6, 1830, when the three Apostles restored the keys to the Melchizedek Priesthood to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery (D&C 128:20).¹⁰⁶ Three years later the Prophet Joseph also received a revelation that announced “the fulness of John’s record” would be given in the future (D&C 93:6, 18). I pray it comes soon! But even more that we will prepare as a Bride for the wedding Supper of the Lamb. Come Lord Jesus, Come!

Header Image: The Triumph of Christianity over Paganism by Gustave Dore. Modified by Jasmin Rappleye.

ENDNOTES

1. Draper, Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 429.
2. *Ibid.*, 533; “John’s second cycle of visions . . . is composed of seven distinct visions, each noted with the formula . . . ‘and I saw,’ or . . . ‘and behold.’” Ironically, in Draper and Rhodes translation, they did not include “and behold” from 12:3 that connects this first vision with the other six.
3. *Ibid.*, 83.
4. John Schmitt, “Israel and Zion, —Two Gender Images: Biblical Speech Traditions and their Current Neglect,” *Horizons*, 18 (1991), 20. In Hebrew the noun Israel is always masculine, however the translation of the Hebrew Bible into English has not always maintained the gender imagery of the manuscripts. With only one exception, Israel is always the son or people of God (Hosea 2:2, 3). The word, “Israel,” appears 2507 times in the Hebrew Bible and 2505 times the noun Israel is connected to masculine verbs and adverbs. John Schmitt, “Gender Correctness and Biblical Metaphors: The Case of God’s Revelation to Israel,” *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 26, 1996, 98-99. Usually it is the cities of Jerusalem, Samaria, and Zion—not Israel—that are described as woman, wife, or mother.
5. “Israel” is referenced in 188 verses in the Book of Mormon. Each time the gender is correct. Most of the verses that use the word “Israel” are written by the first two authors, Nephi and Jacob who were members the original family who left Jerusalem. The second most frequent usages are found in 3 Nephi where the story tells of Jesus’ visit to the inhabitants of the American continent after His resurrection. It is interesting to note that the vocabulary or usage patterns of “Israel” separates between authors, which adds credence to the claim that the Book of Mormon was written by multiple authors.
6. Strong’s #4165, <https://biblehub.com/greek/4165.htm> (accessed 12-3-19).
7. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 441.
8. *Ibid.*, 436; *TDNT* 2:281.
9. Joseph Smith, *TPJS*, 293.
10. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 437-438.
11. *Ibid.*, 444. “The wilderness church represents the righteous descendants of the ancient Saints . . . and they were hid from the world and the dragon by God. Thus, certain bloodlines were reserved.”
12. D&C 27:11; 76:25-26; 128:21; Moses 4:1-4; Abraham 3:27-28; Bible Dictionary “War in Heaven”
13. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament*, 3:518.
14. Joseph Smith, “Discourse, 8 April 1843, as Reported by William Clayton–B,” p. 6, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-8-april-1843-as-reported-by-william-clayton-b/10>.
15. There have been suggestions that time means: 360, times: 720, and half time:180, which totals1260 or 42 months or 3 ½ years. This number is used commonly in the Book of Revelation.
16. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 480.
17. “Discourse, 8 April 1843, as Reported by William Clayton–A,” p. [2], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed December

- 4, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-8-april-1843-as-reported-by-william-clayton-a/2>.
18. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 186-187.
 19. “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” p. 1523, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed December 4, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/166>.
 20. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 486.
 21. Gaskill, *Revelation*, 152.
 22. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 170-171 (also see 188).
 23. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 487.
 24. “Minutes, 25–26 October 1831,” p. 13, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed December 4, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-25-26-october-1831/4>.
 25. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 493. “This still leaves us with a problem. Christ was not slain . . . [until]the meridian of time. This is clearly a case of the *perfectum propheticum* in which the writer, by inspiration, uses the past tense to signify the assurance of the fulfillment of a future event.”
 26. *Ibid.*, 507.
 27. Jack Finegan, *The Archeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ Press, 2014), 345-346, 349, 351.
 28. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1989), 255.
 29. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 524-53; Gaskill, *Revelation*, 163.
 30. *Ibid.*, 535.
 31. The highest number used in the KJV Bible is “thousand” times another number of lower value. For example, Psalm 68:17, “thousands of thousands.” Also we find “twice ten thousand ten thousands” (Revelation 9:16) that is the same as “two hundred million,” but the literal translations remain true to using “thousand” as their highest number. Only in modern translations do we find the numbers translated into English as million.
 32. Strong’s #3478; <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3478.htm> (accessed 12-5-19).
 33. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:196. On February 4, 1844, the Prophet indicated that “the selection of the persons to form that number had already commenced.’ By that time, Joseph had already conferred these blessings on at least 17 men” (Wilford Woodruff Diary).
 34. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1985), 640.
 35. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 566.
 36. *Ibid.*, 569.
 37. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph*, 169.
 38. D&C 6:1; 11:1; 12:1; 14:1; 76:114.
 39. Donald W. Parry and Jay A. Parry, *Understanding the Book of Revelation* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1998), 476.
 40. Genesis 15:16; Exodus 34:14; Deuteronomy 29:20; Matthew 10:34-36; 18:6-7; John 2:13-17; Revelation 6:16; Alma 16:9-

- 11; Mormon 4:5; 8:21; D&C 1:6-13; 59:21; 76:33; etc.
41. Bruce R. McConkie, *Millennial Messiah*, 394.
 42. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 604.
 43. McConkie, *Millennial Messiah*, 354.
 44. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 612.
 45. The “way of the kings,” may possibly refer to the future kings who come in at the Lord’s Second Coming—perhaps the people of Enoch and Melchizedek, or Jesus and His priests and kings, priestesses and queens.
 46. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, xviii.46-49.
 47. Strong’s #2440, <https://biblehub.com/greek/2440.htm> (accessed 12/6/19).
 48. Strong’s #3722, <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3722.htm> (accessed 12/6/19).
 49. Smith’s Bible Dictionary, “Armageddon.” “The scene of the struggle of good and evil is suggested by that battle-field, the plain of Esdraelon, which was famous for two great victories, of Barak over the Canaanites and of Gideon over the Midianites; and for two great disasters, the deaths of Saul and Josiah.”
 50. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 628.
 51. *Ibid.*, 631.
 52. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, 434-35.
 53. *Ibid.*, 435. Hugh Nibley continued: “By offering ‘anything in this world for money’ and so making men competitive—competitive in a big way. He would, with the natural wealth of the earth (precious metals, coal, oil, timber, real estate), as exploited by financiers (manipulation of the money market), buy up armies and navies (they cost the most—the military-industrial complex), and leaders of nations and churches (who embody power), and rule the earth with terror (a world at war is Satan’s own dominion).”
 54. Andrew H. Hedges, J. Spencer Fluhman, and Alonzo L. Gaskill, ed., *The Doctrine and Covenants: Revelations in Context* (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and Deseret Book, 2008), 212–28. Steven Harpers article, “All Things Are the Lord’s: The Law of Consecration in the Doctrine and Covenants,” is an excellent resource on the subject.
 55. The number of heads and horns are similar to divine numbers but used as a deception—now seven is complete in wickedness.
 56. Ogden, 339. The purple is made from a shell fish in Phoenicia. The scarlet dye is made from eggs of an insect (*coccus ilicis*) that live in oak trees in the Holy Land.
 57. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 644.
 58. Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, “Book of Life.” 1.138-139.
 59. From 1831 to 1841, the Prophet Joseph Smith received instructions about the “Holy Spirit of Promise” in seven revelations. Six of the seven describe the “Holy Spirit of promise” as a permanent sealing of saving ordinances (D&C 76:53; 88:3-5; 124:124; 131:5, 132:7, 18-19, 26). Joseph also added the phrase in his translation of 1 John 3:9. On February 16, 1832, in a powerful vision of the afterlife, Joseph learned the step-by-step requirements for receiving the Holy Spirit of Promise as recorded in D&C 76:51-56. After this revelation, Joseph became deeply interested with the idea and elabo-

- rated on its meaning in at least six sermons (see Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph*, 4, 15, 190, 209, 284, 335).
60. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 669. For more on the “Book of Life” see Revelation 3:4-5.
 61. John Taylor, *The Government of God*, 95–98. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/44941/44941-h/44941-h.htm> (accessed 12-13-19) The citation continues: “the everlasting gospel is again to be proclaimed to the children of men; The proclamation is to be made to ‘every nation, kindred, people, and tongue.’ Associated with this, was another declaration, ‘Fear God, and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come.’”
 62. Brigham Young, Jr., General Conference April 1899.
 63. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 703.
 64. *Ibid.*, 704.
 65. *Ibid.*, 715.
 66. The four hallelujahs can be added to the list of four seals, four horses, four horsemen, four statements from four beasts, and four accounts of the destruction before the Second Coming.
 67. Strong’s #239, <https://biblehub.com/greek/239.htm> (accessed 12-10-19).
 68. Elder D. Todd Christofferson, “Preparing for the Lord’s Return,” General Conference April 2019.
 69. Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better” General Conference April 2019. “It is time to put on the full armor of God so we can engage in the most important work on earth. It is time to ‘thrust in [our] sickles, and reap with all [our] might, mind, and strength.’”
 70. Strong’s #4016, <https://biblehub.com/greek/4016.htm>; “to throw all around, i.e. Invest” (accessed 12-10-19).
 71. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 730.
 72. We find three more if you add phrases like “the spirit of much prophecy” (Jacob 1:6), or “the spirit of revelation and prophecy” (Alma 8:24; 23:6), and the variation on the theme, “the spirit of revelation and also prophecy” (3 Nephi 3:19).
 73. Smith, *History*, 1.42; 1.46; 1.64; 1.71; 2.382; 2.428; 2.489; 3.28; 3.379; 3.389; 5.140; 5.215; 5.231; 5.392; 5.400; 5.427; 5.516; 6.77; 6.194. Joseph also approved the inclusion into his *History of the Church* of eleven other references to the “spirit of prophecy” by Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Sidney Rigdon, and an editorial from the *Boston Bee*.
 74. The “spirit of prophecy and revelation” is found in Smith, *History*, 1.64; 2.382; 2.489; 3.379; Alma 43:2.
 75. Smith, *History*, 5.215-216.
 76. Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-7; 52:13-52:12.
 77. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 738.
 78. Strong’s #911, <https://biblehub.com/greek/911.htm> (accessed 12-10-19)
 79. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 742.
 80. *Ibid.*, 637. In apocryphal literature and other writings from the time of the New Testament, the “title also appears in 2 Macc. 13:4; 3 Macc. 5:35; 1 En. 9:4; 63:4; 84:2; Philo, *Spec. 1.18, Decal 41; T. Mos. 8:1.*”
 81. *Ibid.*, 743.
 82. Parry, *Understanding Revelation*, 263.
 83. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 751.

84. Ibid., 754.
85. Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 312-319.
86. Hebrew C, Kimball, *Journal of Discourses*, vol 9.9; <http://ldslastdays.com/celestial-city/> (accessed 12-12-19).
87. Joseph Smith, *History, 1838–1856*, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844], 1976: “What must a man do to commit the unpardonable sin? he must receive the Holy Ghost, have the heavens opened unto him, and know God, and then sin against him: after a man has sinned against the Holy Ghost there is no repentance for him; he has got to say that the sun does not shine while he sees it— he has got to deny Jesus christ when the heavens have been opened unto him, and to deny the plan of salvation with his eyes open to the truth of it; and from that time he begins to be an enemy. This is the case with many apostates of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints.” *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed December 13, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/348>.
88. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 792.
89. Ibid., 806.
90. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1855), 2:31. When President Brigham Young dedicated the cornerstone of the Salt Lake Temple on April 6, 1853, he taught the saints about the role of angels in connection with their endowment. “Your endowment is, to receive all those ordinances in the House of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being enabled to give them the key words, the signs and tokens, pertaining to the Holy Priesthood, and gain your eternal exaltation in spite of earth and hell.”
91. A Greek *stadion* is 607 feet (used as a 600 foot sprint), or 202.3 yards. The KJV translation used “furlong” which is 660 feet, or 220 yards.
92. We also learn from Abraham 3:9 that God also lives in Kolob. We do not understand now, but perhaps without time, like the Spirit’s witness, God can be experienced as many people do simultaneously.
93. Orson Pratt, “The Saint’s Heaven,” *Millennial Star*, vol. 28, Nov 17, 1866, 722.
94. Strong’s #2222 <https://biblehub.com/greek/2222.htm> (accessed 12-10-19)
95. In a third century AD synagogue in Dura-Europos, Syria, a painting of the tree of life was found right over the main shrine. It is filled with birds and animals, bearing all sorts of fruit. The patriarch Jacob and his posterity of twelve tribes sit underneath it. They portray a father blessing two sons—probably Joseph blessing Ephraim and Manasseh, or Isaac blessing Jacob and Esau. For other examples of legends of the tree of life outside of scripture see Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 128-129.
96. Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Provo and SLC, UT: Deseret and FARMS, 1988), 255.
97. Margaret Barker, “Joseph Smith and Preexilic Israelite Religion,” *The Worlds of Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2006). <https://byustudies.byu.edu/content/joseph-smith-and-preexilic-israelite-religion> (accessed 12-12-19)
98. Strong’s #846, “he, she, it, they, them, same;” <https://biblehub.com/greek/846.htm> (accessed 12-9-19).
99. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 837.

100. Strong's #32; "Usage: a messenger, generally a (supernatural) messenger from God, an angel, conveying news or behests from God to men." <https://biblehub.com/greek/32.htm> (accessed 12-10-19).
101. Strong's #3035; "*tachu* (an adjective, used adverbially, and derived from 5036 /*taxýs*, "promptly") – properly, *swift* (quick), without *unnecessary delay*; used of God's *promptness* characterizing how He has ordered all physical scenes of life to happen on *His perfect timetable without unnecessary "delay"* (Revelation 1:1, 22:6)." <https://biblehub.com/greek/5035.htm> (accessed 12-9-19).
102. Strong's #2540 <https://biblehub.com/greek/2540.htm> (accessed 12-9-19).
103. Strong's #2965 <https://biblehub.com/greek/2965.htm> (accessed 12-9-19).
104. Draper and Rhodes, *BYU New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, 861.
105. Donald W. Parry, ed., *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism*, 488-489. "Heirs of salvation are those who have been called and elected, but who still dwell in the telestial world (D&C 7:6-7; 76:88; 77:11)." Moses, Enoch's people, and other translated beings, minister to those who are now "heirs of salvation" (Hebrews 1:14).
106. My dates are broad enough to include every possibility after May 13, 1829 when Joseph received the Aaronic priesthood, and before the power of the Melchizedek priesthood was first used April 6, 1830 (Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 1.74). The higher priesthood had to be restored before the gift of the Holy Ghost was first confirmed, which occurred at the organization of the church in Fayette, NY. Richard Bushman and others have found historical information that fits into the category of "The voice of Peter, James, and John in the wilderness between Harmony, Susquehanna county, and Colesville, Broome county, on the Susquehanna river" (D&C 128:20). Yet I disregard with their options that fall after the first use of the Melchizedek priesthood, April 6, 1830.