

NEW TESTAMENT

MARK

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Mark

Introduction to Mark

NIV SB: Although there is no direct internal evidence of authorship, it was the unanimous testimony of the early church that this Gospel was written by John Mark ("John, also called Mark," Ac 12:12, 25; 15:37). The most important evidence comes from Papias (c. AD 140), who quotes an even earlier source as saying: (1) Mark was a close associate of Peter, from whom he received the tradition of the things said and done by the Lord (see 1Pe 5:13 and note); (2) this tradition did not come to Mark as a finished, sequential account of the life of our Lord, but as the preaching of Peter-preaching directed to the needs of the early Christian communities; (3) Mark accurately preserved this material. The conclusion drawn from this tradition is that the Gospel of Mark largely consists of the preaching of Peter arranged and shaped by Mark (see note on Ac 10:37).

*

Q1: What is your take on the authorship of the gospel? How do we know that Mark is the author? Do you agree with the conclusions drawn from Papias?

A1: Evidence for this sort of thing comes from two sources: 1) historians (such as Eusebius who preserves fragments of Papias) and 2) tradition. We don't have a lot of details, and this introduction is pretty good at summing up what is out there. The fact that what we do have agrees is a good indication that the received view is correct (there are no serious alternative views of any antiquity about the possibility of any other author besides Mark). Also, there is nothing in the internal evidence (the reading of the actual gospel itself) which would contradict the received view, whereas reading it with the idea that John Mark was the human author seems to sync well with the text. It ought to be mentioned, however, that John Mark wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. His authority to do so was derived from Peter (just as Luke's was from Paul). It should also be said that Mark, unlike Luke (who had to do research, as he tells us), was an eyewitness (e.g., he's no doubt the young man who escaped at Mk.14:51-52).

*

NIV SB: The evidence points to the church at Rome, or at least to Gentile readers. Mark explains Jewish customs (7:2-4; 15:42), translates Aramaic words (3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 15:22, 34) and seems to have a special interest in persecution and martyrdom (8:34-38; 13:9-13) - subjects of special concern to Roman believers (and to Peter as well; cf. 1 Peter).

A Roman destination would explain the almost immediate acceptance of this Gospel and its rapid dissemination.

*

Q2: Do you agree that Gentile readers were the recipients of Mark's gospel?

A2: This makes sense to me based upon the use of transliterated Latin words and more extended explanations of some of the Jewish customs as in the examples above. Here is a list of the former found on the internet (at the link):

The Latin words in Mark are census (κηνσος, “poll tax,” 12:14), centurio (κεντυριων, “centurion,” 15:39, 44, 45), denarius (δηναριον, a Roman coin, 12:15), legio (λεγιων, “legion,” 5:9, 15), modius (μοδιος, “peck measure,” 4:21), praetorium (πραιτωριον, “governor’s official residence,” 15:16), quadrans (κοδραντης, a Roman coin, 12:42), sextarius (ξεστης, quart measure, “pitcher,” 7:4), speculator (σπεκουλατωρ, “executioner,” 6:27), and flagellum (φραγελλωω, “to flog,” 15:15).

What should be kept in mind about this, however, is that the Roman congregation had many believers of Jewish origin (not all of whom had been born in Rome) and a great many others who were of Greek origin with Greek as their original language. After all, the gospel is written in Greek, not in Latin. So it might be better to think of this as a gospel written for people who had never been to Palestine, even if they had some familiarity with Jewish customs.

*

Q3: Could you explain the origins of the gospel of Mark? It seems that what Matthew wrote in detail, Mark presents snippets of and moves quickly from one event to another. Sequence seems largely the same, although I'm not sure if it is always identical. Does Mark provide any details that other gospel writers don't? Also, how do we know it is a part of the scripture?

A3: I accept the traditional view that this gospel presents a rendering of the events for a more cosmopolitan audience. And while the details are largely the same they are not identical. I can't do justice to this question in a few sentences – it would take a dissertation based on careful research. But it does seem to me that the impression we receive of our Lord and His ministry is slightly different than that of the other gospels – a very good thing. We are watching things from a different perspective and that is always helpful in understanding and appreciating what we have.

Mark 1:1 (NIV)

1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah,[a] the Son of God,[b]

a. Mark 1:1 Or Jesus Christ. Messiah (Hebrew) and Christ (Greek) both mean Anointed One.

b. Mark 1:1 Some manuscripts do not have the Son of God.

*

Q1: Could you explain both footnotes?

A1: On the first note, the Greek says Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, so this is only demonstrating that there are (at least) two ways to translate the Greek word *Christos*, either as 'Messiah' (a transliteration from Hebrew) or as 'Christ' (a transliteration from Greek). A true **translation** (of either the Greek or the Hebrew on which the word is based) would be "Anointed One", with the anointing (of the Spirit) representing Him as the chosen one of the Father who would fulfill all the promises and prophecies of scripture.

On the second note, the title "Son of God" is present in most mss. but in Sinaiticus it is added in above the line. Since there is a similarity of ending in this sequence, the omission is probably accidental. In fact, since these divine names are usually shortened to save space, what we would have in the text from which Sinaiticus was copied would be three capital upsilons in a row (since the convention was to use the first and last letters of the divine title as an abbreviation): XYYY = "...Christ, Son...", so the omission is understandable. The hand which puts it back into the text seems to be the same as the one transcribing the gospel in the first place (more evidence for the correctness of the text).

*

Q2: If my understanding is correct, the "X" refers to "Xristou", the first upsilon to "uiou", but I'm not clear about the last two?

A2: Added in above the line in the text of the ms. are the letters YY THY, abbreviations for *hiuou theou*, "Son of God".

Mark 1:2 (NIV)

2 as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" - 3 "a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

*

Q: Mark says that the quotation comes from Isaiah, but the first part of it is from Malachi?

A: The convention was to attribute the quote to the major prophet in such cases. What Mark means is that Isaiah was speaking of John the baptist, and that Isaiah also was speaking of the same individual mentioned in Malachi. Isaiah gets the mention in the citation because his is the (by far) larger book.

Mark 1:4 (NASB)

4 John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

NIV SB: They knew of baptism for Gentile converts but had not heard that the descendants of Abraham (Jews) needed to repent and be baptized.

*

Q: What was the procedure of baptism for Gentile converts at that time?

A: There is some suggestion in the Mishnah (ca. 3rd cent. A.D.) that water purification should be used in the case of converts, but other than the famous example of Naaman the Syrian, this would mostly be an example of anachronistic projection backward from medieval practices. Remember too that the Pharisees who came to John wanted to know why he would be baptizing if he were not the Messiah – indicating that purification of the nation *of Israel* through symbolic repentance was in fact something they expected – from the Messiah.

Mark 1:8 (NIV)

8 I baptize you with^[a] water, but he will baptize you with^[b] the Holy Spirit."

a. *Mark 1:8 Or in*

b. *Mark 1:8 Or in*

*

Q: Which rendering is better here - "with" or "in"?

A: Either one works in English. The thing to note is that "with the Spirit" is referring to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, that is, the enduing of believers with the indwelling so that we are "in Christ" as a result (the two aspects of Spirit baptism, namely, His indwelling presence and our unification with Christ through the Spirit's baptism of us into Christ; see BB 5 "Spirit Baptism").

Mark 1:24 (NASB)

24 saying, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are-the Holy One of God!"

NIV SB: 1:24 us. Although the man has only one demon, it speaks for the whole demonic realm, which quakes in fear at Jesus' presence. Holy One of God. A Messianic title affirming that Jesus is set apart for God's service and perhaps alluding to his divine origin (see Lk 1:35; 4:34; Jn 6:69). The title was perhaps used by the demons in accordance with the occult belief that the precise use of a person's name gave certain control over him (see 5:7).

*

Q: Do you agree with the point that "us" is used because the demon speaks "for the whole demonic realm"? Do you agree with the point regarding the using of one's name? I take it this is the same incident as the one described in Luke 4:33-35, which also occurs in synagogue, rather than in Matthew 8:28-32?

A: Verse 24 begins with *legon*, "saying", and the participle is singular. So there is only one demon speaking. I take this to mean as if a soldier were speaking on behalf of his country. The effect is to make the exorcism not "personal" as against one demon but general as against the entire "team" of evil. It shows that the demon recognized quite well what this all meant for his "side". On the "Name", no, I think rather that this ties into what has just been said, namely, it demonstrates that the demon was well-aware of who Jesus was/is and what was in the process of transpiring – this is recorded for our benefit that we might understand that even though the human interlocutors of Christ didn't understand His Person and authority, the demons certainly did. On the last point, yes, this is the same as Luke 4 but not Matthew 8 (which is also recorded in Mk.5 and Lk.8).

Mark 1:28-29 (NASB)

28 Immediately the news about Him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee.

29 And immediately after they came out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

*

Q: Why does in verse 29 Mark resume the narrative with "immediately after they came out of the synagogue" if he was just describing the incident of the man with unclean spirit?

A: The phrase here is *kai eythys* (καὶ εὐθὺς) and is in fact Mark's favorite phrase (41 times by some counts). He seems to use it to mark transitions rather than to express immediacy per se.

Mark 1:29-31 (NIV)

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. 30 Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. 31 So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

*

Q1: Why did Simon's mother-in-law begin to wait on them having been healed, since our Lord went to her together with James and John?

A1: She was feeling better. This fact is recorded for us no doubt to demonstrate the completeness of the healing which not only caused the fever to leave but restored the way she felt to normal, and instantly so.

*

Q2: I was wondering why she would wait on someone who has already come, but the word could be rendered "ministered" - *diakoneo*.

A2: Right! It's that kind of waiting as in that of a waiter at a restaurant.

Mark 1:41 (NIV)

41 Jesus was indignant.[a] He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"

a. Mark 1:41 Many manuscripts Jesus was filled with compassion

NIV SB: 1:41 touched the man. An act that, according to Mosaic law, brought defilement (see Lev 13, especially vv. 45-46; see also Lev 5:2). Jesus' compassion for the man superseded ceremonial considerations.

*

Q: Could you explain the discrepancy between the two renderings - "indignant" and "filled with compassion"? Do you agree with the note says that "Jesus' compassion for the man superseded ceremonial considerations"? Our Lord didn't break the Law and yet touches the leper. I think it probably has got to do with His divine power to heal overriding the Old Testament precept, but I'm not sure how to reconcile the two.

A: I have a hard time understanding why the 2014 NIV has switched from the 1984NIV "Jesus was filled with compassion" – that is what all the other major versions have, and what the Greek verb *splangnizo* always means in the passive voice. The only thing I can surmise is that the translator wanted to do something different (to justify the new secret version), and possibly was worried that someone might be upset at the idea that Jesus "became compassionate" on seeing this man since of course He **is** love and compassion. But either way it would be silliness. On the other question, I agree with you. The mere fact that our Lord was willing to touch a leper (and this happened on a number of occasions recorded for us) showed that He was Lord of the Law in every respect and in the process of fulfilling its promises of healing when the Messiah came.

Mark 1:43-44 (NASB)

43 And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, 44 and He *said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

*

Q: It seems that Mark records our Lord warning people not to say who He was and what He has done more frequently than other gospel writers - is there a reason for it? Why did Jesus command the man to offer for his cleansing what Moses commanded?

A: Different gospel writers emphasize different things for our benefit. It's good to know this fact, and as I have pointed out before it demonstrates more clearly than is the case in the other gospels the practical problems that Jesus faced. The more these miracles became known and talked about widely, the more problematic the logistics of His ministry became (as more and more people

thronged to Him). He had a specific mandate and a specific plan to reach all of Israel at that time in just the right way – it wasn't all about numbers and celebrity as is often the case with wannabe ministries today. As to the offering, until Jesus takes control of the state of Israel (and the world) Israel at that time was supposed to be operating under the Law (the true Law understood correctly and administered in truth as opposed to mindless ritual and human interpretation given the force of law). So our Lord was showing by this command that while He does supersede and fulfill the Law, He was not abrogating the genuine and properly applied essence of it.

Mark 2:6-7 (NASB)

6 But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?"

*

Q: How does Mark know what the scribes were reasoning in their hearts? Is it through the guidance of the Spirit?

A: Yes. One could make this observation about a good deal of the material in the Bible where the writer is giving us information he was not personally privy to apart from the Spirit (starting notably with the book of Genesis since Moses was born long after, e.g., the garden of Eden). Mark wasn't there and didn't interview these men – but the Spirit was certainly there.

Mark 2:9-11 (NASB)

9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk'? 10 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—He *said to the paralytic, 11 "I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home."

*

Q: Could you please explain:

Luke 5:24: But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,"—He said to the paralytic—"I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home."

In your reply regarding this passage you said that it was easier for our Lord to say 'get up', because it didn't require His sacrifice on the cross. In light of that, could you explain why does Jesus say:

'But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,'—He said to the paralytic—"I say to you, get up,'

Saying 'get up' doesn't require the 'authority on earth to forgive sins', why then Jesus uses this act as a demonstration ('so that you may know')?

A: The unbelieving crowd is reasoning, "this is just a man so he can't forgive sins". Jesus of course **does** have the authority to forgive sins because He died for them all. The miracle He performed was the proof that He was who He said He was, and did have the authority He said He did, for God would not empower just anyone to do such a miracle, and certainly not someone who said "your sins are forgiven" if the person didn't actually have that power.

Mark 2:14 (NIV)

14 As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

*

Q: Who is Levi? With regard to the sequence in which his calling is presented, it seems to correspond to the calling of Matthew?

A: Yes, this is Matthew. It seems that all of the disciples had two names, most likely a name given at birth, and another one given to them by the Lord. So not only Levi/Matthew, but also Simon/Peter, Saul/Paul, John and brother James / "Thunderers", Thaddeus/Judas son of James, Bartholomew/Nathaniel, Thomas/Didymus, Simon/Cananeus (zealot). It is true that we do not have alternative names for Andrew or Philip or Judas Iscariot. The last mentioned will be because of the fact that he was never a believer with a "new life" requiring a new name. The other two are simply not recorded for us but we can assume that they probably had them.

Mark 2:19-21 (NIV)

19 Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. 20 But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast. 21 "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse.

*

Q1: Why does our Lord move from talking about John the baptist's disciples fasting to sewing a patch of unshrunk cloth to an old garment?

A1: I'm not sure we can always make this sort of connection in the gospels (or draw conclusions from the juxtapositions) since we are given only a small part, no doubt, of what was said on any given occasion (cf. Jn.21:25). Here it is perhaps possible to say that John representing Judaism and the Law, and the response to his ministry in proper response to the Law is different from how one ought to respond to the Messiah who fulfills the Law and brings in salvation (spiritual and, later, material).

*

Q2: I understand both the point our Lord makes in verse 15 and in verses 16-17. What is unclear to me is the relationship between the two. What is the link between them?

A2: They both relate to doing what is appropriate to the circumstances of one's ministry. There is a time for everything. Figuring out the right thing to do at the right time is a significant part of spiritual growth; the principle also has broader applications as well. For Jesus' disciples, it meant that being involved with the people they were ministering to along with Jesus was what was important at the time, not what the Pharisees thought to be important; for us today, it means not trying to change the old when we should be serving the new since the two have little in common in fact (e.g., trying to change the Roman Catholic church – or any traditional church – from within would, it seems to me, violate our Lord's implicit advice here).

Mark 2:21-22 (NASB)

21 “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results. 22 No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins as well; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.”

*

Q: Dear Professor,

A friend of mine asked me about the interpretation of Luke 5:36-5:39. I thought I would verify my understanding of this passage before writing to him.

Luke 5:33-39 (NASB)

33 And they said to Him, "The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the disciples of the Pharisees also do the same, but Yours eat and drink." 34 And Jesus said to them, "You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? 35 But the days will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days." 36 And He was also telling them a parable: "No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. 37 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined. 38 But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. 39 And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, "The old is good enough."

I take "the new" as referring to the teaching of our Lord, and the old to the legalistic norms of the Pharisees. So "a piece of cloth from a new garment" doesn't fit with the old, as they don't have anything in common and cannot be reconciled. Similarly, new wine, which I read stands for new teaching cannot be put into old wineskins - Pharisees and those who follow their ways. In this respect new wine "must be put into fresh wineskins", and the "new wineskins" are those who are willing to receive our Lord with open heart. Verse 39 perhaps could refer to unwillingness to receive the new through spiritual stagnation and closed heart. So "the old" has a negative meaning according to this interpretation and with regard to the disciples of John could perhaps refer to those who received the herald, but didn't receive the One heralded by him.

Let me know your take on this passage.

I pray for you and your ministry daily and cannot wait to resume our correspondence,

A: Very good to hear from you, my friend.

As to your question, I think you are exactly right in your interpretation. I would only add that in addition to the interpretation there is a most apt application of this teaching as well: trying to change a Christian group or denomination from the inside, especially if it is a case of attempting to inject the power of the truth into a group that has become spiritually moribund, will usually be unsuccessful for the precise same reasons. Those within think "the old is better", and any headway will only disrupt the old organization, possibly even destroying it, with the only result being that the new teaching is lost in the process.

Yesterday was our Thanksgiving holiday, and I certainly remembered that I am thankful for your friendship in the Lord.

Mark 2:26 (NASB)

26 how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?"

NIV SB: 2:26 In the days of Abiathar the high priest. According to 1Sa 21:1, Ahimelek, Abiathar's father (1Sa 22:20), was then high priest (see note on 2Sa 8:17). house of God. The tabernacle (see 1Sa 1:9 and note; 21:1). consecrated bread. See note on Mt 12:4.

*

Q: On this issue you wrote:

All of these passages can be reconciled by understanding a family tradition in this line of son/father/son/father name alternation (of the sort that is famous in Scandinavian countries). Parallels include John the baptist's relatives assuming that he would be named Zechariah after his father or alternatively after someone else in his family (Lk.1:59-61), and the recurrent names Maacah and Tamar in Absalom's branch of the Davidic family (1Ki.15:2; see NIV text note). According to this interpretation, Ahimelech is the son of Abiathar, his son's name is Ahimelech, who in turn has a son Abiathar. The rest of the solution deals with the concept of "high priest". In none of these passages is the high priest identified. We know from the Law (e.g., in Num.35:25 where the perpetrator of manslaughter must stay in the city of refuge "until the death of the high priest"), and from many later references that there was such an office. But as the Numbers passage shows, this was a life-long position. We also know that in the kingship of Judah, very often the "king", who was in one sense king for life, would "retire" and allow a son to reign in his stead (that is the only way to make the chronologies of the Kings and Chronicles "work"; see Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*). So I would conjecture that the true "high priest" was such until his death even at this time when David came to Nob; his name would be Abiathar (just as Jesus records it), and his son, Ahimelech, would be the person actually functioning in the main priestly role (Abiathar having retired from active duty on account of age). This would explain all of the other references above as well, even though they are often reputed to be "mistakes". We should not assume that it is the true "high priest" who is always the one being referred to, since the scriptures never say so. In fact, it may often be the case of a reference to his son who has taken over the duties (yet is not "officially" the

high priest until his father's death). We probably have to do here with a "first" Abiathar (only mentioned by Jesus but known to Him through some other source), Ahimelech (killed by Saul), Abiathar (serving David but exiled at the end), and Ahimelech, his son, who had a role in David's reformation of the priestly duties, and, finally, his son, Abiathar the one mentioned as part of Solomon's hierarchy (the great, great grandson of the Abiathar named by Jesus).

Could you clarify the sentence:

According to this interpretation, Ahimelech is the son of Abiathar, his son's name is Ahimelech, who in turn has a son Abiathar.

It seems that according to it Abiathar has the son called Ahimelech and this Ahimelech has got a son called Ahimelech also ("According to this interpretation, Ahimelech is the son of Abiathar, his (Ahimelech's?) son's name is Ahimelech, who in turn has a son Abiathar), but according to what you wrote later, the names alternate:

We probably have to do here with a "first" Abiathar (only mentioned by Jesus but known to Him through some other source), Ahimelech (killed by Saul), Abiathar (serving David but exiled at the end), and Ahimelech, his son, who had a role in David's reformation of the priestly duties, and, finally, his son, Abiathar the one mentioned as part of Solomon's hierarchy (the great, great grandson of the Abiathar named by Jesus).

A: The "his" in the problematic sentence refers to Abiathar, not Ahimelech.

Mark 2:27-28 (NASB)

27 Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

*

Q: Was it our Lord who gave the Law to Moses? If so, could we understand that since He is the One who gave it, He can also change it?

Matthew 12:8 (NASB)

8 For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

A: Yes (see Matthew). This really is the point: the Sabbath was designed by God for the benefit of man; Jesus Christ took on true humanity and as Lord of the Sabbath made use of that day for the benefit of man – the true purpose of the Sabbath.

Mark 3:4 (NASB)

4 And He *said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?" But they kept silent.

NIV SB: 3:4 to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill? Jesus asks: Which is better, to preserve life by healing or to destroy life by refusing to heal? The question is ironic since, whereas Jesus was ready to heal, the Pharisees were plotting to put him to death. It is obvious who was guilty of breaking the Sabbath. they remained silent. See 12:34.

*

Q: This is a very interesting observation which I have not come across before - would you agree that Jesus' words "or to do harm on the Sabbath" refer to the irony that He wanted to heal and Pharisees were already plotting to harm Him?

A: I agree. It's a very good note.

Mark 3:14 (NIV)

14 He appointed twelve[a] that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach

a. Mark 3:14 Some manuscripts twelve-designating them apostles-

*

Q: Could you explain the point from the footnote?

A: The note includes a portion of Greek occurring in many later mss. but not in the earliest ones. It is most likely an interpolation based on Luke 6:13, so not a part of scripture here.

Mark 3:21 (NIV)

21 When his family[a] heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

a. Mark 3:21 Or his associates

NIV SB: 3:21 his family ... went to take charge of him. They may have come to Capernaum from Nazareth, about 30 miles away (see v. 31).

*

Q: What is the correct rendering here - "his family" or "his associates"? Are members of family meant here? What is meant by "take charge of him" or "take custody of Him" (NASB)? Did Jesus' family want him to stop teaching? This note links verse 21 with 31, but verse 31 starts with "Then" (Kai), so wouldn't this mean that it's a new episode? Would you say that kai can be rendered in this way?

A: This passage only occurs in Mark. The Greek says *hoi par' autou*, meaning roughly "those who were from His own" – so the phrase could comprise close associates or family or both. The situation seems to be that our Lord was working Himself to end of human endurance, and so much so that it was obvious to everyone who knew Him well. However, our Lord knew the limits perfectly, and pushed right up to the absolute line many times in the perfect service of a perfect ministry. This passage reminds us that in His humanity He was burdened in all ways such as we are, but overcame things we could never overcome through self-sacrifice and dedication (rather than special help from His divinity). As to the *kai*, it can't be retroactive. The note is speculative. As you suggest, the narrative is chronological. I suppose it is just possible to take the *kai* in v.31 as equivalent of *waw* in a disjunctive clause and translate, "now his family had come" – but even so it seems like a new incident to me, and I think that trying to see it as the same for the sake of explaining vv.20-21 is a mistake.

Mark 3:22-27 (NASB)

22 The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons." 23 And He called them to Himself and began speaking to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26 If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished! 27 But no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house.

*

A:

Excerpt from Coming Tribulation Part 6

c. Special Security Precautions for Satan: We should note here that the security measures used to sequester the devil for the duration of the Millennium are threefold and are therefore unique. First, he is locked in the Abyss (in common with all other fallen angels removed from circulation from the beginning of human history for various violations of divine ground rules; cf. Lk.8:31). Secondly the devil is placed in chains within the Abyss as a second level of security (as were those fallen angels who severely violated protocol by cohabiting with human women prior to the flood; Gen.6; 2Pet.2:14-10; Jude 1:5-7). Finally and uniquely, the Abyss is specially "sealed", indicating that throughout the Millennium there will be no access to the Abyss whatsoever (and hence no possible chance of the devil exiting until the appointed time through either accident or design). The exceptional level of precautions taken here shows very clearly the importance of a Millennium without the devil.

Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man (i.e., analogous to Satan)? Then he can rob his house (i.e., analogous to the distribution of the plunder upon conquering his kingdom: Ps.68:18; Is.33:23b; 53:12; 60:11; Lk.11:22; Eph.4:7-8).

Matthew 12:29 NIV

In the absence of any Satanic influence whatsoever, and with the provision of perfect environment by the Messiah Himself (as perfect, that is, as the mortal and therefore still inherently sinful human beings who will populate the world of that time can tolerate), mankind will nevertheless by and large still make use of its God-given free will to reject rather than to accept in faith the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, thus proving both the nature of free will and the reality of it. This is also true for angelic kind, for even though the fallen angels will be put out of operation for a thousand years and given to witness not only their own total defeat but also the coming of the astoundingly marvelous Kingdom and penultimate Eden on the threshold of eternity, no change of heart or regret will be visible in any of them, to the extent that the devil, when he is released at the Millennium's end, will once again do all that is in his power to continue to fight against God.

Mark 3:28-30 (NASB)

28 “Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— 30 because they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.”

*

Q1:

Matthew 12:31 (NASB)

31 "Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.

NIV SB: 12:31 blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. The context (vv. 24, 28, 32) suggests that the unpardonable sin was attributing to Satan Christ's authenticating miracles done in the power of the Holy Spirit (see note on Mk 3:29).

NIV SB provides an explanation which sounds very reasonable - do you agree it's correct?

A1: Yes, as far as it goes; since the Spirit testifies to the truth of the gospel, calling the Spirit satanic is a firm rejection of the gospel; and rejection of the gospel is always thus blasphemy because it calls God a liar, impugning the truth of the message the Spirit is mediating. Thus the only unpardonable sin is rejecting the gospel, rejecting Jesus Christ: the refusal to accept Him and His sacrifice was the only sin for which Christ could not die since it is by taking on humanity and dying for sin that all are saved who accept Him and His work on the cross.

*

Q2:

Matthew 12:32 (NASB)

32 Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

What does our Lord mean by "the age to come"?

A2: Eternity is meant: refusing to accept Jesus as Savior results in eternal condemnation.

*

Q3 (email): One clarification regarding the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and Matthew 12:31. Would you say that this passage could be explained in the following way: blasphemy against

the humanity of Jesus (His poverty and 'earthly' attributes) is pardonable, but blasphemy against His deity (His ministry and attributing His teaching to the devil) is the unpardonable sin and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?

And the second way to define it would be, based on what you said, that this is a sin of rejecting Jesus' teaching absolutely and forever, as in order to do it one has to first get to the point whereby His teaching and the ministry of the Holy Spirit is attributed to the demon, which, as you said, is the one sin for which our Lord couldn't die. This can be opposed to a sin of ignorance (like Saul's), whereby one can commit blasphemy against Jesus, but it's character isn't absolute and the attitude can still change.

Taken together, these two blasphemies could be defined in the following way: a) the pardonable blasphemy is a blasphemy against the humanity of Jesus, and it's character is not absolute - the one committing this sin hasn't yet reached a point whereby changing his mind is impossible; b) the unpardonable blasphemy is against the deity of Jesus and it's character is absolute - Jesus' works are attributed to demon and the one responsible for this offence has rejected salvation conclusively, hence committing the one sin, for which our Lord could not die.

Finally, I wanted to ask you about two views on this sin. Some say that this sin cannot be committed by a believer (once we believe it's impossible to reject the fact that our Lord's miracles were completed through the Holy Spirit), others say in order to actually commit this sin, one needs to 'reject the light' and Spirit's testimony, meaning that it is not a sin of complete ignorance ('not knowing the light at all') - it's a sin of consciously shutting this light out and separating oneself from it.

This is the understanding of this passage at which I have arrived, please correct wherever needed.

A3: Blasphemy against the Spirit is something that happens in the heart. The Spirit testifies to the heart of the unbeliever the truth of the gospel. If the unbeliever rejects the truth as untruthful, that is the blasphemy because it amounts to calling the Holy Spirit a liar (whether the person even knows there is a Holy Spirit). ***Blasphemy against the Spirit is rejecting the truth about Jesus Christ so as to refuse salvation.*** I am sensitive to the distinction here about unbelievers who may hear the gospel and not "take it" at that point. I am certain that this is not necessarily unpardonable. That is to say, there are unbelievers who take their time in accepting Jesus Christ. What our Lord has in mind here is the flat rejection of the truth that admits of no change – and that is unpardonable – rather than an agnostic reception or a rejection which will later change. Paul was a very adamant opponent of the gospel – he must have heard it – but did

not block it out of his heart entirely and forever, otherwise he would not have kept searching the scriptures and so become responsive to the truth when our Lord appeared to him. Again, I don't mean in any of my writings on this subject to reduce "blasphemy against the Spirit" to a particular sin or a particular category. Jesus is making a point when He says this and to me the point is clear enough: if you call Jesus demon possessed, you are blaspheming the Spirit who is the real power doing the miracles, and if you have no room in your heart for the words of the Spirit about how to be saved through faith in Christ, that is something for which you cannot be forgiven, because only through faith in Christ is there any salvation. I'm not sure I have satisfied your concerns on this one but would be happy to have another go.

Mark 4:3-9 (NASB)

3 "Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. 6 And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. 8 Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold." 9 And He was saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

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A1: As to the parable of the Sower, there is much upon which we agree. However let me note from the beginning that the scripture very clearly teaches us that "the Sower sows ***the Word***" (Mk.4:14; Lk.8:11). The plant then is indeed separate from the Word-seed which produces it, but that plant must then be whatever comes out of the combination of the person (soil) and his/her response to the Word (seed), which to me is best expressed as "faith response". I also entirely agree that it is possible to be saved yet largely unproductive; that possibility is summed up for me by group #3 (and, as you say, presented as a negative alternative in 1Cor.3 – I have much to say about this in the part 6 of Coming Tribulation re: [the Judgment of the Church](#); see the link). Whether or not everyone in that third group truly believes is a moot point since anyone reading this parable and becoming concerned about it must by definition be a Christian who is or soon will "get on the stick" and begin the process of spiritual growth from which all true production flows.

I would certainly agree with what you have to say about #1. As to group #2 and #3, I think it is fair to assume that Jesus meant these four groups as teaching four different lessons. If we assume that

#2 are poor believers, we have a problem because then there would be no significant difference between the #2 and #3. Moreover, if the plant = works, then neither #2 or #3 produces anything worthwhile (i.e., for my money they would then be exactly the same in every important detail, merely expressed differently for some unknown reason). However, notice that group #3 is unproductive because while the plant does grow (I would call this faith), it is choked by weeds so that it does not produce a crop. That has two very important applications for our purposes. First, it shows that it is the fruit of the plant and not the plant itself which represents acceptable production. As an agricultural analogy that certainly makes sense. After all, if I am growing corn, what good does it do me to have a field full of wonderful green corn plants if there are no ears of corn on them? Secondly, since the plant is what does producing – or what should do the producing – the plant would seem to me to best represent the faith of the believer from which response and production flows (Phil.2:17; 1Thes.1:3; 2Thes.1:11; 1Tim.1:4; Heb.11:4ff.). We believe, and so we respond. The stronger our faith, the better our response. That makes sense from the standpoint of the first group, doesn't it? If they are the ground and the seed is the Word, the plant would be the response to the Word. It never comes for the first group, it doesn't produce for the third group, but it does result in a crop for the fourth group, the group to which we should all aspire, true believers who not only receive the Word with faith and joy, but respond throughout our lives so as to produce something with which our Lord Jesus will be pleased on that day when we stand before Him. That only leaves group number two. In them, the Word does receive an initial response of faith (i.e., a plant sprouts), but their faith does not prove strong enough to withstand the pressures of life (no question of choking production since the faith plant dies before things get to that point). They (the ground) remain, but faith (the plant) dies, so that there is not even a possibility of production (i.e., no matter whether the plot is weeded or not after the plants die). Please note what the scriptures say about this process:

And he who was sown on the rocky places, this is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy. He has no roots, however, but lasts only a short time. So when tribulation or persecution occurs on account of the Word, he is immediately tripped up.

Matthew 13:20-21

And these [second types] who are sown on the rocky places are similar. Whenever they hear the Word they immediately receive it with joy, although they have no root in themselves, but are only temporary. When tribulation or persecution because of the Word comes [their way], they are immediately tripped up.

Mark 4:16-17

And those [whose seed fell] on the rock do receive the Word with joy when they hear it. However these [types] have no root. They **believe for a while**, but in time of testing they apostatize.

Luke 8:13

In the last passage, notice the juxtaposition where the loss of faith is actually stated: "they have no root [and as a result] they believe [only] for a while". This loss of faith results in apostasy (falling away), and that to my mind settles the issue. For we can argue about what being "tripped up" might mean in Matthew and Mark (although in these passages too it is closely connected to ephemeral behavior: "[the plant] lasts only a short time" in Matt.13:21 and is "temporary" in Mk.4:17). But in Luke 8:13 this group is clearly said to apostatize (Greek **aphistantai** – "rebel – against God – the very word whence "apostasy" is derived). So it seems to me that while some contortion is necessary in order to avoid the second scenario being one of believers who fall away, accepting the above as the correct interpretation makes the whole parable flow naturally and smoothly.

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An Overview of Spiritual Growth: The Parable of the Sower (Peter Series #12)

The parable of the sower occurs in all three of the synoptic gospels (Matt.13:1-9; Mk.4:1-9; Lk.8.4-8), and is explained by Jesus in Matt.13:18-23; Mk.4:13-20; Lk.8:11-15. Though dealing primarily with salvation, it is significant for us because it helps to explain the mechanics of spiritual growth. For just as many attitudes toward Christ are possible, but only one, that of faith, leads to salvation, so also many attitudes toward His teachings are possible, but only one, that of faith, leads to spiritual growth. In the parable, a sower goes out to sow seed in four different types of ground: hard ground (by the roadside), rocky ground, thorny ground, and good ground. The seed that falls on the hardened ground beside the road is quickly stolen away by birds; the seed that falls on the rocky ground springs up quickly, but perishes because its roots lack depth; the seed that falls on the thorny ground is choked by the weeds that grow up around it; but the seed that falls on good ground prospers and produces a bountiful crop. Jesus explains the hard ground as the person

whom Satan causes to reject the gospel; the rocky ground as the person who abandons the gospel in times of distress; the thorny ground as the person distracted from the gospel by the cares and worries of life; and the good ground as the person who actually produces fruit for God in this life.

This parable outlines for us the four basic types of responses to the gospel, only one of which results in saving faith and true spiritual growth. The common elements of its interpretation are as follows: the "seed" which is sown is the Word of God, the gospel message which proclaims Jesus as the Christ, and which tells us that salvation comes only by faith in Christ. The "plant" in each case is the faith of the person in question. The "ground" represents the heart of different kinds of people. It is important to note that *we* decide which type of ground we shall be. Whether we are hard or rocky, thorny or good, is our responsibility.

HARD GROUND (faith stillborn)

The "hard ground" person hears the gospel message, but chooses not to believe in Christ. The "birds" who snatch away the seed and eat it before it can sprout are explained by Jesus as Satan snatching away the Word from the person's heart. As ground by the roadside is hard-packed, and impenetrable to seed, so the hearts of many are hardened to the message of salvation by faith in Christ. Their hearts are so calloused against the truth of the gospel that they are unable to receive it. Luke's account of the parable (Lk.8:5) provides an additional detail which helps to explain the problem, when he tells us that this seed is "trodden down" by the passersby. In the same way, for those who refuse to take it into their hearts immediately, the truth of the gospel is often belittled by those around them, leading to a rejection of Christ. Jesus explains this process as Satan "snatching away" what, upon hearing the gospel, has been sown "in their heart". Satan does this "so that they might not *believe and be saved*" (Lk.8:12). Matthew's account (Matt.13:19) explains the process: all such people have "heard the word", but they have not "understood" it. "Understanding" or comprehension of God's truth, as we have seen, comes only by *faith*. For people with "hard ground" hearts, their unwillingness to believe means that they will never understand the "so-great salvation" that they have let slip by (Heb.2:3), and it will remain just so much "foolishness" to them (1Cor.1:18ff.). How does Satan accomplish this feat? We must point out that although he does influence these people, the ultimate responsibility for accepting (or rejecting) Jesus Christ lies with every person individually.

Each of the three accounts of this parable uses a different name for Satan, giving us a clue to his methods in deceiving the unbeliever and encouraging him to ignore the gospel. Matthew refers to

him as "the evil one" and it is typical of his evil methods to *substitute lies* for the truth. Mark refers to him as "Satan", a Hebrew name meaning "adversary", and Satan *opposes* the truth wherever it is found. Luke refers to him as "the devil", a Greek word meaning "slanderer", and we can be sure that the devil will *slander* the truth of the gospel at every opportunity. When an unbeliever holds the precious message about Christ in his heart, weighing it and considering it, our adversary the devil does everything in his power to try and influence such a person to reject the gospel. He does this not by personal appearance, of course, but by using all the lies, fears, and deceptions the individual in question has assimilated throughout his life. This world (temporarily) is the devil's world (Jn.14:30), and the devil has filled it to overflowing with propaganda favorable to his cause. You can be sure whenever someone is considering becoming a Christian that as "the evil one" he will try to confuse the issue with lies (opposing the true principle of salvation by faith in Christ with the false one of salvation by works, for example); that as the "adversary" he will try to turn the prospective Christian back using fear and threats (reminding him of the costs and dangers, be they physical or merely social, of being identified as "Christian", for example); that as "the slanderer" he will try and make the unbeliever doubt the veracity of the simple message about Christ (by calling into question the motives of those giving the gospel message, for example). Mark's account tells us that Satan acts "quickly", snatching away the seed of truth before it has had any chance to take root and produce genuine faith. The seed was good, but faith was stillborn in the hard heart.

ROCKY GROUND (faith destroyed)

The "rocky ground" person hears the gospel message and actually does believe in Christ, but this "faith" of his is only transitory. As a result, though his faith "plant" springs up quickly as he receives "with joy" the message of deliverance from sin, and the promise of eternal life through faith in Christ, this temporary faith is quickly scorched and withered by the burning sun. Jesus explains the sun in the parable as the persecution and trouble that inevitably befall every believer. The "rocky ground" person has not "counted the cost" of discipleship (Lk.14:28ff.), so that when his faith meets serious opposition, it dies.

In the case of the "hard ground" person, faith could not even take root. The "rocky ground" person, on the other hand, has roots, but his "roots" (or degree of commitment to his new faith) are insufficiently deep. This is because there is no "depth of soil". Faith takes root in his heart, but before it can grow, it runs into an impenetrable barrier of rock. You cannot say "this far but no farther" to God. You cannot give Jesus Christ a partial commitment. Believers are left in the devil's world after salvation for the express reason of being tested to demonstrate that their faith is

genuine. No partial commitment, no faith that holds God at arms length can possibly survive the scorching heat of the day.

Jesus (in Matthew and Mark) explains that in time of testing such individuals "are offended" (KJV). This verb is based on the Greek word *skandalon* (the origin of the English word scandal), and is used in the Septuagint to translate two Hebrew words, one meaning "stumbling block", another meaning "trap". Both aspects of the word are appropriate here to describe the half-hearted convert whose walk of faith is "tripped up" by persecution, trouble, and testing, and who finds himself "baited and snared" by the devil's attempts to get him to revert to his former life. Jesus' words in Luke are even more specific: "[They] believe for a while, but in the time of testing they *fall away* [from the faith]." The Greek verb for falling away here is the same from which we derive the word apostasy, and its meaning is unmistakable: such people did believe, temporarily, but under the pressure of testing found it convenient to abandon their faith. The seed was good, but faith could not take permanent root in their rocky heart.

THORNY GROUND (faith stunted)

The "thorny ground" person does put his faith in Christ, but thorns also grow up in his heart. These "thorns" are worldly distractions which compete for his allegiance with the "faith-plant", and eventually win, choking faith back. Such a person "hears the word", but the Word of God sown in his heart is strangled and overcome by a variety of other matters which prove to be more important to him than Jesus Christ. How could this happen?

The two main categories of distractions which alienate us from Christ will help us to understand the process Jesus refers to here. These two categories are (1) fear and (2) lust. The devil's world is filled with problems for everyone, especially believers in Jesus Christ, all of whom find themselves targets of Satan's opposition. As normal people, we are all subject to worries and desires every day of our lives, but it is essential that we view these two primary sources of pressure on our faith from the correct (that is to say, the *heavenly*) perspective. We would not be human if we never got worried about our jobs, our families, our health, or our lives, but from God's perspective, there really is no reason to worry.

Certainly, this is a difficult concept for us mortals to accept, especially when our trouble and pain get particularly acute. But when Jesus tells us "not to worry" about what we shall eat, drink, or wear because "your Heavenly Father knows you have need of all these thing" (Matt.6:25), He is showing us the heavenly point of view. God knows all of our problems, and is right here, right now, making sure that all our difficulties work out to our ultimate good (Rom.8:28). Worry and fear will

continue to confront us throughout our lives, but we must never let them *control* us. We must remember that God is mightier than anything we fear, and that He is here helping us. Furthermore, the problems of this life will not endure forever. The accounts of Matthew and Mark stress that such worries are "the worries of this life" only. As Christians, we should set our hope upon the future, to the time when we shall never experience fear or worry again (Is.25:8; Rev.21:4).

The person with the thorny heart does not trust God enough. When problems befall him, he doesn't believe that God will see him through, and so his faith shrivels.

The thorny hearted individual has similar problems when confronting his lusts. Along with worries and fears, we can also expect lusts and desires to be a constant part of our lives. Since the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, all human beings have had to cope with "the sin in the flesh" (Rom.7:17) and the destructive lusts it generates. The representative lust given in all three accounts of this parable is the lust for wealth. The problem is not money (a necessity for living in the world), but the "love of money" (1Tim.6:10). The thorny heart allows desire for riches to replace his devotion to God. As Jesus says in this parable, wealth is "deceptive". It can trick us into abandoning our reliance upon God, and replacing Him with a new master: money (Matt.6:24).

It is an illusion to think that wealth will solve all our problems, and to exchange our confidence in the Creator and Sustainer of the universe for a false confidence in the transient and deceptive riches of this world is a poor bargain indeed. Jesus warned us against the futility of laying up riches on earth "where the moth destroys and the thief breaks in and steals" (Matt.6:19ff.). He told us rather to "lay up treasures in heaven" for "where your treasure is, there your heart shall be too". What advantage is there to gaining the riches of the entire world, Jesus asks us, if we must forfeit our eternal life in return (Matt.16:26)? The thorny ground person ignores these warnings, and allows fear and desire to take over his heart and stunt the growth of his faith. As a result, "he bears no fruit", the very opposite of the purpose God intends for our Christian lives (Jn.15:16).

As we have stressed repeatedly in this study, we are here on earth *to grow and to help others to grow*. This is the "fruit" which God intends for us to produce. In its simplest form, this "fruit" is the increase of our faith, and the faith of others through the help we provide to them. It is easy to proclaim that we "have faith", but, as James points out, "faith without works" (that is, without some tangible expression of faith) "is dead" (Jas.2:17). Many people misunderstand the "works" of James chapter two. James is not referring to particular "good deeds" (such as the donation of

money, or becoming a missionary). Rather, James has in mind obedience to God, especially when it is very hard to obey, when there is a need for strong, demonstrable faith. James has in mind those times in our life when we must take some difficult step of faith, but, when once done, we can look back and say in confidence "I never would have been able to do this if I have not trusted in God."

James picks just such an example to illustrate his point: God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac. With "hindsight", we know that everything worked out fine. God stopped Abraham before he killed his son, and provided instead a ram for the sacrifice – a clear picture of Christ taking our place on the cross and being judged for our sins as our substitute. But Abraham could not have known what would happen. Besides knowing that he had been ordered to do a terrible, unthinkable thing that seemed sure to obliterate the hopes of a lifetime, he had only one other piece of information to consider: the character of the God he knew and loved.

For our faith to grow, we have to do as Abraham did. We have to face *with faith* the hard, sometimes seemingly impossible situations that become the stuff of our spiritual growth. Armed only with our knowledge of God's character, and our faith in His goodness, and concern for us, we too must overcome what we fear (and what we desire) by trusting in God. After we do, along with Abraham we can look back to such trials and know with certainty that our faith is real. The thorny ground person, on the other hand, has no such experiences to recall. He has never "leaned" on God in times of trial and testing, and so has no "works" (or results) to show. The cares and concerns of this world distract him from God, so that he looks elsewhere when tried or tempted. Though he accepts the message about Jesus "with joy", he never (as Luke's account says) "brings his fruit to completion".

We may rightly ask whether such a person is really a Christian. True faith in Christ is the mark of the believer, and we know that it is possible for faith to perish and be replaced by unbelief (Rom.11:20-21). Even if the "thorny ground" category includes some true Christians (if stunted and marginal), we would do well to consider the danger of such a status, for during the terrible persecutions to come at the end of this age (i.e. the "tribulation"), it is predicted that the pressure of events will cause many such half-hearted Christians to fall away (Matt.24:10-12; 2Thes.2:3; 2Pet.2:1-22). Only a living faith can bring us through the struggles of this life and our own personal tribulations. Ultimately we must choose whether we shall trust God or listen instead to our fears and lusts. Where the thorns of fear and unchecked desire grow wild, true reliance on God cannot prosper. The seed was good, but the faith at first received with joy was soon strangled in the thorny heart.

GOOD GROUND (faith growing)

"Good ground" is the ideal for which we, as Christians, should all strive. The "good ground" person believes in Jesus Christ and continues to grow as a believer thereafter. Absent from his heart are the hard-packed surface unwilling to receive God's teachings, the under-layer of rock preventing the Word of God from taking hold, and the thorns of fear and desire choking the life out of the his newly sprouted faith. The heart of the "good ground" person, as Jesus tells us in Luke's account (Lk.8:15), is a "fit and good" one.

Both Greek words here can be translated "good", but the distinction between them is important. The first, *kalos*, means here something that is suitable for use (as in a "good" harbor "fit" to receive ships). The "good ground" person's heart is able to receive the seed of God's message about Jesus because it is willing to do so, and is therefore "fit". The second Greek word, *agathos*, on the other hand, means something that is apt to produce the right results (as in a "good" soldier who fights well). Thus the good heart also provides a fertile environment for the "faith plant" (newly sprung from the seed of God's Word) to continue to grow and bear fruit. The amount of production may vary (Mk.4:8), but note that it is only "good ground" which produces a crop, and that all ground which is truly good does produce.

When we heard the good news about Jesus Christ, we accepted it with joy, and faith flourished in our hearts. Let us take care to nurture the "plant of faith" within us, and not lose heart when God prunes it (Jn.15:2). Let us take care to preserve our faith, to remain part of the true vine, Jesus Christ, that we may bear the fruit He would have us bear in due season (Jn.15:5).

"Faith comes from hearing" (Rom.10:17), but not all who heard believed (the hard ground did not), not all who believed kept their faith (the rocky ground did not), not all who maintained some measure of faith were productive for the Lord (the thorny ground was not). The issue, then, is not whether or one has heard the Word, but what one *does* with the Word once received. This issue is one which is key to our continued spiritual growth, because the pattern expressed in this parable of accepting or rejecting the gospel message, is repeated for us as Christians every time we hear the Word of God. Hearing is not enough. If we reject the teaching of God's Word outright (the hard ground pattern), abandon it in time (the rocky ground pattern), or allow it to take second place to our worldly concerns (the thorny ground pattern), we endanger our spiritual growth, and we place our faith at risk.

All three gospel accounts of our parable address the issue of believing, that is, of putting our faith in God's Word. In all three accounts of our Lord's parable, the good heart hears the Word, but in all three, it does more. Mark's account says that such a person both hears and "receives" it

(Greek *paradechomai*): he accepts the truth of the Bible, even when that may be difficult for him. Matthew's account says that he both hears and "perceives" it (Greek *sunimi*): he gains insight into the truth of God's Word by perceiving with his faith rather than with his eyes (2Cor.5:7). Luke's account says that he both hears and "retains" it (Greek *katecho*): he holds fast to the truth of the Word in spite of his troubles. In its reception, perception through faith, and retention of God's Word, the good heart is good because it is *willing* to continue its growth and to produce fruit for the Lord. It is *willing* to grow spiritually and helps others do the same.

Mark 4:11 (NASB)

11 And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables,

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Q: How specifically should we understand "the mystery of the kingdom of God"? Is it the entirety of the gospel message?

A: Paul also speaks of the mystery "of the gospel":

Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Ephesians 6:19-20 NIV

A mystery is something hidden which in our context and throughout the New Testament is a **formerly** hidden truth which has now come to light. That certainly applies to the good news and to all aspects of the plan of God which were not necessarily evident in a crystal clear fashion before the incarnation and the cross, but which were instead veiled until the time of revelation when the means of God's salvation, the Savior Jesus Christ, was Himself revealed to the world. During our Lord's first advent, part of the unveiling had taken place, but things were still in process inasmuch as the cross, followed by the resurrection, ascension, session and glorification of our Lord had not yet taken place. This time of offering the truth, offering the good news, offering the kingdom to those who ought to have received it with joy but who by and largely rejected it is therefore one of "half-light" because of the hardness of heart of this generation, a hardness which led to the offering of the good news to the gentiles, but which will be removed when the Lord returns.

But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!

Romans 11:12 NIV

Mark 4:21-22 (NASB)

21 And He was saying to them, "A lamp is not brought to be put under a basket, is it, or under a bed? Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand? 22 For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light.

*

Q: Could you explain these three verses, what is their relationship to one another and to the context? The beginning of verse 17 ("For") seems to suggest that it is directly linked to verse 16, content of which might be regarding the parable of the sower. And the beginning of verse 18 ("So") hints that it refers back to what was just said in verse 17, but I'm not clear as to how all this goes together. Also, it seems these words are used by our Lord in different contexts elsewhere:

16 "Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, so that those who come in may see the light. 17 For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light. 18 So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him."

Luke 8:16-18 (NASB)

21 And He was saying to them, "A lamp is not brought to be put under a basket, is it, or under a bed? Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand? 22 For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

Mark 4:21-23 (NASB)

24 "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. 25 It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household! 26 "Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. 27 What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops.

Matthew 10:24-27 (NASB)

12 Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another, He began saying to His disciples first of all, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. 2 But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. 3 Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have[c]whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops.

Luke 12:1-3 (NASB)

I may be wrong here, but Luke 18:17 seems to be referring to not hiding the message of the gospel, which also appears to be the case in Mark 4:21-23, but in Matthew 10:24-27 and Luke 12:13 the meaning looks more to do with all the hypocrisy eventually being disclosed?

A: As to other contexts, Matthew 10 and Luke 12 both affirm that things hidden at present will all come to light. Everything will come to light, for there will be judgment at the end of time for all, believers and unbelievers alike (though the Church's judgment occurs at the beginning of the Millennium). Mark 4 is parallel but does not have the additional point contained in Luke 8:18, our context. You are correct about gar and oun: these three verses are a unity and are to be taken together, but they don't go back to the parable of the Sower (a self-contained teaching). Verse 16: the purpose of making a light is for it to give light; therefore instead of hiding our light, we are to "let it shine" inasmuch as we are "light in the Lord" (Eph.5:8) and "shine as lights in the world" (Phil.2:15); how is this done? It is done by responding to Jesus Christ: growing, progressing in our faith, and helping others to do the same – not by calling attention to ourselves in foolish ways or making "a big splash" the way those who are friends with the world are wont to do; not by engaging in "charity" as the world defines it – but by ministering the truth as the Lord would have it. And "this is important" (v.17 gar), because everything will be revealed in the end "in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel" (Rom.2:16 NKJV). So "therefore" (v.18 oun) we need to be careful to receive the truth and do so in the correct way, in humility, in the Spirit, in belief of the truth we hear, in treasuring and applying it the way we should. If we do, we will be given more and more (along with all that comes with growth); if we go the other way, we may find that our faith dries up to the point of apostasy where "even what we have will be taken from us".

Mark 4:24-25 (NASB)

24 And He was saying to them, "Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it will be measured to you; and more will be given you besides. 25 For whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him."

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Q: Could you explain the relationship between the words "Take care what you listen to" and the rest of Jesus' teaching here? I understand how verse 25 is linked to what our Lord has just taught, but the remark about our standard of measure being used for what we deserve to be measured to us isn't clear to me.

A: This has to do with the way in which we receive the truth. It's one thing to listen, another thing to hear. It's one thing to be warily evaluating the truth, another thing to accept it openly and fully like an innocent child. It's one thing to let some of it in conditionally, another thing to embrace all of it with an open heart. The "what" in v.24 (Gk. *ti*) is "how" in Luke (Gk. *pos* at Lk.8:18), and that is more what the accusative of respect means here too. So I would translate not "what" but "in what respect/manner", because it really is the **manner** of perception and not the content that our Lord is talking about when it comes to receiving the truth. With that understood, the next part should more easily make sense. If we are grudging in the way we receive the words of truth, we will be given a grudging measure; if we are really enthusiastic about the Word of God, it will be doled out to us generously and fully beyond our expectation. This explains a lot about the current situation of the church-visible: not much substantive Bible teaching available because there are not many like yourself who want the truth in full and deep measure. Our Lord approaches this same issue with the analogy of the good and bad eye also in Matthew 6:22-23 and Luke 11:34-36 (at the link).

Mark 4:26-29 (NASB)

26 And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil;

27 and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows-how, he himself does not know.

28 The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head.

29 But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

*

Q: Could you clarify this parable? Is it to do with the expansion of the church?

A: I do think that this can be applied to the Church, but the main interpretation it seems to me has to do with the individual believer, the person who responds to the call of the kingdom. When we first believe, we know very little and we are spiritually not very strong, even though we have received the Word with joy. But as we grow, day by day, incrementally and all unawares, we turn around one day (assuming that we have been doing what we are commanded to do in the quest of spiritual growth) and find that Jesus Christ and His kingdom mean everything to us. What was once a small seed has sprouted into an enormous tree that dominates everything within us – and manifests itself in every way without. And when we have grown to full measure, we will have a goodly crop to offer to the Lord on that great day of days, whether the harvest comes for us in the natural course of things, or whether it is our lot to abide until the Lord's return (or whether we are martyred for Him in between).

Mark 4:30-32 (NASB)

30 And He said, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it?
31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, 32 yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that the birds of the air can nest under its shade."

*

Q: Could you briefly explain Luke 13:18-21? What are the reasons behind these specific comparisons? Is it the case of the growth of the kingdom of heaven, it's expansion linked to it now growing, as you illustriously called it, geometrically?

A1: Yes. Like a small seed or a small amount of yeast, the Kingdom of Heaven is now almost invisible to the eyes of the secular world, but a day is coming when it will fill and define the New Heavens and the New Earth. And this is a process: the patriarchal line of faith became a specific nation of faith (Israel), then a world-wide community of faith (the Church), will yet be a worldwide kingdom of faith (in the Millennium) and eventually fill the entire new cosmos to come. This is also true on the individual level, as every Christian who sets him/herself to seek the Lord discovers. What starts as the smallest "yes" to God in Jesus Christ, comes to dominate and define our lives in every way on this earth – and will be our life eternal with Jesus Christ forever.

*

A2: For what Jesus tells us was true of His ministry, true of our individual Christian lives, and true of the entire kingdom of heaven as well. From the smallest of beginnings, God has wrought and is in the process of bringing about things as yet beyond comprehension. They truly will fill the whole world, and a new one of His own making in time to come at that! I have long drawn great comfort and inspiration from these words, for they tell me that despite what our eyes may see, despite how we may (rightly) downplay our own efforts and their effects in the devil's world, in time to come we can yet not even imagine the wonders that will be revealed. The Lord's plan will indeed come to full fruition and the seed of the Word, whether in our individual hearts or in the world at large will sprout to become a tree which fills the entire cosmos (and indeed in many ways it already has, especially in regard to our Lord's victory on the cross) How wonderful to be a part of this glorious process and to anticipate the great day when all these things will be fully revealed!

As to mustard trees, I never get too excited about supposed contradictions like this. Having spent many years investigating the details of the ancient world in both my secular work and Christian ministry, I can tell you that our present knowledge is far from complete. If we had a total understanding of ancient flora and fauna, perhaps we could make such definitive judgments. As it is, I think it is pretty clear from the parable that Jesus is drawing a comparison between a small seed / large plant-tree and a small (to the eye) divine beginning with an unimaginably large result. Over-parsing these things is often counterproductive.

Mark 4:33-34 (NASB)

33 With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it;
34 and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.

*

Q: How should we understand the fact that our Lord was explaining everything only to His disciples? I understand the application of Isaiah 6:9ff. here, but would this mean that only these twelve were willing to receive the truth? And if this should be the case, then how does Judas fit here?

A: As you note the prophecy was that few would understand, and so it turned out that although our Lord came to His own, they, by and large, did not receive Him as their Messiah (Jn.1:11). When the crowds came to Him they did so out of curiosity, out of the enthusiasm of the moment, and out

of a desire to benefit (from healing, mostly, but cf. also Jn.6:15). But there were those who did desire the truth and to have a true relationship with God through Him. It says in Luke 6:13: "And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles" (NASB). In other words, the circle of "disciples", literally, "students" (i.e., those really willing to learn) was larger than merely the twelve who formed the special inner-circle. We also know about the seventy-two who were also special and sent out to evangelize all the towns and villages of Israel. And we also know about certain women who followed along and supported the Lord and His circle (and other positive believers such as Lazarus, Mary and Martha). So the number is greater than twelve, and was as great as the number willing to put Jesus and the truth before everything else in this life. It was not limited by Him but by the stubbornness and hard-heartedness of that generation. As to Judas, he is a special case, representing those who wanted to seem as if they cared but in reality did not (as opposed to those who were definitely in opposition). I have written about his circumstances at the link: Judas.

Mark 4:41 (NASB)

41 They became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

NIV SB: 4:41 Who is this? In view of what Jesus had just done, the only answer to this rhetorical question was: He is the very Son of God! God's presence, as well as his power, was demonstrated (see Ps 65:6-7; 107:25-30 and notes; Pr 30:4). Mark indicates his answer to this question in the opening line of his Gospel (1:1). By such miracles Jesus sought to establish and increase the disciples' faith in his deity.

*

Q: The reference to Psalm 65:6-7 is interesting (NASB):

6 Who establishes the mountains by His strength, Being girded with might;

7 Who stills the roaring of the seas, The roaring of their waves, And the tumult of the peoples.

Since verse 5 establishes that what follows is said regarding God (NASB): *5 By awesome deeds **You** answer us in righteousness, **O God** of our salvation, **You** who are the trust of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest sea;* And since the miracle performed by our Lord directly parallels what is said in verse 7, could we take it as another reference for our Lord's deity?

A: Seems reasonable to me. I'd never connected these verses but it does seem to be a fulfillment of the Psalm or at the very least a demonstration of it. I suppose I had always just assumed that anyone present at this amazing miracle should have understood that only God could do something like that (no need to consult scripture about something which ought to have been so entirely obvious).

Mark 5:1 (NIV)

5 They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes.[a]

a. Mark 5:1 Some manuscripts Gadarenes; other manuscripts Gergesenes

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Q: How should the name of the region be rendered?

A: Here is what I said about the passage in Matthew (at the link):

All three of the synoptic gospels mention this place, and they all spell it slightly differently (at least in the original hand in Aleph). This is, in my opinion, much ado about nothing. When we have disciples called by different names entirely, it is not too much to understand that certain places with difficult names were variously pronounced (and spelled), according to the preference of the one doing the writing. I doubt any of the gospel writers had ever seen the place spelled in a text, so they each transliterated it into Greek as it seemed best to them. In the LXX, the town Megiddo is spelled dozens of different ways – a problem of making Hebrew names into Greek (which as we know is a problem with all Hebrew names coming into Greek, and Aramaic ones too). The point is that it is the same place, whether or not we wish to come up with a standard English transliteration – which will be different from whatever we decide is "right" in Greek – the town/region is the same in any case. No problem.

Mark 5:5 (NASB)

5 Constantly, night and day, he was screaming among the tombs and in the mountains, and gashing himself with stones.

NIV SB: 5:5 cry out and cut himself with stones. Every word in the story emphasizes the man's pathetic condition, as well as the purpose of demonic possession-to torment and destroy the divine likeness in which human beings are created (see Ge 1:26 and note).

*

Q: Since the likeness refers to the spiritual rather than physical, would you say that the point made in this note regarding destroying the divine likeness isn't true?

A: I don't find any biblical evidence to support that conjecture. I think it is dangerous to impute motives to demonic forces when these are not evident from context. Causing their "hosts" physical distress seems to be a common thing demons do – why they do it or why they do it in specific ways like this is not clear. It shows us they are not "on our side" in any way, and that is the important lesson for any believer to learn, especially if ever tempted to "negotiate" or have any dealings with demonic forces at all. We are to live and function as if they did not exist, even though we understand that they do and that this is a major source of the opposition we are encountering here in the world.

Mark 5:6-10 (NIV)

6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him.

7 He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!"

8 For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!"

9 Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many."

10 And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

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Q: What is the temporal sequence of this dialogue? When were our Lord's words from verse 8 said? Is it before the words of the possessed man from verse 6 and 7? There's one aspect of this event that I cannot understand - if the Legion of demons didn't want to be tormented, then why did the man approach Jesus in the first place, instead of running as far away from Him as possible? Should we understand it as the man willing to seek help from our Lord and the demons not being able to overrule his free will in doing this?

A: As Luke 8:29 also indicates, these words of our Lord came first – and that makes sense inasmuch as once the demons are expelled they have no further means of communicating with Him. As to the man's reaction, you are exactly right: he was clearly desirous of being in control of

his own free will again, and was able to assert it to this small degree in spite of the demonic pressure brought to bear by this large group of fallen angels – which goes to show that it's all about free will (demon possession too).

Mark 5:19 (NASB)

19 And He did not let him, but He *said to him, "Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you."

NIV SB: 5:19 tell them how much the Lord has done for you. This is in marked contrast to Jesus' exhortation to silence in the case of the man cleansed of leprosy (1:44; see 1:34; 3:12; Mt 8:4 and notes), perhaps because the healing of the demon-possessed man was in Gentile territory, where there was little danger that Messianic ideas about Jesus might be circulated (see Introduction: Emphases).

*

Q: Do you agree with the point made in this footnote? If the territory was Gentile, would our Lord want the man to report the things He has done at all, since He has emphasized on occasions during His ministry that He came for the lost sheep of Israel?

A: It would have been inappropriate for a gentile to have followed the Lord on His ministry because it would have been a distraction through offering up an unnecessary point of controversy for those in opposition (who wouldn't even deign to eat with gentiles; cf. Gal.2:11-14). On the other hand, giving this new believer something positive to do for the Lord was entirely appropriate, and gentiles ministering to gentiles apart from the Lord's personal ministry constituted no breach of any policy or more importantly provided no apparent hindrance to the plan of God for Jesus' earthly presentation of the kingdom to Israel. He was about to die for all, and God wants all to be saved. For this man who recognized so well and deeply now the power and the grace of God and the reality of the One who had delivered him to go and spread the good news was a blessing on every hand.

Mark 5:30 (NASB)

30 Immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My garments?"

NIV SB: 5:30 power had gone out from him. The woman was healed because God graciously determined to heal her through the power then active in Jesus.

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Q: Since our Lord did not do this miracle Himself, what is the best way to explain it?

A: There are other instances of people merely touching our Lord and being saved (Matt.14:36; Mk.6:56), and we have similar things when it comes to the apostles (Acts 5:15; 19:12). What is different about this case is that the woman touched Him without being noticed – or so she thought. But this passage lets us know that power came out of our Lord when healings took place – which shows that there was a physical price for Him to pay with these miracles. Another important element to notice is that of faith. The woman believed that she would be healed if she touched Him and she was; and at the end of the episode our Lord tells her "your faith has saved/healed you" (Mk.5:34).

Mark 5:36 (NIV)

36 Overhearing^[a] what they said, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe."

a. Mark 5:36 Or Ignoring

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Q: Which rendering is correct here?

A: I would render it as "disregarding" because that is what the *par-* on the standard verb of hearing, *akouo*, normally indicates in the NT – although it is true that the other meaning is more prominent in earlier Greek. It seems clear to me from the dialogue that our Lord did not just "happen to hear" this – He could not have avoided hearing it. So if that was the meaning, the simplex of *akouo* would have been appropriate. The addition of the prefix ought to mean something more, and that something is in my view that He did not pay attention to this negative report but instead bucked up the father's courage and proceeded to go where the girl was.

Mark 5:42 (NASB)

42 Immediately the girl got up and began to walk, for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded.

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Q: It sounds as if the girl got up and began to walk because she was twelve years old - why does Mark write "for she was twelve years old"?

A: Perhaps because the previous descriptions of her, *paidion*, *korasion*, and *talitha* could all be applied to a very young child who was not yet ambulatory (and that might be the most likely presumption of readers since death in infancy was a very common thing in the ancient world). By adding this *oun* ("for"), Mark gives another detail in the context of an explanation that at her age this was a natural thing for her to do (the same would have been true if she had been, e.g., five years old, but as it was she was twelve – just barely still young enough to qualify for the terms used here for her). Incidentally, this gospel was written after that of Matthew where this detail is not mentioned (an example of Mark giving a detail to a mixed audience that might not otherwise have understood about the terminology – thus he headed off the wrong thinking that a baby was walking).

Mark 6:3 (NASB)

3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him.

NIV SB: 6:3 carpenter. Matthew reports that Jesus was called "the carpenter's son" (Mt 13:55); only in Mark is Jesus himself referred to as a carpenter. The Greek word can also apply to a mason, smith or builder in general. The question is derogatory, meaning, "Isn't he a common worker with his hands like the rest of us?" brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon. See note on Lk 8:19. they took offense at him. They saw no reason to believe that he was different from them, much less that he was specially anointed by God.

*

Q: How should we reconcile Mark's account ("carpenter") with Matthew's ("carpenter's son")?

A: There's no problem. It was expected that a son would follow in his father's footsteps, learning his trade and his business (especially in the case of the eldest) – since the father knew the most about his own profession and was practicing it, it would be natural to apprentice at least the heir. Joseph seems certainly to have been deceased by the time our Lord begins His three and a half year ministry which concludes at the cross and with the resurrection. If so as seems to be the case,

there was a period of time when our Lord had to hold together the family business until such time as His brothers could do so. On whether or not *tehton* means "carpenter", please see the link.

Mark 6:7 (NASB)

7 And He *summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits;

NIV SB: 6:7 the Twelve. See notes on Ac 1:11; 1Co 15:5. two by two. The purpose of going in pairs may have been to bolster credibility by having the testimony of more than one witness (cf. Dt 17:6), as well as to provide mutual support during their training period.

*

Q: Why in your view were the apostles sent out in pairs? Do you agree with the reasons given in the note?

A: Both points seem logical to me.

Mark 6:13 (NASB)

13 And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.

*

Q: Should we understand oil here similarly as the water with baptism?

A: Oil represents the Holy Spirit and His healing power, so, yes, this is a similar analogy. Oil and wine were the essential medicines of the ancient world, the latter against infection, the former to promote healing. Water is necessary for life and is analogous to the truth which is in turn necessary for spiritual life and growth. But the Holy Spirit is behind both symbols.

Mark 6:14 (NIV)

14 King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying,^[a] "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

a. Mark 6:14 Some early manuscripts He was saying

*

Q: Could you relate to the footnote? Matthew 14:1-2 also point to Herod as the subject rather than "they" or "some":

A: The Greek (Sinaiticus et al.) says "he", namely, Herod. There is an alternative textual tradition where omicron occurs instead of epsilon in the verb ending (which explains the alternative reading "they" instead of "he"), but that is a mistake: 1) there is nothing to break the narrative for a change of subject; and 2) Matthew 14:1-2 clearly shows that this sentiment came from Herod.

*

Matthew 14:1-2 (NASB)

14 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the news about Jesus, 2 and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

b) NIV SB: 6:14 King Herod. See note on Mt 14:1. Mark may here have used the title "king" sarcastically (since this Herod was actually a tetrarch; see chart), or perhaps he simply used Herod's popular title.

*

Q: Why in your view did Mark use the title "king"?

A: Mark also uses *basileos* in the account of John the baptist's execution in chapter six (three times), so it's not ironic or an accident. No doubt Herod styled himself "king" just as his father had been. The Romans had reduced his "kingdom" and the extent of his authority, but would not have been so picky about titles when it came to supporting an ally when nothing in particular was at stake. I think rather that Matthew calls this Herod "the tetrach" in order to avoid confusion since he has given us the story of "the" more famous king Herod and the Magi earlier in the gospel. The same thing goes for Luke (who mentions the elder at Lk.1:5 – however, Luke calls the later one "king" at Acts 12:1 – a different book so no such basis for confusion).

Mark 6:20 (NIV)

20 because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled^[a]; yet he liked to listen to him.

a. Mark 6:20 Some early manuscripts he did many things

*

Q: Could you relate to the footnote?

A: It's a question of reading *eporei* vs. *epoiei*. The former is correct: Herod was perplexed.

Mark 6:22 (NIV)

22 When the daughter of^[a] Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests.

The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you."

a. Mark 6:22 Some early manuscripts When his daughter

*

Q: Could you relate to the footnote?

A: Certain commentators are bothered by the Greek of the best mss. which says, "the daughter of him or Herodias"; while it may seem clumsy in terms of more Classical Greek style, I have no problem taking this to mean from the Greek, "his daughter, [that is to say] Herodias' [biological daughter]". She is his step-daughter and "actual" daughter of Herodias by Herod's brother Philip; hence Mark's decision to explain fully (if not to the satisfaction of some textual critics). This was a problem in antiquity with some later traditions turning "his" to "hers".

Mark 6:37 (NIV)

37 But he answered, "You give them something to eat."

They said to him, "That would take more than half a year's wages^[a]! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"

a. Mark 6:37 Greek take two hundred denarii

*

Q: Which rendering is correct here?

A: The Greek says "two hundred denarii". "More than half a year's wages" is an attempt to turn this into a comparable amount for us (since most people don't know how much a denarius is). The rough rule of thumb is that a skilled worker often earned one denarius a day, so this would be less

than a year's pay for an average person, probably, depending on what his profession was and how many days he worked. Jews did not work on the Sabbath or holy days, and gentiles also had a very large number of pagan holidays. Also, a person couldn't necessarily count on being employed every working day. Since the disciples are only estimating here in any case, I think their point is more like "a whole years pay".

Mark 6:41-43 (NASB)

41 And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves and He kept giving them to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all. 42 They all ate and were satisfied, 43 and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish.

NIV SB: 6:42 all ate and were satisfied. Attempts to explain away this miracle (e. g., by suggesting that Jesus and his disciples shared their lunch and the crowd followed their good example) are inadequate. If Jesus was, as he claimed to be, the Son of God, the miracle presents no difficulties. God had promised that when the true Shepherd came, the wilderness would become rich pasture where the sheep would be gathered and fed (Eze 34:23-31). Jesus is the Shepherd who provides for all our needs, so that we lack nothing (cf. Ps 23:1).

*

Q: Would you agree that this miracle is foretold in Ezekiel 34:23-31?

A: I would agree that such provision is a Messianic sign and that the passage in Ezekiel – as well as other passages (e.g., the manna given in the wilderness) – allude to this sign. But food provided by God is symbolic of the more important gift of the body of Christ, "the Bread of Life", through the partaking of which we have salvation and the pledge of a new resurrection body in eternity. Moreover, the literal provision of actual food in abundance is fulfilled in the Millennium.

Mark 6:46 (NASB)

46 After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray.

NIV SB: 6:46 pray. Mark's mention of Jesus' praying is further evidence of a crisis situation. On only three occasions in this Gospel (here; 1:35; 14:32-36) does Jesus withdraw to pray; each time a crisis is involved.

*

Q: Do you agree with the note? What crisis was involved at Mark 1:35?

A: I don't see any particular crisis. Our Lord was under immense pressure at all times, and this pressure only got worse as He got nearer to the cross, culminating in the gauntlet He had to run to get there, and then of course the pressure and pain we cannot even imagine of bearing our sins. We are told to "pray without ceasing" and given many similar commands so that it is not at all surprising that our Lord spent as much time in prayer as possible. This was an opportunity to pray (crowd dispersed and disciples occupied) and explains our Lord's walking on the water not as some arbitrary thing but as a special and allowable dispensation so as to permit this time of prayer – He was able to "catch up" to the boat in this way (whereas if He had gone on the boat initially He would not have had the opportunity for prayer in private).

Mark 7:4 (NIV)

4 When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.^[a]

a. Mark 7:4 Some early manuscripts pitchers, kettles and dining couches

*

Q: Could you relate to the footnote?

A: Earlier mss. omit "couches", but many later mss. add this word. It's probably been added in later based on Lev.15:4-5 (i.e., it is an interpolation).

Mark 7:9 (NIV)

9 And he continued, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe^[a] your own traditions!

a. Mark 7:9 Some manuscripts set up

*

Q: Could you relate to the footnote?

A: There is some confusion in the mss. tradition about the verb here. Sinaiticus has *krateite* which I believe to be correct. It would mean, roughly, "empower" so "hold onto" or "approve".

Mark 7:11 (NIV)

11 But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)-

NIV SB: 7:11 Corban. A Hebrew/Aramaic word meaning "offering" (see note on Lev 1:2). By using this word in a religious vow an irresponsible Jewish son could formally dedicate to God (i.e., to the temple) his earnings that otherwise would have gone for the support of his parents. The money, however, did not necessarily have to go for religious purposes. The Corban formula was simply a means of circumventing the clear responsibility of children toward their parents as prescribed in the law. The teachers of the law held that the Corban oath was binding, even when uttered rashly. The practice was one of many traditions that adhered to the letter of the law while ignoring its spirit.

*

Q: Do you agree that the teachers of the law held that the Corban oath was binding even when uttered rashly?

A: If there is evidence to that effect it would come from later sources (i.e., the Mishnah at the earliest, and more probably the Talmud). Projecting a rabbinical opinion backwards as a rule universally adhered to in our Lord's day would be to follow an incorrect methodology in my view. The point is that many were using this dodge, a practice very similar in its effects to the indulgences sold by the medieval R.C. church. God has His own opinion regardless of what men decide – and that is a big part of our Lord's point here.

Mark 7:15-16 (NIV)

15 Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them." [16] [a]

a. Mark 7:16 Some manuscripts include here the words of 4:23.

*

Q: Should Mark 7:16 a part of the scripture?

A: No. It does occur in a number of mss., but only became "verse numbered" because it was present in the inferior edition used for the KJV version (N.B., versification of the New Testament

was the invention of Robert *Estienne* in the mid 16th century for his critical edition of the Greek New Testament; the verses and chapters are not original to the mss.).

Mark 7:24 (NIV)

24 Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre.^[a] He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret.

a. Mark 7:24 Many early manuscripts Tyre and Sidon

*

Q1: Could you relate to the footnote?

A1: Sinaiticus has both nouns. The text does say "regions of", but one can see how a reader could easily have dropped out the second name accidentally or else through feeling it was impossible to be in both places (the venue was probably somewhere in between).

*

Q2: This is an interesting point - how should we understand our Lord's visit to Tyre and Sidon if He came to minister to "the lost sheep of Israel"?

NIV SB: In a unique excursion into pagan and semipagan areas, Jesus visited the districts of Tyre and Sidon and the confederation of free cities called the Decapolis. He was called to minister to "the lost sheep of Israel" (Mt 15:24), but the phenomenal public attention in Galilee was intense. Even here his fame had spread, and he could not keep his presence secret. The commercially magnificent cities of Tyre and Sidon had been a source of cultural seductiveness and religious heterodoxy since the time of Jezebel. The cities had been heavily influenced by Hellenism; the sophistication of Greek culture was apparent in their coinage and architecture. Each was also a proud, historic center of Canaanite paganism, with tombs of ancient kings and temples to Melqart/Heracles, Astarte and various other deities.

A2: The trans-Galilee areas were part of historic Israel and no doubt had at least some Jewish population (and it was appropriate for our Lord to visit "all the cities": Matt.9:35). The visit to the Tyre/Sidon area is different, however, and seems to be a necessary rest period (Mk.7:24).

Mark 7:35 (NASB)

35 And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly.

NIV SB: 7:35 man's ears were opened ... he began to speak plainly. Jesus was doing what God had promised to do when he came to redeem his people (see Isa 35:5-6 and notes).

Isaiah 35:4-6 (NASB)

4 Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; The recompense of God will come, But He will save you." 5 Then the eyes of the blind will be opened And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. 6 Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah.

*

Q: Since Isaiah says that "your God will come" and mentions the miracle which our Lord here performs, would you say that these verses could also be used as a proof our Lord's deity? Not just by the miraculous nature of the sign itself, but also because of the reference to Isaiah's words?

A: I would agree. As far as "proof" goes, when you use this word it seems to me that you are considering the passage for apologetic purposes. So much truth would have to be already accepted a priori for this passage to make the difference for someone who was not a believer to accept Christ and His deity that its utility in that respect would probably be limited to conservative Jews (or those in groups who absolutely accept the Bible as is but not the divinity of Christ – a rare combination indeed). This passage is also millennial in nature, so the two advents would have to be explained as well. For those who don't understand the two advents but are receptive to the message, it might be just the passage to quote. Paul is reputed to have proved that "Jesus is the Christ" from the Old Testament when speaking with Jewish audiences, and this may well have been one of the passages he used (e.g., Acts 18:28).

Mark 8:4 (NASB)

4 And His disciples answered Him, "Where will anyone be able to find enough ^[a]bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?"

NIV SB: 8:4 where ... can anyone get enough bread to feed them? The disciples' question reflects their inadequacy and acknowledges that Jesus alone could feed the people. They

had not forgotten his feeding of the 5,000 (6:34-44) and were probably simply giving back to him the task of procuring bread. Alternatively, their question may reveal their spiritual dullness-they were slow learners (see note on v. 16).

*

Q: Do you agree with the point that the apostles "were probably simply giving back to him the task of procuring bread" instead of showing their lack of faith and hardness of heart? It maybe is possible that the two are not mutually exclusive, but I'm not sure.

A: In the earlier case of the feeding of the 5,000, John records Jesus as asking Philip where they might procure enough food for this mass of people, adding "He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do" (Jn.6:6 NIV). So perhaps in the first instance the disciples could be forgiven for not understanding what the Lord was going to do; since this had not been the practice before, even if we were there (without knowledge of the miracle), we might understand that the Lord could do all things, but not anticipate that He would handle the situation in this way. Nevertheless, Philip's response on that first occasion about two hundred denarii being necessary to provide a minimum for each person suggests that he doesn't seem to "get" that the Lord was going to handle the problem in some way. By the time we get to this second situation, however, while the crowd is smaller though still very large, and while the resources are greater (seven loaves instead of five), though still very small, still the disciples don't seem to understand the power of God. Perhaps they had not "forgotten" the earlier miracle intellectually, but this is a good example of the difference between knowledge and "*epignosis*", namely, knowledge fully believed, assimilated, and acted upon. All Christians can look back at some major deliverance the Lord has wrought on our behalf, and many of us can look back at multiple times where the Lord has saved us from certain disaster of one kind or another. So how do we react when another such disaster is looming? Do we have confidence that He will bring us through? Or do we, like the disciples, retain an intellectual memory of the rescue without "getting it" to the point of being able to apply our past deliverance to our present situation? We have the promises of scripture. We have examples like this from scripture. And we have personal examples of times when the Lord has delivered us in spite of all expectation to the contrary. And yet it is still often hard to apply those truths when the pressure is on. In fact, it takes spiritual growth, learning and believing the truth and gaining experience in relying on it in defiance of what our eyes see, our ears hear, and feelings tell us in order to get to the place of passing these sorts of tests with regularity. But the mark of a mature believer is that he/she does get better at this – as opposed, for example, to the children of Israel in the desert whom the Lord tested "ten times" and they failed all ten tests – even though

they had seen with their own eyes some of the most amazing miracles ever recorded. This all in a nutshell sums up the human experience in general and the life's work of the believer in particular, namely, striving to get to the place where we can not only see the problems with the Israelites in the desert and the disciples in the presence of the Lord, but can also – finally even with difficulty – get to the place of doing better ourselves to the glory of God. Abraham was ready to sacrifice His most precious possession out of absolute faith that somehow the Lord would work it out – which of course He did (which of course He always does).

Mark 8:10 (NASB)

10 And immediately He entered the boat with His disciples and came to the district of Dalmanutha.

NIV SB: 8:10 Dalmanutha. South of the Plain of Gennesaret (see note on Mt 14:34) a cave has been found bearing the name "Talmanutha," perhaps the spot where Jesus landed. Matthew says Jesus "went to the vicinity of Magadan" (Mt 15:39; see note there; see also map). Dalmanutha and Magadan (or Magdala), located on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, may be names for the same place or for two places located close to each other.

*

Q: Do you agree that Dalmanutha and Magadan could be names for the same place or for places located close to each other? Which one is more likely in your view?

A: Here's what I wrote previously:

Whether or not Madagan and Magdala are the same place I would not be willing to say. Contemporary identification of biblical name sites, especially less well-known ones, is a treacherous morass. As to the names themselves, they are little attested (especially Dalmanutha). They [i.e., M. and D.] are pretty clearly the same place since our Lord's departure thence occurs directly after the feeding of the 4,000. My own guess would be that Magadan is the chief city and Dalmanutha is the region/territory (for one reason because Mark says "parts" / mere of Dalmanutha).

Mark 8:11 (NASB)

11 The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him.

NIV SB: 8:11 Pharisees. See note on Mt 3:7. sign from heaven. The Pharisees wanted more compelling proof of Jesus' divine authority than his miracles, but he refused to perform such a sign because the request came from unbelief.

*

Q: So far I haven't drawn this distinction when reading this verse - between a "sign from heaven" and a miracle. Do you think it is scripturally valid?

A: I agree with you. After all, the word "miracle" is a Latin word. When it does correspond to something in scripture (in one translation or another) it's usually rendering *mopheth* in Hebrew or *dynamis* in Greek – meaning, literally, "beautiful thing" or "powerful thing" respectively. In other words, the technical meaning of the word "miracle" which we often have in mind thanks to the theology of Rome is not really biblical. Anything that astounds us is "a miracle". And, after all, everything God does is miraculous – whether we realize it or not. The Bible does speak of signs, by which it is meant things which can, at least to the eyes of faith, be interpreted in no other way but as communications from God. I don't think miracles and signs are mutually exclusive but overlapping. If there is any difference at all, it would seem to be, as this passage suggests, that "sign" seems to be more frequently used for something seen far and wide (as in celestial phenomenon, e.g., Rev.12:1; 12:3; 15:1). But all these words (wonder, power, sign) really are synonyms in terms of biblical force:

Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some **sign** (*semeion*) performed by Him. Luke 23:8

So I don't think the note is correct in making this distinction, but I do think it is a correct observation that "the signs/miracles" our Lord had been doing in their midst for years by this point were "not enough" for them – and nothing would have been enough for many of them. Even His rising from the dead was not enough (Lk.16:30-31), and even when He returns in glory there will still be some of "this generation" who will not believe. So the demand for a (greater) sign is merely an elastic excuse for their hardness of heart which they have no intention of changing no matter what (cf. Lk.7:32).

Mark 8:12 (NASB)

12 Sighing deeply ^[a]in His spirit, He *said, "Why does this generation seek for a ^[b]sign? Truly I say to you, ^[c]no ^[d]sign will be given to this generation."

c. Mark 8:12 *Lit if a sign shall be given*

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Q: Could you explain footnote c? Why is "if a sign shall be given ..." rendered as "no sign will be given"?

A: The second translation is legitimate because of the grammatical construction. What we have here is a future minatory [warning/threatening] condition, which has no apodosis (i.e., no "then" clause following the "if" clause). Instead we have the figure of speech called aposiopesis. This is a lot like a parent saying, "Little Johnny, if you don't clean up your room right this instant . . ." – the implication being that something not good will follow (leaving it unsaid makes the threat more palpable). Both elements (the condition and the figure of speech) have the same force, so that the effect is one of strong denial but in an implied way only, deliberately left ambiguous to make the listeners reflect on their behavior. So while the defensible rendering is the way most versions go, it loses a lot in translation, becoming merely a negative statement, when in fact the idea is "your negativity and unwillingness to respond to the truth you are being given while whining for signs to amuse you is a symptom of the spiritual rot which is going to result in nothing good very shortly" – or something similar.

Mark 8:16 (NASB)

16 They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread.

NIV SB: 8:16 Another possible reading of the Greek text could be translated: "They discussed with one another why they had no bread." According to this rendering the disciples were so concerned to find out who was to blame for not bringing more bread that they completely ignored Jesus' warning about the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod. Such an understanding heightens Mark's depiction of the disciples as slow learners (see 4:13; 5:51-52; 7:18; 8:4, 17-21 and note on 8:4; 9:32; 10:13-14, 35-40).

*

Q: Would you agree that "the disciples were so concerned to find out who was to blame for not bringing more bread that they completely ignored Jesus' warning about the yeast"? I thought that rather than ignoring our Lord's remark, they misunderstood it.

A: Yes, they (typically) weren't paying proper attention to our Lord's words, regardless of the reason.

Mark 8:22-26 (NASB)

22 And they *came to Bethsaida. And they *brought a blind man to Jesus and *implored Him to touch him. 23 Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, "Do you see anything?" 24 And he looked up and said, "I see men, for I see them like trees, walking around." 25 Then again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and began to see everything clearly. 26 And He sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village."

*

Q1: Good Morning Bob, and happy day after Father's Day to you. As I was reading this morning, this verse gave me pause (as often happens) and I will meditate on this, but also ask you if there is any significance you could share with me.

Thanks, and have a day of victory in Him.

A1: We certainly know from modern medicine that vision is not only a physical thing but also a perceptual and mental thing. So in rare cases where blindness has been restored or alleviated, it seems that often the individual in question has to be trained "how" to see (how to interpret the visual information flooding into his/her brain which has never been there before). The translations of this verse "Do you see anything?" are not bad, but the Greek indefinite pronoun is not an exact equivalent to our English one; also possible here is "He asked him what/how/in what respect he was seeing" – meaning not that our Lord was unaware of whether the man's physical vision had been healed (He certainly knew that it had), but that He was also aware that the physical healing would also require a perceptual adjustment. Certainly, the Lord could have done this in one step; certainly, He did not have to "make mud" or apply it to the man's eyes to completely restore vision and perception; certainly Jesus did not even have to be present to answer the man's prayers. Things were done the way there were done for our benefit, so that we might in this instance have a deeper appreciation of how dramatic a miracle healing from blindness truly is. A God who can do that, can do anything – as we know, but internalizing that completely is often analogous to needing the "perceptual adjustment" miracle on top of the healing miracle this man experienced: we see that truth sometimes, any yet we don't see it . . . without taking the additional step of completely believing it.

*

A2: In respect of that concern, I think it's more likely that the "outside of the village" part is to be explained by the concluding verse, since this distancing from the village continues after the healing:

Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't even go into the village."

Mark 8:26

The reason for doing this miracle in private and for telling the man healed not to go back into the village was to avoid an unwanted, excessive response which would only complicate our Lord's ministry efforts without at the same time producing a positive effect. While most "Christian" ministries today go to great lengths to garner attention operating on the principle that "there's no such thing as bad publicity", our Lord often avoided it. His miracles demonstrated that He was the Son of God, but He also was concerned to carry out the perfect ministry in the perfect way. Too much attention before the time would have resulted in too early opposition from those in power in Jerusalem. It also made the ministry itself more difficult on occasion. Here is the operative paragraph on that from "The Earthly Ministry of Jesus Christ" in BB 4A: "Christology":

(14) After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." (15) Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

John 6:14-15 NIV

Akin to the need to show perfect self-restraint in regard to rendering judgment was the similar necessity not to be swept up in the popular enthusiasm which came His way as a result of His miracles. Even Herod desired to see Him because "he hoped to see him perform some miracle" (Lk.23:8). Rather than craving celebrity as the rest of the human race does almost without exception, our Lord eschewed it as the passage above shows, and went to great lengths to avoid it as far as He possibly could (Matt.8:4; 9:30-31; 12:16; 14:13-14; Mk.1:43-45; 3:20; 8:26; 9:30; Lk.4:42-44; 5:15-16; 5:19). For Jesus knew full well that the approbation of human beings is about as stable as the wind; He was looking not for human approval but to please His heavenly Father (e.g., Matt.26:42; Lk.11:2; Jn.4:34; 5:30; 6:38).

(1) Behold my Servant – I will support Him. My chosen One – my soul (i.e., heart) takes pleasure in Him. I have placed my Spirit upon Him. He will bring forth justice for the nations. (2) He will not cry out nor will He lift up His voice in the street.

Isaiah 42:1-2

Yours in Jesus Christ our dear Lord and Savior,

Bob L.

Mark 8:26 (NIV)

26 Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't even go into^[a] the village."

a. Mark 8:26 Some manuscripts go and tell anyone in

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Q: Could you relate to the footnote?

A: There is one family of (late) mss. which have the alternative reading – this seems to be a gloss (explanation) added, probably in the margin of a lost ms., which won its way into the text of one strain of the textual tradition by accident. It is incorrect.

Mark 8:33 (NASB)

33 But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and *said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

NIV SB: 8:33 Satan. Peter's attempt to dissuade Jesus from going to the cross contained the same temptation Satan gave at the outset of Jesus' ministry (see Mt 4:8-10), so Jesus severely rebuked him.

*

Q: This is an interesting observation I haven't come across before - would you agree that our Lord calls Peter "Satan" not just because of His misconception of who the Messiah was, but also because Peter's words are linked to the temptation used by Satan at the onset of our Lord's ministry?

A: I'm not sure I see the similarity. The devil was deliberately trying to compromise our Lord's mission (which would have resulted in our damnation) by tempting Him with physical need, lust and pride. Peter is putatively concerned with heading off our Lord's arrest and execution. The former is all self-interest. The latter is not meant as a temptation but as something done out of genuine concern. Of course Peter was so wrong, and his motives, even if not recognized at the time by himself, were not pure. Not understanding the purpose of the first advent and the looming cross, it no doubt seemed to Peter that if Jesus were executed, Peter's whole rationale in following

Him would be out the window – and he himself would be next to be arrested and killed. But by attempting to dissuade our Lord from the primary objective of His mission, Peter was doing the devil's work in effect, even if it was out of ignorance and not entirely objective selfishness.

Mark 8:35 (NASB)

35 For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.

NIV SB: 8:35 save their life. Physical life may be saved by denying Jesus, but eternal life will be lost. loses their life. Conversely, discipleship may result in the loss of physical life, but that loss is insignificant when compared with gaining eternal life (see note on Lk 9:24).

*

Q: I take it that our Lord didn't here just mean the preservation of physical life or death through martyrdom, but also a life where the fleshly lusts are gratified and a life completely subordinated to serving Him?

A: I think the note gives the correct interpretation; making an application from this as you suggest to other aspects of living in this world is entirely legitimate.

Mark 8:36 (NASB)

36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?

*

Q1:

Hi Dr. Luginbill,

I hope all is well with you and that your school year is going well! I have certainly come a long way since we last talked thanks to God's hand over my overactive mind. I still manage to have questions though and hope you could help me with this one. My question is about Matthew 16:26 and was wondering if this refers to unsaved man or if it applies to all? If a Christian tries to gain the world though they are saved, will they lose their soul? I recently read a bible study on this and it said if a Christian decides to gain the world that they forfeit their salvation which didn't sound

right to me. I feel we should set our priorities differently obviously but for those who try to do both I wouldn't say lose their salvation. I dunno, can you clarify this? I need to add this to my repertoire of tricky verses to interpret correctly. It's hard to understand if some verses are referring to Christians, unsaved man, or both. Are there certain key words to look for when interpreting the target audience? I recently dialogued with a lordship salvationist recently and this was brought up ... man, was that a bad experience! It saddens me sometimes how divided the church is and how some verses can be interpreted to a certain agenda. It's just crazy! Any info would be great!

Thanks,

A1:

Good to hear from you. I am very pleased to learn that your first year goes well – I'm keeping you in my prayers.

As to your question, here is one rendering of the verse to consider:

For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?

Matthew 16:26 RSV

This verse is a good example of why substantive Bible teaching is important. Most versions do have, as you report, the word "soul" where the RSV (also the ASV) have the word "life". I much prefer "life", because that is really what the Hebrew and Greek words *nephesh* and *psyche* respectively mean here. Few English translations have caused as much trouble for biblical interpretation and for the understanding of the truths of scripture than the use of the word "soul", and I have had occasion to have to write about this issue very often (please see the links: "What is the 'soul'?", "Is the Soul a tertium quid?", and "The Creation of Man"). For while it is true that in contemporary English usage the "soul" is the "ghost" or immaterial part of the human being, in the Bible that is the spirit (or as I usually term it the "human spirit"). Wherever one finds the word "soul" in the Bible, what is being referred to is actually not a discrete immaterial thing with independent existence; in the Bible, a "soul" is a "person" or an "inner person" or "the heart", namely, the "us" that is formed by God's placing of the spirit in the body.

And the Lord God formed the man (i.e., Adam's body) from the dust of the ground, then blew into his nostrils the life-giving breath (i.e., his spirit), and [thus] the man became a living person (*nephesh* "soul" = individual composed of spirit and body).

Genesis 2:7

That is why "life" is often a good translation for "soul", as in the case of Matthew 16:26. No one can lose their spirit. Once God creates a spirit, that spirit will exist forever. For human beings the key question is "where?", and the answer depends upon a person's attitude toward Jesus Christ. All believers are saved. All unbelievers are lost. If a believer does not persist in faith but apostatizes and becomes an unbeliever, that person is lost because all unbelievers are lost. If an unbeliever does not persist in disbelief but comes instead to saving faith, that person is saved because all believers are saved (see the links: "False Doctrine of Absolute Eternal Security I", "False Doctrine of Absolute Eternal Security II", and "False Doctrine of Absolute Eternal Security III").

So even if some of the branches have been broken off, and you, wild olive branch that you are, have been grafted into their place and have become a partaker of the rich root of the natural olive tree, don't boast over those branches. For if you boast, [remember] that you don't support the root, but the root supports you. Now someone may say "Branches have been broken off for me to be grafted in." True enough. They were broken off because of their unbelief, and you stand secure because of your faith. But don't think arrogant thoughts. Rather, have a care. For if God didn't spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either. So consider God's mercy and severity. For He is severe towards those who have fallen away, but merciful towards you – if, that is, you continue in that mercy. But if you don't, you too will be cut off. And if they don't continue in their unbelief, they will be grafted back in.

Romans 11:17-23a

Seen in its proper context and with a proper interpretation of the word psyche, therefore, Matthew 16:26 fits perfectly with all the other truths of scripture. There is nothing in this life which will compensate a person for dying unsaved as that will result in condemnation, the "second death", the loss of life eternal. And there is nothing a person can "give God" as a ransom to make up for their status of spiritual death at present – only Christ's sacrifice will do; but if a person has rejected Jesus, "there is no other sacrifice for sin" to be had or to be made (Heb.10:26). Our Lord is paraphrasing here a similar point made by the Psalmist:

No one can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for them—the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough—so that they should live on forever and not see decay. For all can see that the wise die, that the foolish and the senseless also perish, leaving their wealth to others.

Psalm 49:7-10 NIV

Loss of life means loss of everything and God accepts no human ransom so that even possessing the entire world would not suffice for "bargaining with God" – but He has provided the redemption price for us, the blood of Christ (if we are only willing to accept that greatest Gift through faith).

Please do feel free to write back about any of the above.

Yours in Jesus Christ our dear Lord and Savior,

Bob L.

*

Q2:

Hi Dr. Luginbill,

Thanks for your fast response! Also, thank you for keeping me in your prayers, everything has been much better but I can see how people get sucked into legalism now which is what I've determined I've been fighting with. I used to look at my "works" everyday to see if I was "in the faith" and would get frightened because I'd realize that I shouldn't be doing this or that and it just turned into a laundry list. I never struggled with that before but now I just tell myself, Christ did it all, don't get stuck into legalism because no matter what you do to make yourself "more Christian", won't work because Christ did it all and there's nothing we can add to it. It's like mental slavery, I can't really explain it and just can't believe I got sucked into this. It has been so much better though, I'm not constantly thinking about it plus it helps to actually talk to people (like you) who understand the scriptures in the correct context rather than driving people into manic legalistic fears. So the verse I am still a little confused about. "Life" is what I thought was the correct way to translate here because soul in this context contradicts other teachings of security for the believer. What I'm curious about are Christians who seem like they have "gained the world", like Christian celebrities, politicians, etc. The guy I was arguing with says because of their "works" or their professions, that they couldn't possibly be Christians because they have "gained the world" by being rich and famous and have power plus they act contradictory to their faith (which all of us do at certain times to some degree). I said basically that's not true. A Christian is saved regardless of what they do even if they are rich and "gain the world". They probably could use their wealth and status to further God's kingdom but on the outside they don't, who knows their inward struggles? Then he brought up the whole faith without works is dead thing and I tried to explain that it has nothing to do with salvation but I guess there is no rationalizing with them ... I dunno. Some of these verses

are just hard to understand in their context and the way some of them are traditionally taught I now realize aren't correct (like lukewarm "Christians" for example) but I guess when you've been indoctrinated with a certain way of reading them, then you just stick with what you know. If you can explain this further, I would appreciate it!

Thanks,

A3:

You're very welcome, and it is absolutely no bother to talk about this further.

It always very important to distinguish between interpretation and application. The former is involved with figuring out precisely what a verse or passage "means"; the latter is making use of some of the truth in a verse, passage, or the scriptures generally so as to apply it to life and circumstances. We cannot really do the latter to any profit unless and until we have done the former correctly. The former is the stuff of Bible teaching (with a little of the latter); the latter is the stuff of sermonizing (with woefully little of the former all too often).

What your correspondent has been doing with Matthew 16:26 is applying it to life and circumstances (application), but doing so in a way that he/she wishes to make this the absolute interpretation of the verse – that not only gets things completely backwards, but is also an approach which introduces a cancerous process into anyone's understanding of truth and inevitably results in a person's opinions dominating what "scripture has to mean".

One could certainly use Matthew 16:26 loosely to say that "in a similar way" many Christians are over-focused on the world and as a result are making a poor bargain, because even if they achieve great worldly success, that means nothing in God's eyes, and will not result in any reward at the judgment seat of Christ – and can even compromise their faith, if they go too far down that worldly road. That would be a correct application of the verse.

What the verse means, however, is that even if a person could dominate the entire world in every way – something no one has ever done and something that will not even be done in a military/political sense by anyone but antichrist (and that is a fact that ought to have been in the minds of those hearing these words if they had been spiritually mature and well-versed in scripture and its truths) – even so it would be a pointless exercise. Why? Because this world is temporary. We are all mortal. No gain or success, not even this hypothetical ultimate success for which many famous personalities and lesser lights have striven since the fall, can change the fact that human history itself is a mere blink of the eye – and how much shorter an individual life. If

the "reward" of total victory is being plunged into the lake of fire for all eternity, then such total victory is not much "profit", at least for anyone considering the issue rationally. Indeed, anyone who is not "mad" ought to understand this at a very young age just by examining the world (natural revelation; see the link). Simply put, the proper "solution" when anyone of even minimal intelligence has "done the math" is that only God can help, and that only God's help and favor are worth anything in the end – because death will wipe away all human endeavor, and very quickly too. And God has the only answer to death: salvation by His grace through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. That is the interpretation (with a bit of "close application"); that is what our Lord is trying to get across – in a perfect way. Why don't more respond? It's a question of free will. Most people choose their own will over the Will of God and would rather go to hell than yield up their will to the Lord – that attitude is "mad" and results in "madness" (the "hardening of the heart"), but is unfortunately by far the most common human decision in all of history.

Trying to derive from this passage the automatic loss of salvation by those who pursue and achieve success is not authorized by the actual words of Matthew 16:26. It also is a mis-application because it mis-states what Jesus says and what He means (and what the Bible teaches throughout). It is also deceptive because it seems to equate, logically, failure with salvation. There are some successful people who are Christians and who will be saved – though in many cases it may indeed be by the "skin of their teeth" if they have indeed put worldly things first in their lives to achieve that success ("not many mighty are called"); but that is not necessarily so: David was a rich and powerful king (e.g.). On the other hand, there are droves of Christians who are spiritually lazy, and many of them are lazy in worldly terms as well. I don't think we need anyone incentivizing Christians to be unsuccessful as a means to greater spirituality. Clearly, we who believe in Christ ought to put Him and His Word and our living by that Word and ministering that Word to others our top priority in this life – that is the way to "the three crowns" (see the link). However, this does not mean that we ought therefore to be negligent or sloppy in our approach to the other necessary areas of our lives. We all live in "the world", and that means by definition that we will have family and work responsibilities. As Christians, we ought to do our best to be above reproach in all that we do. And if we do put Jesus first, and if we are upstanding in the way we conduct ourselves in all things, it will not be surprising if – along with testing, trials and tribulations – we are rewarded in our home and professional lives as well, both as a natural consequence of "doing a good job", but also as a result of the Lord's blessing:

"Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."

Psalm 91:14-16 NIV

This is not the prosperity gospel (and we may find that the more we put Him first the more we are tested by deprivation or bounty – or both – in order to prune us for greater production for Him). It's just a recognition of the truth of the way the Lord deals with them "who love Him", "working all things out together for good" (Rom.8:28).

Yours in Jesus our dear Lord,

Bob L.

Mark 8:38 (NASB)

38 For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

*

Q:

A:

Mark 9:1 (NASB)

1 And Jesus was saying to them, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."

*

Q: Could you explain the meaning of this verse? Do you agree with either of the two interpretations presented in NIV SB:

Matthew 16:28 (NASB)

28 "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

16:28 There are two main interpretations of this verse:(1) It is a prediction of the transfiguration, which happened a week later (17:1) and which demonstrated that Jesus will return "in his Father's glory" (16:27). (2) It refers to the Son of Man's authority and kingly reign in his postresurrection church. Some of his disciples will witness—even participate in—this as described in the book of Acts. The context seems to favor the first view. See note on 2Pe 1:16.

A: The first NIV SB point is correct: it is the transfiguration which is in view; that is why it is only "some" whom our Lord says will see it (Peter, James and John).

Mark 9:5 (NASB)

5 Peter *said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three ^[a]tabernacles, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

NIV SB: 9:5 Rabbi. Hebrew for " (my) teacher." three shelters. Peter may have desired to erect new tents of meeting where God could again communicate with his people (see Ex 29:42). Or he may have been thinking of the booths used at the Festival of Tabernacles (see Lev 23:42 and note). In any case, he seemed eager to find fulfillment of the promised glory at that moment, prior to the sufferings that Jesus had announced as necessary.

*

Q: Do you agree with the reasons given here for Peter's words? I thought that the idea of tabernacles was rather a sign of Peter being dumbfounded?

A: I agree with you that this is the primary thing we are to take from Peter's response. Whether or not he had the feast of Tabernacles in mind (which is symbolic of the Messianic return of our Lord), mainly Peter was the sort of person who had trouble keeping his mouth shut when he didn't really have anything constructive to say (cf. Acts 1:15-26).

Mark 9:7 (NASB)

7 Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!"

*

Q: Could you please explain the minor differences in how God's words are rendered in different gospels:

Luke 9:35 NASB

Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!"

Mark 9:7 NASB

Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!"

Matthew 17:5: NASB

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!"

Is it again to do with the rendering of Hebrew? Did God say these words in Hebrew?

A: There are many reasons why the gospels differ one from another in treating the same event (and I believe we have discussed these matters before). Language issues can account for seeming discrepancies. In this instance, however, which is clearly the same one referred to in all three synoptics, I believe you are precisely correct. I do believe the Father spoke in Hebrew on this occasion, and therefore Luke has merely translated the Hebrew word in question as "elect" instead of "beloved" (Matthew's addition of "with whom I am well-pleased" is merely a case of one writer adding more of what was actually said). Interestingly, Delitzsch's translation of the Greek New Testament back into Biblical Hebrew has the same Hebrew word for all three passages: *yedhidh*, "beloved" (cf. Deut.33:12). I would agree that this is the word being translated in all of the gospels. Also very interesting is the fact that the root from which *yedhidh* is derived, *ydd*, means "to cast lots", so clearly the Hebrew concept of "beloved" flows from the idea of special choice, making Luke's use of "elect" just as valid as the others. The fact that the Spirit has included both renderings (and the more complete quote from Matthew) shows us God at work in giving us a full picture of the truth in expressing how deeply the Son is loved by the Father.

Mark 9:9 (NASB)

9 As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead.

*

Q: Why did Jesus tell the disciples not to tell about the transfiguration until He has risen from the dead?

A: Probably because it would prove to be a distraction. This happened in the period just before the cross. Once the resurrection had taken place, the transfiguration and its meaning would be understandable to those hearing about it in a way that wouldn't have then been the case contemporaneously. In 2nd Peter 1:16ff., the transfiguration is given by Peter as the most dramatic thing he personally had ever experienced in terms of miracles – but he is quick to point out (in v.19) that the written Word is more reliable even than that most sublime experience.

Mark 9:10 (NASB)

10 They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant.

NIV SB: 9:10 what "rising from the dead" meant. As Jews they were familiar with the doctrine of the resurrection; it was the resurrection of the Son of Man that baffled them, because their theology had no place for a suffering and dying Messiah.

*

Q: Do you agree with this note? Were the disciples familiar with the doctrine of resurrection? It seems from the New Testament scriptures that many Jews were not.

A: I don't discount that the disciples were clueless at this point about the meaning of the passages in the Old Testament regarding the Suffering Servant (or the two advents), but this discussion seems to be pointed at the nature of the resurrection – which was a topic of some dispute among the Jewish factions then (cf. Matt.22:28-32) as it is today.

Mark 9:11 (NASB)

11 They asked Him, saying, "Why is it that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

*

Q: Why do the disciples ask about Elijah at this point?

A: I think these "disciples" are the ones who were on the mountain and who saw our Lord appearing as He would in resurrection – but He was the one who was "transfigured" and took on the glorious appearance He now has. So it would be a logical thing for them to ask about, namely,

why Elijah (not to mention Moses) were not resurrected first, since that is what the scribes taught, not understanding either the role of John the baptist, the Messiah's first advent herald, nor what would happen in the resuscitation of Moses and Elijah during the early days of the Tribulation. Christ is the first-fruits of the resurrection, but Moses and Elijah (whose types are Jesus and John) are heralds of the Messiah's second advent return and the resurrection He represents and effects at that time.

Mark 9:13 (NASB)

13 But I say to you that Elijah has indeed come, and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him."

NIV SB: 9:13 Elijah has come. A reference to John the Baptist (see Lk 1:17 and note). they. Herod and Herodias (see 6:17-29; Mt 14:3 and note). As Elijah was opposed by Ahab and Jezebel, so also John was opposed by a weak ruler and his wicked consort. as it is written about him. What Scripture says about Elijah in his relationship to Ahab and Jezebel (see 1Ki 19:1-10 and note on 19:3). There is no prediction of suffering associated with Elijah's ministry in the end times. However, what happened to Elijah under the threats of Jezebel foreshadowed what would happen to John the Baptist. The order of events suggested in vv. 11-13 is as follows:(1) Elijah ministered and suffered in the days of wicked Jezebel; (2) Elijah was a type of John the Baptist, who in turn suffered at the hands of Herodias; (3) the Son of Man suffered and was rejected a short time after John was beheaded.

*

Q: Do you agree that when our Lord says "as it is written of him", he is referring to parallel suffering of Elijah at the hands of Ahab and Jezebel?

A: In fact, Elijah suffered nothing at the hands of Ahab and Jezebel – though he did run away out of fear of suffering following Jezebel's threatening letter. I don't take Mark 9:13 to be a reference to 1st Kings 19:2. I think instead the "as it has been written of him" is referring to the first part of the sentence talking about his coming – it happened just as scripture proclaimed it would (phrase placement is often different in Greek than it is English; so the "as it is written of him" should be placed directly after the "has indeed come" in correct English renderings).

Mark 9:16 (NASB)

16 And He asked them, "What are you discussing with them?"

*

Q: I'm not sure who does our Lord mean by the first and second "them" here.

A: The Lord is addressing the crowd and the "with them" refers to the disciples who did not go up the mountain with Him.

Mark 9:19 (NIV)

19 "You unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

NIV SB: 9:19 unbelieving generation. Probably the referent should be restricted to the disciples. This cry of Jesus reveals his great disappointment with them (see note on 8:16).

*

Q: What is the reaction of our Lord caused by? Is it to do with the lack of faith on part of His disciples, who didn't heal the boy or the lack of faith on part of the young man's father ("if you can")?

A: I disagree with the note. The man in question did not have sufficient faith in the ability of the disciples to heal the boy and for that reason he was not healed. As such, he stands as a representative of "this generation" of hardness which refuses to put its faith in the true power of God and the ministry of His Son.

Mark 9:24 (NASB)

24 Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief."

*

Q1: This is quite a verse. Faith is a free will choice and the one choice which we have to make ourselves and yet the father of the possessed boy asks our Lord to help him overcome his unbelief. Do you think it's a legitimate request?

A1: This is typical of how people think, denying responsibility for their own actions. Nevertheless, God responds to the slightest smidgen of faith on our part; though it were but the size of a mustard seed at first, He is able to make it grow into a mighty tree. I think this fellow had a modicum of

faith, very slight (as is evident in his words) – and our Lord did heal the boy both in response to the request and for the sake of the faith of the crowd as well. I have written this up at the link: "Help my unbelief!"

*

Q2: Could you please explain this Mark 9:24 where the father of the sick child asks Jesus to "help my unbelief"? Also if I were to buy a Bible for a non-believer friend, what version should I get him so it would be easy to read for him?

A2: Mark 9:24 goes back to the issue of faith as an important basis for the miracles which our Lord performed. Remember that in His home town, He "did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief" (Matt.13:58). Mark actually says that He "was not able to do any miracle there except to lay His hands on a few sick and heal them" and that "He marveled at their unbelief" (Mk.6:4-6). Now we know of a certainty that our Lord is God and that God has the power to do anything, so that Jesus "lack of ability" to do miracles in His hometown is on account of the unworthiness of the potential recipients of these miracles, and therefore is due to God's self-imposed policy of restraint in cases of disbelief, and not to any lack of inherent ability. Similarly, Christ could have turned the stones into bread at the devil's behest, but He did not because it would have been a violation of the testing which He had been led by the Spirit to endure (Matt.4). The reason for such restraint in the accomplishment of miracles is, clearly from the passages above, the issue of faith (specifically, the lack thereof). Jesus' miracles were to serve the dual purpose of demonstrating both His Messiahship and the veracity of His message and claims. Therefore they were generally done on behalf of those who were willing to trust in what He said, and to trust in Him. So where He was met with a wall of stubborn unbelief, miracles were both pointless and inappropriate. Now faith is not an absolute commodity in the way that we imperfect human beings often exercise it (would that it were and we always employed it to the full). Jesus several times rebukes His disciples for their oligopistia (ὀλιγοπιστία), their "little faith" (cf. Matt.17:20). Faith can grow, like a mustard seed, from something very small into something quite large (Matt.13:31; 17:20). Sometimes it is fickle and not solid, like the seed of faith which never takes root, or quickly dies off, or is choked by weeds (Matt.13:3-9; 13:18-23). Sometimes it is limited by fear (Jn.12:42). Sometimes it can apparently be genuine but then quickly turn from acceptance to rejection (cf. Jn.7:30 with Jn.7:48ff.). The majority of those who followed Jesus at one time or another (having some level of faith) eventually turned their backs on Him (i.e., chose to abandon that faith; cf. Jn.6:66).

The boy's father in this passage, Mark 9:24, was clearly "conflicted" - on the one hand, he had his doubts about Jesus and his disciples, but on the other hand, he had a pressing problem and wanted to, needed to believe they could and would solve it. He had seen the disciples' inability to cast out the demon while Jesus was on the mount of transfiguration, and, as Jesus tells them later, this failure was due to their own lack of faith, at least in part (Matt.17:20). So it is perhaps understandable that the father lets slip in his request to Jesus an element of the doubt he is experiencing: "if you are able". Now the centurion (Matt.15:28) and the Syro-Phoenecian woman (Matt.8:13), we recall, were commended for recognizing that our Lord was completely able, if only He were willing (Mk.7:24-30; 8:13). And on many, many occasions, Jesus tells the recipient of His miracles "your faith has saved you". This father of the possessed child was clearly not in that category of those other exceptional people who clearly and unreservedly committed to or were willing to commit themselves to Him with such complete faith.

On the occasion in question here, Jesus immediately makes the issue clear, namely, that faith in Him must be genuine to be effective: "this 'if you can' [of yours, that's the problem]; everything is possible for the one who believes" (verse 23). The father's answer - "I do believe! Help my unbelief!" - is a fairly clear example, it seems to me, of "commitment with mental reservation". This is a far cry from the centurion's "just say the word" (Matt.8:8)! We cannot say that there was no faith present in this father at all (he had come for help, after all, professes "I believe", and in his second qualification of doubt asks for "help"), but it is not the most heartening thing to read (and cannot have been the most heartening thing for our Lord to hear). It is very important that this event has been included in scripture, because it give us an example, a negative one, of the type of unnecessary self-torture that people put themselves through, even when they feel God's call (in matters great and small), when they refuse to give in to Him entirely and take what He says with complete trust, acting upon what He says in complete faith. A true faith, undivided, single-minded, zealous and not lukewarm, is a very powerful thing. But a little doubt can destroy everything (cf. Jas.1:5-8).

Jesus did heal the young man - but not because of any unreserved faith commitment on his father's part (the emotion we see in this verse is for his own son, not for God's Son). For it says in verse 25 that our Lord only did so "when/because He say that a crowd was gathering" (cf. Jn.11:41-42). The presence of so many third parties transformed the issue from one this individual's faith alone to the proof of our Lord's Messiahship, making it acceptable and right to heal the boy regardless of the father's inability to give himself completely to Christ (and in many instances,

after all, Jesus healed all comers, a situation which unquestionably included many like this person who were not complete in their faith; e.g., Matt.8:16; 12:15; 14:14; 14:36; 15:30; 19:2; 21:14).

Now we cannot say one way or the other what happened to this man, whether he learned from this experience (and from the miracle he experienced in the case of his son), but we can certainly learn from his lack of faith, and make a personal commitment not to test our Lord in ways like this, choosing instead ever to demonstrate a strong and uncompromised faith that trusts in Him without any reservations.

You might also check out Peter lesson #24, "Faith Dynamics" for more on this subject. Also, I have now written more on this passage in another place (hope you find it helpful): Gospel Questions V: Help my unbelief!

On the question of versions, I rather do like the NIV (that is the "old" version of the NIV rather than the TNIV). The "New KJV", or RSV, or NASB would all be fine - I don't unreservedly recommend the KJV for new believers, since the language is somewhat difficult to comprehend until one gets used to it - nor "Good News" nor any of the "easy listening" contemporary English versions. These all do too much violence to the true meaning of the original languages in my view. I have reviews with comments on some of these versions in the "Read Your Bible" file (click the link). I think even more important than the version is that you get the person a good study version, one that will actually answer questions in a Bible-believing way. The two I can vouch for are Charles Ryrie's "study Bibles" (he has them for several versions), and my all-time favorite is "The NIV Study Bible" ed. K. Barker, done by Zondervan publishers. The notes, charts, and illustrations are almost always helpful, and the cross-references are the best I've seen. By the way, I admire your efforts in sharing the gospel with friends - to this we have been called (2Cor.5:20).

Mark 9:29 (NIV)

29 He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer.^[a]"

a. Mark 9:29 Some manuscripts prayer and fasting

*

Q1: What do the best manuscripts have here?

NIV SB: 9:29 This kind. Seems to suggest that there are different kinds of demons. only by prayer. The disciples apparently had taken for granted the power given to them or had come to believe that it was inherent in them. Lack of prayer indicated they had forgotten

that their power over the demonic spirits came from trusting in Jesus and his power (see 3:15; 6:7, 13; see also note on 6:12-13

Q2: Do you agree with both points made here - firstly that there are different kinds of demons who possess men and secondly that the disciples took for granted the power given to them?

A: First, "fasting" seems to be a late addition. Second, demons are fallen angels, and they have different levels of authority and ability (just as is the case for human beings in any organization). The "ability" here seems to be a willingness – or better a temerity – to resist divine authority, in this case delegated by our Lord. Doing this sort of thing is something most demons would be reluctant to attempt – because they might be thrown into the Abyss. This particular demon was only willing to abandon his host when forced to do so by the Lord's direct power. Hence, in such cases, prayer – petitioning God for direct intervention – would be the only way to remove the demon, even in the case of these men who had been given this unique delegated authority. Today, **no one** has that authority, so that we all must resort to prayer in case we suspect such demon intervention. This incident provides a good palliative, however, for anyone being too impressed by supposed exorcists today. There are demons who would not even be moved by the apostles of the Lamb whose authority over them came directly and personally from Jesus Christ – how much less would they be subject to someone arrogating that power to themselves?

Mark 9:33-37 (NASB)

33 They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?" 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. 35 Sitting down, He called the twelve and *said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." 36 Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me."

*

Q1: I'm not sure how our Lord's words regarding the child from verses 36 and 37 are linked to the rest. Children are mentioned also in what seem parallel verses in Matthew 18:1-4, but there it is much easier to reconcile Jesus' point about the child with the rest of the discourse ("Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven"), than here ("Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me").

A1: I think the common thread is that of humility. Very young children naturally believe and follow their elders in authority over them (more so than when they reach, e.g., teenage years, at any rate). If we are acting in that manner, responding to the authority of our heavenly Father and that of our Lord Jesus Christ, we will naturally put aside all such worldly concerns and be concerned instead with pleasing them – rather than in defending and advancing our own worldly authority.

*

Q2: I'm still not quite sure why it's the act of receiving that our Lord emphasizes here?

A2: If I'm understanding you correctly, the point is that we have to have a childlike non-skeptical faith to come to Christ. We can't put any conditions on it or demand proof or entertain mental reservations – the kind of things we learn to do as adults after being burned by unscrupulous human beings. We have to be pure in our accepting of the truth from the Spirit (cf. 1Thes.2:13).

Mark 9:38-40 (NIV)

38 "Teacher," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us."

39 "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, 40 for whoever is not against us is for us. 41 Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.

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Luke 11:23 (NIV)

23 "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

Q: So in Mark 9:40 our Lord says "whoever is not against us is for us", and in Luke 11:23 "whoever is not with me is against me" - are these two passages taken together to convey the message that there is no "middle ground" when it comes to spiritual matters?

A: I think that is a good application. Notice that the inclusive statement has to do with "us", whereas the exclusive statement has to do with "Me". In other words, while it is true that where the Church is concerned anyone who is doing anything that helps advance our cause in any way should be tolerated (e.g., Mormons handing out Bibles), when it comes to the main issue of accepting

Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation, there is no middle ground and we should not tolerate any blurring of the lines.

Mark 9:42 (NASB)

42 "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea.

*

Q1: Do you agree that believers are meant by "the little ones"?

Matthew 18:6 (NASB)

6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

NIV SB: 18:6, 10 14 little ones. All believers, regardless of age (see Mk 9:42 and note; Lk 17:2).

A1: The point made by the note is true, but the context clearly is speaking about the young (and therefore impressionable) – it seems an even greater measure of divine displeasure is forthcoming for tripping up the very young (akin to heavier sentences in secular law for crimes against children).

*

A2: As the parallel passage of Matthew 18:6 makes clear, the "little ones" are those "who believe in Me", that is, believers. The offense Jesus mentions is "scandalizing" believers, and in the context, scandalizing in particular those who are "young and innocent", that is, those who may not yet have the life-experience to "know better" in the same way that an older believer would/should. So it is indeed talking about "scandalizing" vulnerable believers who are vulnerable not through their own sloppy approach but because of their age (whether chronological or spiritual). The verb in Greek, *skandalizo*, is talking about leading someone else into apostasy, that is, "tripping them up", or "making them stumble" in their faith to the degree that they may lose that faith and hence lose their salvation as a result (see the link in CT 3A: "Definition, Etymology, Process and Prophecies of the Great Apostasy"). The usual way that this happens is through the active tearing down of faith through lies, and by directly sowing of seeds of doubt about the gospel, or indirectly through leading these vulnerable believers into compromising practices, whether of false religion or sin or both, which in turn undermine faith. So these verses are talking about those who have actively

taken up arms in the cause of Satan to assault the faith of believers, something which is bad enough when their targets are mature believers (in terms of years and/or spiritual growth), but absolutely horrific when their targets are the young and vulnerable (in terms of years and/or spiritual growth). In this case, our Lord assures us, He and His Father are not going to stand idly by. Such individuals will be dealt with in the most severe terms, ***a fact that shows for certain that there is a differentiation of greater and lesser degrees of divine judgment both in this life and the next.*** One thing is for sure: given our Lord's extreme description of the fate of those who serve the devil in this most heinous activity of trying to deprive of salvation those who are particularly open to assault through no particular fault of their own, we can be certain that He is not just using hyperbole here. Those who engage in this activity have a reckoning coming which is sure to be both swift and a cause for shuddering for all who hear tell of it.

*

Q3: Could you explain from what you wrote the fact that there will be differentiation of greater or less divine judgement in this life and the next (see bold and italicised)?

A3: The more evil in this life, the more judgment from the Lord. The more evil in this life, the more severe the rebuke at the Great White Throne (even believers “fear the Lord” when it comes to our divine eternal evaluation, though we are confident of salvation and reward: 2Cor.5:11). This does not mean, however, that there is any difference in the lake of fire for one unbeliever versus the next -- even though they will be recognizable as “great or small” (Rev.20:12).

Mark 9:43-50 (NIV)

43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. ^{[44] [a]} 45 And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. ^{[46] [b]} 47 And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, 48 where "the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched." 49 Everyone will be salted with fire. 50 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

a. Mark 9:44 Some manuscripts include here the words of verse 48.

b. Mark 9:46 Some manuscripts include here the words of verse 48.

NIV SB: 9:49 The saying may mean that everyone who enters hell will suffer its fire, or (if only loosely connected with the preceding) it may mean that every Christian in this life can expect to undergo the fire of suffering and purification.

*

Q1: Could you explain both footnotes - should the words of verse 48 be included also in verses 44 and 46?

Q2: Which interpretation is correct here?

A1/2: The words in both cases are lacking from the best mss. and were doubtless added by later copyists from v.48 for emphasis. As to fire, I wouldn't absolutely rule this out as an application, but I don't think it's the right interpretation. Salt is a preservative so that the addition of fire in verse 49 is referring to the cleansing nature of that fire. As such, "everything", as our Lord says, will undergo a fiery cleansing. That is true of unbelievers (the last judgment), that is true of believers (when all of our "wood, hay, and stubble" is burned up but we are saved "yet as through fire": 1Cor.3:13-15), and that is true of the universe which will be consumed by fire and remade into the new heavens and new earth (2Pet.3:7-12). There are many other fire judgments as well, but in the context here, the terror which divine judgment ought to inspire should be motivation for us all to respond in the correct way (2Pet.3:11), and seek the good – striving to have "salt" in us, the truth believed which preserves unto salvation and a good evaluation before our Lord's judgment tribunal.

*

Q3: Please explain how we should interpret these passages. Do you agree with NIV SB: 18:8–9 Hyperbole: Deal as drastically as necessary with sin in order to remove it from your life. This calls for self- discipline. See note on 5:29–30.

8 If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. 9 And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

Matthew 18:8-9 (NIV1984)

A3: No self-mutilation can save; only grace accepted through faith can save – the blood of Christ alone washes away sin. Also, no one in history has done this – and our Lord did not expect anyone to do these things. Indeed, the examples are perfectly chosen as impossible things no one can do

(cf. the camel going through the eye of the needle – but "nothing is impossible for God": Matt.19:24-26). The point is precisely that we need help from God in order to be saved, and nothing we can do, no matter how severe, could ever save us. This passage destroys salvation by works and throws anyone listening onto the mercy of God – exactly where we need to be to be saved.

*

Q4: I take it these words are not to be taken literally - how should we understand them?

A4: This is covered at the link:
<http://ichthys.com/mail153fish.htm#pluck%20out%20your%20eye>

Our Lord is putting things in a way that can't possibly be ignored. Honestly, I can't even imagine a scenario where a person who plucked their eyes out would go to heaven but would not have done so if they hadn't plucked their eyes out. This hypothetical doesn't ever occur, but it does make our Lord's point for Him and very powerfully so. There is absolutely nothing we value in this life which we aren't better off losing (if God takes it away from us) or throwing overboard (if He leaves it to us to make the hard choice) if the alternative is not being saved. This applies to both believers and unbelievers.

For a believer, nothing is worth apostatizing for. Clearly, if we are compelled to keep looking at something which may result in apostasy (like an idol), then we would be better off being blind. In reality of course, the reason why this hypothetical never happens is that if a person has the willpower to blind him/herself, then surely that person has the willpower to stop looking at the offensive thing (alternatively, putting out our eyes won't take away the lust that leads to the idolatry in any case so would be useless act). That is our Lord's point: since being blinded is better than apostasy, how much more should we then not turn away from behavior which leads to apostasy? That is something which is easier to do by many magnitudes than putting one's own eyes out. Just to make it very clear, no one should seriously consider engaging in any of the self-mutilations discussed in these and similar passages: our Lord is helping us put things into the proper value hierarchy with these remarks:

"You think it would be onerous to cut off your own hands? So it would! But wouldn't that be better than going to hell? So it would! So learn the lesson and stop doing things with those hands which may land you in hell!"

For an unbeliever this same logic shows the futility of avoiding hell by one's own efforts. Believers are saved, and while we have to maintain faith intact until the end of life, we are beyond all argument secure in Christ as long as we do maintain our faith in and faithfulness to Him – a situation which is incalculably better than that of the unbeliever. Any reasonable person in hearing these words of our Lord knows very well that cutting off the hands may slow down theft, for example, but it will not prevent it, and that putting out the eyes may slow down lust, but it will not prevent it. Since even the most drastic of physical actions is not going to conquer sin, there is therefore no human solution even for controlling sin completely – let alone for atoning for sins already committed, even if the sin nature could be completely contained (which is of course impossible). So for unbelievers these verses bring home one of the three points of natural revelation everyone comes to know at some point: we are sinful (point 1) and so when we die as we all must (point 2) we will face the impossible situation of standing before a perfectly holy and righteous God whose character and existence we cannot help but recognize from the creation in which He has placed us (point 3). In other words, for unbelievers these seemingly harsh words of our Lord are really exceptionally merciful: they serve as a very important reminder of a critical part of the universal appeal God has woven into the warp and woof of His creation as motivation to seek out and accept the gospel message:

"Since nothing you could even contemplate doing to yourself, no matter how horrible, could ever have any significant effect on sin, you'd better look to the only One who can take away your sin – otherwise you are lost!"

*

A5: The key thing to me about our Lord's examples is that no one in the world would actually do this, namely, pluck out their eye if, for example "it" lusted after a woman. In short order the entire world of men would be blind if that were common practice, whereas in the history of the world following our Lord's use of this example no one has yet done this (no one sane, in any case). So it does serve to show how impossible sinlessness is – apart from the Spirit; and it does, as you suppose very correctly, point the way all that much more emphatically to the need for help in order to be saved – and He is our only help, the only Name given under heaven whereby we must be saved.

I would add also what is explained at the link, namely that this is an emphatic way to make anyone who thinks about it realize that we have no hope apart from a Savior who will take away our sins –

because even if we take the most dramatic measures we cannot be saved without God's merciful intervention at the cross.

Mark 10:2 (NASB)

2 Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife.

NIV SB: 10:2 Pharisees. See note on 2:16. came and tested him. The question of the Pharisees was hostile. It was for unlawful divorce and remarriage that John the Baptist denounced Herod Antipas and Herodias (see 6:17-18), and this rebuke cost him imprisonment and then his life. Jesus was now within Herod's jurisdiction, and the Pharisees may have hoped that Jesus' reply would cause the tetrarch to seize him as he had John. Is it lawful ... to divorce his wife? Jews of that day generally agreed that divorce was lawful, the only debated issue being the proper grounds for it (see note on Mt 19:3).

*

Q: This is an interesting observation - would you agree that the Pharisees were trying to receive a reply from our Lord that would cause Him to be seized?

A1: I think it might be worth mentioning as a possible clever motive on their part, but I think scripture indicates that these individuals were trying to justify their own conduct and would have been happy to have had our Lord give them the answer they wanted. Also, given all the angst this passage has caused modern readers, I'm not sure what it is about our Lord's answer that would have endeared Him to Herod (nothing, obviously), nor am I sure that what He said wouldn't have provided enough "ammunition", so to speak, for these men to trap Him if they had reported the conversation. Still, we can't rule out motives of heart about which scripture is silent.

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A2: Adultery in this situation consists of two things - an unlawful divorce and remarriage. This means that if someone divorces their spouse, but they don't remarry, they have not committed adultery - because both conditions for their action to be qualified as adultery, as given by Jesus, have not been met - only one. They have divorced their spouse, but have not remarried - so they don't commit adultery.

It's an important point in this context, since reason the Pharisees engaged in this hypocritical procedure was to justify getting a new woman they wanted. So if they were to divorce their wives

and remain unmarried after the divorce, they wouldn't be committing adultery against their wives. But of course that's not what they wanted - they wanted a new woman and were justifying getting this new woman in the way described - and our Lord condemns their conduct here.

Matthew 5:31-32 (NASB)

31 "It was said, 'Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce';

32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Mark 10:5 (NASB)

5 But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.

NIV SB: 10:5 because your hearts were hard. See 6:52 and note. Divorce was an accommodation to human weakness and was used to bring order in a society that had disregarded God's will, but it was not the standard God had originally intended, as vv. 6-9 clearly indicate. The purpose of Dt 24:1-4 (see note there) was not to make divorce acceptable but to reduce the hardship of its consequences.

*

Q: I'm not clear about the point that the purpose of divorce "was not to make divorce acceptable but to reduce the hardship of its consequences".

A: I think what they mean is that divorce was bound to happen, given sinful human nature, so that the provisions for it in the Law were meant to minimize the damage rather than to encourage the practice – at least that is what I personally think about the passage (giving the note the benefit of the doubt).

Mark 10:7 (NIV)

7 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,^[a]

a. Mark 10:7 Some early manuscripts do not have and be united to his wife.

*

Q: Could you explain the footnote - what do the best manuscripts say here?

A: Most early mss. (Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, for example) don't have the last part – which was probably added either because it was thought to have been accidentally left out or just because the scribe knew the parallel passage and ended up just writing it out automatically. Matthew 19:5 does have the whole thing (so the correct text here is another example of Mark's economy).

Mark 10:15 (NASB)

15 Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.”

*

Q: I have been reading my Bible quite a lot lately, and I find that the more I read it, the more I find questions I can't answer. Jesus said that we are to receive the Kingdom of Heaven as a little child. Does that mean to trust Him to get us there? If that is so, why does He say that many will say to Him, "Lord, Lord...", and that He will reply, "Depart from me, you workers of iniquity, I never knew you." (Matthew 7:22-23) Are the people He is talking about ones who trusted Him to get them there and they still fell short in some way? If iniquity is violation of the law, even in ignorance (according to my Bible concordance), how am I to trust Him? There are several issues of which I am not completely sure, so could He say, "Depart from me..." because I guessed wrong?

A: Please don't be discouraged because you are finding things in the Bible that cause questions without immediate answers. This is a universal experience for all who are seeking God. In order to grow closer to Him, we need to build our faith, and one of the ways this critical faith of ours is built is by standing fast with what we know to be true, and building on that base of faith day by day through what we learn from scripture. This is life-long process - it never ends, but it always gets better. We have to learn to trust Him that He is and is going to continue to answer our questions, solve our problems, and bring us closer to Him to the point where we can begin to help others through the gifts we have been given. The Bible is at once very simple and very complicated. Certain major truths come out clear as a bell on every page (the love of God, the mercy of God, the justice of God, the wisdom of God), while specific interpretations and fine points of detail about individual scriptures are often not possible to discern without expert help. But we are all called upon to drink in the truth of the Word, and approaching it in a diligent, daily way as you are obviously doing is the only approach that is safe, sound, and secure.

We have to approach this like little children, as Jesus told us. When we were very young, we didn't

always know where our parents were taking us when they led us by the hand - but we trusted them, because we knew instinctively that they loved us and were there to care for us. We usually obeyed them too. And when we listened to their words, we did so with a very simple and genuine lack of subtlety, not imagining or pretending that we knew better. As we grew older, we tended to be more disobedient, tended to doubt they knew what they were talking about, tended to think that we knew better what was right for us. As we reached a more mature adulthood, however, we reflected and considered that they had done all right after all, and that we had been head-strong and suffering from the arrogance of youth in many of these adolescent assumptions.

Now everyone's experience is different, and no human parents are perfect either, but as we look through the human family generally and through time, these are pretty typical trends and experiences. Our heavenly Father, of course, is perfect, and knows perfectly well what is good for us - in fact He is working out everything in our lives for the good, especially for those of us who truly do love Him and Jesus beyond everything else in life, and want to do so more and more day by day (Rom.8:28). For every question, He will provide an answer, and for every problem, a solution. It may not be the one we want, or the one we expected, or come at the time we anticipated it, but we have to learn to trust Him like a child trusting His loving parents when it is yet impossible for him to understand completely what is going on.

Now the one other thing about this comparison our Lord makes that we should keep firmly in mind is that while a small child really has no choice but to follow his/her parents' lead, we do have a choice. Instead of banishing doubt, embracing faith, trusting God, and joyfully waiting for what He has for us, whatever that may be, we can, in arrogant adolescent style, doubt His ability, His mercy, His care, His attention, His timing, His knowledge. In the human analogy, this turned out to be foolish on our parts as teenagers - how much more is it not folly now when the One with whom we have to do is the all-powerful Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the One who loved us so much that He sent His own beloved Son to die for us in our place, a death on the cross at that!

As far as iniquity is concerned, we are called as Christians to be holy, to be sanctified, to be perfect. Let me tell you, that is the truth. But it is also the truth that apart from our Lord, no believer has ever perfectly fulfilled that mandate. It is good to read 1st John whenever one is concerned about this issue, for the very book that describes believers as essentially sinless (1Jn.3:9-10), is also the clearest in its description of how we should deal with the personal sins we do commit (1Jn.1:5-10;

cf. 1Jn.2:1). We have passed from death to life in Jesus Christ, and have been crucified to this world. The life we now live, we live for the One who bought us. This means that all our failures are of this earth, and that we are to turn away from them and pursue instead the upward calling to which we have been called of growth and production for our Master Jesus Christ. It is true indeed that if we turn away from Him completely, no good will come of it. In fact, if we are so head-strong in our resistance and our rebellion that we get to the point that we put our faith to death (see "Apostasy and the Sin unto Death"), then the end will be worse than the beginning. But we should remember Paul's words to the Hebrews, who were in bad spiritual shape, but not yet in apostasy:

Remember the days gone by, when you first saw the light, when you persevered through that terrible trial of abuse. For you were publicly exposed to humiliation and persecution, and shared the lot of others who experienced the same. You supported those in prison, and accepted the confiscation of your belongings with joy, because you knew you possessed a more valuable estate, and a more lasting one. So don't throw away this conviction of yours - it leads to a great reward. You need to keep persevering so that you may carry off in victory what has been promised - after you have accomplished God's will. For yet a little while, how short, how [short the wait], and He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay. "Then shall my righteous one live by his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him." Now we are not possessed of cowardly apostasy which leads to destruction, but we have faith which leads to [eternal] life.

Hebrews 10:32-39

If we are walking forward in faith, building faith, and acting in faith, we can be confident that God will honor this child-like faith of ours and lead us into all truth.

Hang in there - if you are hacking your way forward, you are certainly not going backward. If you are concerned, you most likely don't really need to be. It is those who are not concerned that are usually the ones in true jeopardy. And my Lord and Savior will continue to lead you and me like little children around every blind corner - all we have to do is keep holding His hand.

Mark 10:17-21 (NIV)

17 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

18 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good-except God alone.

19 You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

20 "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

NIV SB: 10:17 man. Lk 18:18 calls him a "ruler," meaning he was probably a member of an official council or court, and Mt 19:20 says he was "young." what must I do ...? Cf. Ac 16:30-31 and notes. The rich man was thinking in terms of earning righteousness to merit eternal life, but Jesus taught that it was a gift to be received (see v. 15 and note). eternal life. See note on Mt 19:16.

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Q1: Could you explain the point made in this footnote? It says that "Jesus taught that it was a gift to be received", but it doesn't seem to be the main thrust of our Lord's words to the young ruler, as He asks him about adhering to the commandments.

A1: You are correct. The problem with these legalists was that they believed that they had eternal life through following the Law; our Lord easily demonstrated to this young man that he was not perfect as he supposed – and hence was in need of God's righteousness given by grace through faith in place of his righteousness of works.

*

Q2: Can you explain how Jesus' words from verse 18 force the man to recognize that his only hope was in total reliance on God?

NIV SB: 10:18 Why do you call me good? Jesus was not denying his own goodness but was forcing the man to recognize that his only hope was in total reliance on God, who alone can give eternal life. He may also have been encouraging the young man to consider the full identity and nature of the One he was addressing.

A2: What I would say on this is that having one's assumptions about "goodness" shot down like this was a critical part of prompting the man's reevaluation of his system of works-righteousness. Obviously, only God is good. So how in the world can we be "good" on our own merits; and if we are not "good" in an absolute sense, how do we expect to be found acceptable by Him? That is the

calculus that God has painted across creation in broad strokes; only by adopting a pseudo-system of "goodness" can anyone ever come to imagine they have achieved it on their own.

*

Q3: Can we draw the conclusion from this verse that the young man has made a definite decision to choose wealth, rather than simply leaving in sadness, seeing the difficulty of following our Lord?

10:22 He went away sad, because he had great wealth. The tragic decision to turn away reflected a greater love for his possessions than for eternal life (see 4:19 and note).

A3: Clearly not. Our Lord gave him something to "chew on" that would lead him to reevaluate his presuppositions about life's most important questions. If and/or when He decided to make a right choice we will have to wait to find out. But the purpose of the event and its recording is to place that same choice before everyone who reads the gospel.

Mark 10:24 (NIV)

24 The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is^[a] to enter the kingdom of God!

a. Mark 10:24 Some manuscripts is for those who trust in riches

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Q: Could you relate to the footnote?

A: The addition is an explanation – added no doubt to assuage the anxiety of those who read this – which occurs in some good, ancient mss. (A and C, for example), but not in Aleph or B (for example). It's best to see the erroneous addition as an explanation along the lines discussed. Indeed, **it is** impossible to enter the kingdom of God – without someone to die for your sins. Our attitude towards worldly things and innate desire for worldly security is a symptom of our recognition of that supreme existential difficulty.

Mark 10:25 (NASB)

25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

*

Mark 10:31 (NASB)

31 But many who are first will be last, and the last, first."

NIVS SB: 10:31 first will be last. A warning against pride in sacrificial accomplishments such as Peter had manifested (v. 28; see vv. 42-44 and note on v. 43).

*

Q: This is an interesting point. I thought that what our Lord means here is that the apostles may appear as last, but will be first, but the note suggests that it's a "warning against pride in sacrificial accomplishments". What is your take on this verse?

A: You are correct. It's an encouragement. I cover this sentiment in CT 6 at the link:

Mark 10:41 (NASB)

41 Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John.

NIV SB: 10:41 the ten. The other disciples. indignant. Possibly because they desired the positions of prestige and power for themselves.

*

Q: Would you agree that this was the reason why the disciples felt indignant?

A: They were reacting in a worldly and fleshly manner to a worldly and fleshly request. The disciples were human, and they didn't yet have the permanent indwelling of the Spirit (and had proved reluctant to appropriate the Spirit's presence in their daily walk). It seems to me more of a typical jealous reaction to the perception that someone is getting an unfair advantage (which of course was not actually the case – and that was the wrong way entirely to think about these matters in any case).

Mark 10:46 (NASB)

46 Then they *came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road.

NIV SB: 10:46 Jericho. A very ancient city located five miles west of the Jordan and about 15 miles northeast of Jerusalem. In Jesus' time OT Jericho was largely abandoned, but a new city, south of the old one, had been built by Herod the Great. leaving the city. Luke says Jesus "approached Jericho" (Lk 18:35). He may have been referring to the new Jericho, while Matthew (20:29) and Mark may have meant the old city.

*

Q: What is the best way to reconcile the two accounts of "leaving the city" and "approached Jericho"?

A: Here is what I wrote about this in the Matthew questions:

I'm not sure that the two are not a different incident, but it is true that Matthew often calls attention to all participants instead of the most prominent one (as in the case of the Gadarene demoniac: Matt.8:28ff.; see the link). As to where the incident involving Bar-Timaeus took place, I don't think that in fact the accounts of Mark and Luke are irreconcilable. Mark says in verse 46b, "while He was going through [the city] away from Jericho" – which two phrases taken together most likely mean "moving away from the city center but still technically in the greater area called "Jericho". Luke says in verse 36 that Bar-Timaeus heard the noise of the crowd "passing through" i.e., the center of town (verse 35 says that he was sitting by the road (no doubt on the far side of the town) when Jesus had approached the city from the east. After the healing, Luke has in verse one of chapter nineteen, "and having come in (i.e., to the city), He passed [completely] through Jericho". This means that Bar-Timaeus was sitting in the "suburbs", so to speak, on the west side, but still in what was known as "Jericho". In fact, that is the only way to understand *eiselthon* in verse one of chapter nineteen. So Luke adds a wonderful detail explaining how the blind man could have gotten prepared (physically and also in his heart) for what he would do when Jesus came by.

Mark 11:14 (NASB)

14 He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" And His disciples were listening.

NIV SB: 11:14 May no one ever eat fruit from you again. Perhaps the incident was a parable of judgment, with the fig tree representing Israel (see Jer 24:1; Hos 9:10 and notes; Na 3:12). A tree full of leaves normally should have fruit, but this one was cursed because it had none. The fact that the clearing of the temple (vv. 15-19) is sandwiched

between the two parts of the account of the fig tree (vv. 12-14, 20-25) may underscore the theme of judgment (see v. 21 and note). The only application Jesus explicitly makes, however, is as an illustration of believing prayer (vv. 21-25).

*

Q: Would you agree that the theme of judgment is present in the cursing of the fig tree and it being withered, even though our Lord only makes a reference to a prayer offered in belief?

A: I believe we are to take this as representative of the unproductive nature of the nation of Israel at that time (cf. Lk.13:6-9), destined to continue by and large through the Church Age – with the exception of Jewish believers; however, the blossoming our Lord predicts as a sign of the coming second advent is a prophecy of Israel regaining the leadership role in the Church during the Tribulation (Lk.29:29-31).

Mark 11:19 (NIV)

19 When evening came, Jesus and his disciples^[a] went out of the city.

a. Mark 11:19 Some early manuscripts came, Jesus

*

Q: What should the scripture say here?

A: The text has "[He] went out", but some mss. have "[They] went out". Clearly, the disciples went with our Lord, but since He is the focus, it is acceptable and rather common in Greek usage to mention only the leader and to understand that of course His followers went with Him. No ms. of which I am aware has either the word "Jesus" or the words "Jesus and his disciples"; so I think the note writer has misunderstood the textual issue here.

Mark 11:21 (NASB)

21 Being reminded, Peter *said to Him, "Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered."

NIV SB: 11:21 Rabbi. Hebrew for "(my) teacher." fig tree you cursed. See note on v. 14. has withered. Perhaps prophetic of the fate of the Jewish authorities who were now about to reject their Messiah.

*

Q: Would you agree that the withering of the tree stands as a symbol of the fate of Jewish authorities?

A: I would rather see this in the way described in the pervious verse/Q-A.

Mark 11:25-26 (NIV)

25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." [26] ^[a]

a. Mark 11:26 Some manuscripts include here words similar to Matt. 6:15.

*

Q: Should the words similar to Matthew 6:15 be included as verse 26?

A: No. Another example of Marcan economy – and of a scribe's desire to harmonize the text (motivation unclear). Lots of mss. evidence for verse 26 being an interpolation.

Mark 11:30 (NASB)

30 Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men? Answer Me."

NIV SB: 11:30 from heaven, or of human origin? "Heaven" was a common Jewish substitute for the divine name to avoid a possible misuse of God's name (see Ex 20:7 and note; see also Introduction to Matthew: Recipients). Jesus' question implied that his authority, like that of John's baptism, came from God.

*

Q: Do you agree that Jesus used the word "heaven" not to use the divine name of God?

A: Our Lord uses the divine Names in many instances so seeing this usage as a periphrasis is not the entire answer. No doubt on the one hand this makes the answer more acceptable to the Pharisees in the way it is framed; but more to the point it makes the attribution of John's ministry a bit more vague than saying directly "Do you think that God sent him?" Saying it the way our Lord said it took away any feigned sense of outrage the Pharisees might have chosen to demonstrate as a false issue and made the true issue of Christ's genuine authority all that much more clear.

1 And He began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted A vineyard and put A wall around it, and dug A vat under the wine press and built A tower, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. 2 At the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive some of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers. 3 They took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 4 Again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. 5 And he sent another, and that one they killed; and so with many others, beating some and killing others. 6 He had one more to send, a beloved son; he sent him last of all to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 7 But those vine-growers said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!' 8 They took him, and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. 9 What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others. 10 Have you not even read this Scripture:

'The stone which the builders rejected,

This became the chief corner stone;

11 This came about from the Lord,

And it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

12 And they were seeking to seize Him, and yet they feared the people, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And so they left Him and went away.

*

Parable of the Tenants (NIV) / Vine-growers (NASB)

See also Matthew 21:33-46.

A1: As it says in verse 45: "Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them". These leaders of the Jewish state and religion had purloined the vineyard and were using it to their own advantage, meaning that they were not doing what God wanted (learning and teaching the truth), but merely supporting their comfortable lifestyles through mulcting the nation; when the Messiah came, therefore, they would do to Him as they had done to all God's prophets who had likewise called them to account.

*

Q2:

Matthew 21:44 (NIV1984)

44 He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."^[a]

Matthew 21:44 Some manuscripts do not have verse 44.

Could you comment on the point made in the footnote?

A2: Verse 44 is part of the text and is in most of the most ancient mss. Some critics want to exclude it because of its similarity to Luke 20:18 and because it is absent in one strain of text. Please see the fine analysis in Metzger's *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London 1970).

Mark 12:23 (NIV)

23 At the resurrection^[a] whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

a. Mark 12:23 Some manuscripts resurrection, when people rise from the dead,

*

Q: What should the scripture say here, considering the point in the footnote?

A: A very few later mss. add after "at the resurrection" the clause "when they rise"; it's a superfluous explanation (or "gloss"), and is not a part of the original.

Mark 12:34 (NASB)

34 When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.

*

Q: Why is it after these words spoken by Jesus that "no one would venture to ask Him any more questions"?

A: This is what actually happened. As to why it should have happened, all I can do is to extrapolate from personal experience. There have been times when I was at a presentation where there were questions following and the presenter was so on top of his/her subject and so direct and effective in smashing skeptical follow-up questions that no one else was willing to put their ego on the line to do likewise, even in a group of "experts". That seems to be along the lines of what happened here.

Mark 12:35-37 (NASB Strong's)

35 And Jesus began to say, as He taught in the temple, "How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? 36 David himself said in the Holy Spirit,

'The Lord said to my Lord,

"Sit at MY right hand,

Until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet."

37 David himself calls Him 'Lord'; so in what sense is He his son?" And the large crowd enjoyed listening to Him.

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Matthew 22:41-42 (NASB)

41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question: 42 "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" They *said to Him, "The son of David."

Q: Was this question by our Lord in any way linked to the previous test by the Pharisee (verse 36 - "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?")?

A: At this point of finally being asked the right question and having received an affirmation from at least one of their number as to what was really important in the Law, our Lord slices through several layers of pharisaical thinking to expose the hollowness of all of their unbelieving thoughts towards Him. For by asking this question Jesus makes it clear that the Son of David, the Messiah, had to be also the Son of God, divine as well as human, otherwise David would not be subordinate to Him (calling Him "Lord").

Mark 13:4 (NASB)

4 "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?"

NIV SB: 13:4 The disciples thought that the destruction of the temple would be one of the events that ushered in the end times (see Mt 24:3 and note). sign. The way by which the disciples might know that the destruction of the temple was about to take place and that the end of the age was approaching.

*

Q: How can we know that "The disciples thought that the destruction of the temple would be one of the events that ushered in the end times"? On what basis did the disciples link the destruction of the temple with the end times?

A: We can't – and, apart from what our Lord said about "not one stone" remaining on another, I don't think they would have had any such idea (that would be the link you ask about, namely, what our Lord had just said to them prior to their question). After all, the biggest problem with the contemporary eschatological view which caused many to stumble over the truth Messiah was that they all expected that the next thing would be "kingdom come"; whereas in fact the cross had to come first.

Mark 13:14 (NASB)

14 "But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.

NIV SB: 13:14 abomination that causes desolation. See note on Mt 24:15. standing where it does not belong. Cf. 2Th 2:4 and note. let the reader understand. This may be Mark's own narrative comment alerting the reader to the imminent fulfillment of this prophecy in the destruction of Jerusalem (but see note on Mt 24:15). flee to the mountains. See note on Mt 24:16.

*

Q1: Were the words "let the reader understand" spoken by our Lord or added by Mark?

A1: This was spoken by our Lord and refers to prophecy in Daniel – that is what should be "read and understood" in order to fully grasp the specifics of the eschatology. Matthew has a fuller version of what our Lord said on this occasion which includes the phrase "spoken of through Daniel the prophet". It is to that reference that the aside is applied by our Lord (Marcan economy leaves this out – it would be known from Matthew's earlier gospel).

*

Q2: I'm not sure about the exact meaning of the Greek verb *anagignosko* from which the participle is derived, but if it is to be rendered as "reader", then wouldn't it make it more likely to be a writer's note rather than the speaker's?

A: Not if the speaker is talking to the audience about a book and how they should "read it" (as is the case here).

Mark 13:30 (NASB)

30 Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

*

Q1: Should we take "this generation" in this verse as referring to the contemporaries of our Lord who would witness the destruction of Jerusalem, or does Jesus here refer to those who would experience the days preceding His second coming? If it's the latter, why does He say "this generation"?

A1: "This generation" is referring not to a chronological "generation" in the sense in which we employ the English word, but to a "type" of person which will be typical of the Jewish race until the Messiah's return, namely, hardened against the entire idea of a suffering Messiah who as God and man would die for the sins of the world. More and more links at this link: "The Two Witnesses"

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Q2: I know that his is a rather lengthy inclusion, but I wanted to ask your opinion on the following chronological breakdown of the Passion week included in NIV SB - do you agree with what is given in it and the sequence and dates of events?

PASSION WEEK: Bethany, the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem: The Roman road climbed steeply to the crest of the Mount of Olives, affording spectacular views of the Desert of Judea to the east and of Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley to the west. 1. Arrival in Bethany FRIDAY (Jn 12:1) Jesus arrived in Bethany six days before the Passover to spend some time with his friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus. On the following Tuesday evening, while Jesus was still in Bethany, Mary anointed his feet with costly perfume as an act of humility. This tender expression indicated Mary's devotion to Jesus and her willingness to serve him. 2. Sabbath-day of rest SATURDAY Not mentioned in the Gospels. The Lord spent the Sabbath day in traditional fashion with his friends. 3. The "Triumphal" Entry SUNDAY (Mt 21:1-11; Mk 11:1-11; Lk 19:28-44; Jn 12:12-19) On the first day of the week Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, fulfilling an ancient prophecy (Zec 9:9). The crowd welcomed him with the words of Ps 118:25-26, thus ascribing to him

a Messianic title as the agent of the Lord, the coming King of Israel. 4. Clearing of the temple MONDAY (Mt 21:12-17; Mk 11:15-18; Lk 19:45-48) Jesus returned to the temple and found the court of the Gentiles full of traders and money changers making a large profit. Jesus drove them out and overturned their benches and tables. 5. Day of controversy and parables TUESDAY (Mt 21:23-24:51; Mk 11:27-13:37; Lk 20:1-21:36) IN JERUSALEM Jesus evaded the traps set by the priests. ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES OVERLOOKING JERUSALEM (Tuesday afternoon, exact location unknown) Jesus taught in parables and warned the people against the Pharisees. He predicted the destruction of Herod's great temple and told his disciples about future events, including his own return. Day of rest WEDNESDAY Although the Gospels do not mention this day, the counting of the days (Mk 14:1; Jn 12:1) seems to indicate that there was another day about which the Gospels record nothing. 6. Passover, Last Supper THURSDAY (Mt 26:17-30; Mk 14:12-26; Lk 22:7-23) In an upper room Jesus prepared both himself and his disciples for his death. He gave the Passover meal a new meaning. The loaf of bread and cup of wine represented his body soon to be sacrificed and his blood soon to be shed. And so he instituted the "Lord's Supper." After singing a hymn they went to Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed in agony, knowing what lay ahead for him. 7. Crucifixion FRIDAY (Mt 27; Mk 15; Lk 22:66-23:56; Jn 18:28-19:37) Following betrayal, arrest, desertion, false trials, denial, condemnation, beatings and mockery, Jesus was required to carry his cross to "the place of the skull" (Mt 27:33), where he was crucified with two other prisoners. 8. In the tomb Jesus' body was placed in the tomb before 6:00 p. m. Friday evening, when the Sabbath began and all work stopped, and it lay in the tomb throughout the Sabbath. 9. Resurrection SUNDAY (Mt 28:1-10; Mk 16:1-8; Lk 24:1-49; Jn 20) Early in the morning, women went to the tomb and found that the stone closing the tomb's entrance had been rolled back. An angel told them Jesus was alive and gave them a message. Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden, to Peter, to two disciples on the road to Emmaus and later that day to all the disciples but Thomas.

A2: Not entirely, although this is helpful. Another helpful (and not entirely correct) treatment can be found in chart form in Thomas and Gundry's *A Harmony of the Gospels* (p. 349). Rather than dissect this piece by piece, since you don't have specific questions about it, I would ask you to please have a look at BB 4A where these things are discussed including the chronological issues: "The Last Passover"

Mark 14:3 (NASB)

3 While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head.

NIV SB: 14:3-9 In John's Gospel this incident is placed before the beginning of Passion Week (see Jn 12:1-11 and note). Matthew and Mark may have placed it here to contrast the hatred of the religious leaders and the betrayal by Judas with the love and devotion of the woman who anointed Jesus.

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Q: Do you agree with the reason given in NIV SB for Matthew's and Mark's placing this incident differently than John? John 12:1-3 says that Jesus came to Bethany "six days before the Passover":

John 12:1-3 (NASB)

12 Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him. 3 Mary then took a [a]pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

But Mark 14:1 says that the Passover was only "two days away".

A: Mark is filling in this incident: "Now while He had been in Bethany (i.e., several days earlier) . . .". The NIV SB note has value and may provide a possible explanation for the way Mark (and Matthew) have told the story somewhat differently under the Spirit's guidance, but I don't think we can be dogmatic about it.

Mark 14:4 (NASB)

4 But some were indignantly remarking to one another, "Why has this perfume been wasted?"

NIV SB: 14:4 Some of those present. Mt 26:8 identifies them as the disciples, while Jn 12:4-5 singles out Judas Iscariot.

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Q: Should we understand that more than Judas opposed, but he is the one who uttered these words?

A: The Greek states that all of these "some" were discussing the matter; Judas is singled out for his complete hypocrisy.

Mark 14:8 (NASB)

8 She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial.

NIV SB: 14:8 prepare for my burial. It was a normal Jewish custom to anoint a dead body with aromatic oils in preparing it for burial (see 16:1 and note). Jesus seems to anticipate suffering a criminal's death, for only in that circumstance was there no anointing of the body.

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Q: Could you explain this note - If there was no anointing for the body when one was to suffer criminal's death, then why, based on this, the note says that Jesus seems to anticipate such death?

A: Mary's action will be retold "in memory of her" because she was apparently the **only one** who "got" what Jesus had been telling them all over and over again for at least the better part of a year, namely, that He as the Christ had to suffer death to provide salvation (cf. Is.53:1ff.). I think getting into the weeds on this other point is therefore a mistake which distracts from the point the Spirit is making here of praising Mary's listening **and believing** what the Lord had said.

Mark 14:17 (NASB)

17 When it was evening He came with the twelve.

NIV SB: 14:17 evening. Thursday of Passion Week.

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Q: How do we know it was Thursday?

A: He rose on Sunday; therefore He was crucified on Friday (three days counting inclusively according to the Jewish system); therefore the night before was Thursday (as we see things in our 24 hour clock). There is a good deal about this at Ichthys because a lot of people make a great deal

about the chronology here, although it is rather insignificant spiritually speaking. See the link: "Aspects of the Crucifixion"

Mark 14:18 (NASB)

18 As they were reclining at the table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me—one who is eating with Me."

NIV SB: 14:18 reclining at the table eating. Originally the Passover meal was eaten standing (see Ex 12:11), but in Jesus' time it was customary to eat it while reclining (cf. v. 3 and note). Truly I tell you. See note on 3:28.

*

Q: There seems to be no reference made to the Passover being eaten standing in Exodus 12:11?

A: When I read "This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's Passover.", while standing is not mentioned, the context was of removing oneself from Egypt as soon as possible, and that is why the person would be holding his staff (usually only done when standing), i.e., being on the point of walking out.

Mark 14:24 (NIV)

24 "This is my blood of the^[a] covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them.

a. Mark 14:24 Some manuscripts the new

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Q: Should the passage say "the covenant" or "the new covenant"?

A: Many ms. have "new" but Sinaiticus does not. It is obvious that this is what is meant, however, so the Spirit has allowed the word "covenant" alone to have that force of change here (instead of the word "new" which attracts our attention in Luke).

Mark 14:43 (NASB)

43 Immediately while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, *came up accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, who were from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.

NIV SB: 14:43 Judas. See note on 3:19. crowd armed with swords and clubs. Auxiliary police or servants of the court assigned to the task of maintaining public order beyond the precincts of the temple. Jn 18:3 indicates that at least some of the Roman cohort of soldiers were in the arresting group, along with officers of the temple guard. The fact that some carried clubs suggests that they were conscripted at the last moment. chief priests ... teachers of the law ... elders. See notes on 8:31; Mt 2:4. The warrant for Jesus' arrest had been issued by the Sanhedrin.

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Q: Do you agree that carrying clubs indicates that some of those who came were conscripted at the last moment?

A: Judea was a Roman protectorate, and while we may not know the specifics of just exactly how the Romans exercised their authority in Jerusalem, it was standard Roman practice to ban weapons, and particularly the carrying of weapons, within metropolitan areas – except by authorized persons. The temple guards would be an example of such an authorized group as were, apparently, Herod's soldiers. The opponents of our Lord thought of Him and His followers as revolutionaries and no doubt anticipated an armed struggle; for that reason they would want to mobilize as many people as possible. This would include all the "retainers" (or clients, in the Roman way of thinking about these things) of the wealthy men who agreed with this night-time attack. Arming these men with swords, even if such weapons were available (which is questionable in Jerusalem under Roman rule) would be a risky policy. The Romans hadn't been a party to this raid – the plan was to get Pilate's support later – and they would not be keen about large armed bans who were not authorized to carry weapons wandering about in the night.

Mark 14:53-15:15

NIV SB: 14:53-15:15 Jesus' trial took place in two stages: a Jewish trial and a Roman trial. By harmonizing the four Gospels, it becomes clear that each trial had three episodes. For the Jewish trial these were:(1) the preliminary hearing before Annas, the former high priest (reported only in Jn 18:12-14, 19-23); (2) the trial before Caiaphas, the ruling high priest, and the Sanhedrin (14:53-65; see Mt 26:57-68; Lk 22:54-65; Jn 18:24); and (3) the final action of the council, which terminated its all- night session (15:1; see Mt 27:1; Lk 22:66-71). The three episodes of the Roman trial were:(1) the trial before Pilate (15:2-5; see Mt 27:11-26; Lk 23:1-5; Jn 18:28-19:16); (2) the trial before Herod Antipas (only in Lk

23:6-12); and (3) the trial before Pilate continued and concluded (15:6-15). Since Matthew, Mark and John give no account of Jesus before Herod Antipas, the trial before Pilate forms a continuous and uninterrupted narrative in these Gospels.

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Q1: Do you agree with the outline given here?

A1: Yes, for the most part. Please see the link in BB 4A where this is outlined in detail: "The Seven Trials of Christ"

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A2:

The Seven Trials of Christ – Excerpt from BB 4A Christology

The Seven Trials of Christ: In biblical symbolism, while seven is the number of perfection and thus the number of God (e.g., the seventh day, the Millennium, and the seven Edens), six is the number of Man (i.e., created on the sixth day and being incomplete without the addition of the One, Jesus Christ). It is thus no accident that our Lord was made to undergo six trials at the hands of human beings before being judged in the darkness on the cross by the Father in our place. In each of these trials, Jesus was irrefutably innocent but nonetheless condemned, the perfect Lamb of sacrifice without spot or blemish being condemned to death as a substitute for our sins. And in each of the trials conducted by human agency, our Lord was not only condemned but also abused physically and mentally. Nonetheless, though we would be hard-pressed to endure any one such of these six trials, for our Lord they were but a prelude designed to demonstrate His mettle and His perfection before the trial of trials began on the cross itself.

This gauntlet of abuse, unprecedented in human history and never to be remotely duplicated, constitutes the final prophesied humiliation of the Messiah. The suffering and humiliation of our Lord Jesus is a recurrent theme in Old Testament prophecy, and an unmistakable one at that (cf. Is.52-53), even though, because it was so “uncomfortable”, it was rejected by Jesus' contemporaries as they rejected Jesus Himself, an outcome which was itself part of His suffering and humiliation (Ps.22:6; 118:22; Is.53:3; Mk.9:12; 1Pet.2:4). Thus the portions of scripture which prophesy this were later occasionally obscured deliberately as in the case of the incorrect traditional vocalization of Psalm 118:21 (covered in fn. #66 above under “Triumphal Entry”). We have already discussed the betrayal of our Lord (prophesied: “my companion, my close friend” Ps.55:13-14; cf. Ps.41:9), His abandonment by the disciples (prophesied: “strike the shepherd”:

Zech.13:7; and see below on Peter's three denials), and are about to consider the trials our Lord would have to endure which in terms of process and outcome could not have been further removed from any notion of basic justice (prophesied: “they hated Me without cause”: Jn.15:25; cf. Ps.35:19; Ps.69:4; Is.52:13-53:12). All of these things contributed greatly to the suffering or “passion” of our Lord to a degree that is easy to miss when merely reading about them in the comfort of our homes. Being betrayed unto death by someone you have cared about and sought to help for years is no small matter, nor is being abandoned and denied by your entire inner circle of closest companions in your hour of greatest need.

Finally, before coming to the crucifixion itself, the six trials of Christ were unquestionably a heavy load beyond anything any of us could ever hope to bear – and especially beyond anything we could hope to bear up under with perfectly sanctified behavior in the manner of our Lord. For beyond the physical suffering, the beating and the scourging, and beyond the mental anguish from the slander, blasphemy, spitting and mocking, the very fact of being condemned by a judicial proceeding, being found to be a wicked person, a lawbreaker and someone to be shunned by any decent citizen, to be set upon by an angry crowd maligning you and calling for your death, are terrible things to have to suffer, especially if completely untrue, unfair and unjust. For any of the rest of us, complete innocence in any matter is problematic, sinners that we are, but no one was ever more completely and demonstrably innocent of all wrong doing or of even of the appearance of it than was our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet He was condemned six times, rejected even from the consideration of clemency in favor of a genuine criminal (Barabas) by those He had come to save.

We probably will never be able to appreciate fully the emotional suffering of our Lord in all that He endured before the cross, in addition to the physical suffering to which He was subjected throughout those final hours before Golgotha, forced also to bear up under the temptation to indulge in extreme bitterness and anger, rejected, abandoned and abused by everyone as He was. When we add to this His mental anticipation of dying for the sins of the world, a consideration which His prayers in the garden of Gethsemane demonstrate as being out of all proportion to any of these other considerations to the point where they are not even mentioned therein (i.e., His death for sin on the cross is the “cup” to which He refers; see above under “The Last Supper”). **Nevertheless, as we consider this part of our Lord's “passion”, it is absolutely critical for us who call ourselves Christians to understand that all these things which Christ suffered before the cross and which constitute His prophesied humiliation did not expiate our sins. *It was the judgment of our Lord Jesus in the darkness on the cross which washed those sins away, and***

not the unimaginable physical and emotional sufferings that preceded the cross, the event which, from the proper divine point of view, is history.

Why, then, did Jesus have to go through this gauntlet of gauntlets even to get to the cross where He bore our sins “in His body on the tree” (1Pet.2:24)? Without question all of this preliminary suffering fulfilled a whole host of Old Testament prophecies (cf. Acts 13:27-29). And without question the devil did all that he possibly could to prevent Jesus from reaching the cross in a manner acceptable to the Father and as an acceptable Substitute for our sins, for that was where the victory in the unseen conflict raging around us was finally and definitively won with eternal results (Jn.16:33; Rom.14:9-10; Eph.1:19b-23; Phil.2:9-11; Col.2:15; Rev.5:5-14; cf. Eph.4:8-10).(71) What we can also say, moreover, is that our Lord's resolute and unwavering negotiation of this final gauntlet serves to provide a vivid demonstration of His boundless love for us, and for the entire world.

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.

John 13:1 KJV

For God loved the world so much that He gave [up] His only Son, [with the purpose] that everyone who believes in Him should not be lost [forever], but have eternal life [instead].

John 3:16

But short of Satan's physical prevention of our Lord (something he was clearly not allowed to do), nothing could stop Him from carrying out the Father's will to the end, no matter how hard, how painful, how emotionally or physically searing it proved to be, and not even when what lay beyond the gauntlet of pain and humiliation was something so incredibly impossible and horrifying that we are incapable of even dimly understanding it this side of heaven – standing judgment and dying for our sins, and for those of the entire world. In this as in everything important, Jesus is our role model, and just as He did, so we too are to carry our cross and do whatever God puts in front of us. But we can rest assured that whatever this may be it will never approach what Jesus went through, and that on the other side of whatever gauntlet we may face, even if martyrdom be our lot in the midst of the Great Tribulation to come, rather than undergoing anything like the ultimate sacrifice

made by our Lord, we instead will be liberated from any further suffering and find ourselves standing before Him there in the third heaven with a “well done” for following Him and His example, “sharing the sufferings of Christ” (1Pet.4:13; cf. Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.3:10; Col.1:24).

(13) Behold, My Servant will embrace the truth. He will arise on high, be lifted up, and be greatly exalted, (14) to a proportional degree that many had [previously] been appalled at Him. For His appearance had been marred beyond human [likeness], and His form more than [that of any] other man. (15) As a result, He shall sprinkle [with salvation] many gentile [nation]s. Kings will shut their mouths at [the sight of] Him. For those [gentiles] who had not been told shall see, and those [gentiles] who had not understood shall hear. (1) [But] who has believed our report? And to whom has the Arm of the Lord (i.e., the Messiah) been revealed? (2) For He grew up before Him like a suckling plant, like a root [springing up] from dry ground. He had no [particular] handsomeness that we should take note of Him, no [obvious] charisma that we should be taken with Him. (3) [On the contrary,] He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with suffering. Like a person people hide their faces from, He was despised, and we did not hold Him of any account. (4) For He took away our torments, and He shouldered our weaknesses. And yet we considered Him as [the One who had been] punished, smitten and afflicted by God. (5) But [in fact] He was made subject to torment on account of our transgressions, and He was crushed because of our collective guilt (lit., “guilts”). The punishment [required] for making peace [with God] on our behalf [fell] upon Him. Because of His wounding, we have been healed. (6) We have all gone astray like sheep. Each of us has turned to his own way. And the Lord caused the guilt of us all to strike Him. (7) Though He was oppressed and afflicted, like a lamb led to slaughter He did not open His mouth, and like a ewe before her shearers He did not open His mouth. (8) By repressive judgment He was taken away, and who gave any thought to His posterity? For He was cut off from the land of the living. He was punished for the transgression of my people. (9) And they assigned Him a grave with the wicked (pl.) and with a rich [man] in His deaths (sic). Not for any violence that He had done. Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. (10) For it was the Lord's good pleasure (i.e., “will”) to crush Him, to subject Him to torment. But though you make His life a guilt offering, He will see His seed, He will lengthen His days, and the good pleasure (i.e., “will”) of the Lord will prosper in His hand. (11) [Released] from the trouble [inflicted] upon His life, He will [again] see [the light of life] and be satisfied (i.e., in resurrection). My righteous Servant will provide righteousness for the great [of heart] (i.e., believers) through the[ir] acknowledgment of Him, and He Himself will shoulder their guilt (lit., “guilts”). (12) Therefore I will allot the great [of heart] to Him [as His portion of the plunder], and He will apportion plunder to these [same] mighty [of heart]. Because He bared His life to death and was numbered with the transgressors,

thereby He took away the sin of the great [of heart] and substituted [Himself] for the transgressors.

Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12

(6) 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. (7) For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.

Isaiah 50:6-7 KJV

(1) My God, My God, why did You forsake Me? [Why were You so] far from saving Me, [so far] from [answering] the words I roared forth?

Psalm 22:1

(6) But I am a worm, not a man, the reproach of mankind and One rejected by the people. (7) All who see Me, mock Me. They open wide their mouths. They shake their heads [at Me]. (8) "He relies on God. Let Him rescue Him! Let Him deliver Him, if He takes pleasure in Him" (cf. Matt.27:39-43; Mk.15:27-32; Lk.23:35-37). (9) For You are the One who cut Me out of the womb. You are the One who made Me trust in You on my mother's breasts. (10) I was cast upon (i.e., made to rely upon) You from the womb (i.e., immediately after birth). [Since the moment I came] from out of the womb You have been my God. (11) Be not far from Me, for trouble is near, for there is no one [else] to help [Me]. (12) [Like] many bulls they have encircled Me. [Like] strong bulls from Bashan they have surrounded Me. (13) They open their mouths against Me [like] roaring lions about to pounce on their prey. (14) I am poured out like water, and all My bones are being stretched apart. My heart has become like wax. It is melting inside of Me. (15) My strength is evaporating like a broken piece of pottery, and My tongue is sticking to the roof of My mouth [with thirst]. For You (cf. vv.1-2) have set Me ablaze in the dust of death. (16) For they have surrounded Me [like] dogs. [This] congregation of evil-doers has encompassed Me. They have pierced My hands and My feet. (17) I can count all My bones. [While] they look on and stare at Me, (18) they are dividing up My clothes for themselves, and for My garments they are casting lots. (19) But You, Lord, be not far off! O My God, hurry to My help! (20) Deliver My life

from the sword, My precious [life] from the power of [these] dog[s]! (21) Save Me from the mouth of the lion! Answer Me from amid the horns of these wild oxen!

Psalm 22:6-21

Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.

Psalm 41:9 NIV

(12) If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. (13) But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, (14) with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God.

Psalm 55:12-14 NIV

For they mixed gall with what they gave Me to eat, and for My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink.

Psalm 69:21 (cf. vv.19-21; Matt.27:34; 27:48; Mk.15:23; 15:36; Lk.23:36; Jn.19:29)

(50) Remember, Lord, how your servant has been mocked, how I bear in my heart the taunts of all the nations, (51) the taunts with which your enemies have mocked, O Lord, with which they have mocked every step of your anointed one.

Psalm 89:50-51 NIV

The Stone which the builders rejected has become the Cornerstone.

Psalm 118:22

For they have struck on the cheek with a rod the Judge of Israel.

Micah 5:1b

In addition to the beating, spitting, mocking, lying, cursing, betrayal, rejection and all of the other things He had to endure, it should be noted as well that besides being a particularly painful form of execution, the fact that our Lord was crucified (as opposed to being stoned to death or beheaded), constituted a part of His humiliation as well. For there was a certain amount of shame involved in this type of death (cf. Heb.12:2), since it proclaimed the person in question as being “under a curse” (Deut.21:23; Gal.3:13).

He made Him who had no [personal] experience of sinning [to be] sin (i.e., a sin offering) for us, so that we might have God's righteousness in Him.

2nd Corinthians 5:21

. . . [Moses] considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches than the treasure vaults of Egypt. For he was looking to his reward.

Hebrews 11:26

Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Keep in mind all the terrible opposition He endured against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as not to grow sick at heart and give up.

Hebrews 12:1-3

So let us go outside the camp to Him, bearing His reproach.

Hebrews 13:13

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we might die to sins and live to righteousness. By His wound you are healed.

1st Peter 2:24

But before the ultimate trial of the crucifixion itself and the death for sin He would die on our behalf in the darkness while hung on the cross, our Lord, though completely innocent, would be made to undergo six prior trials at the hands of sinful human beings, and be abused, rejected and condemned by mere men for whom He was about to die.

1) The Trial before Annas (Jn.18:12-24)

In our Lord's day the high-priesthood had become a largely political office. Annas, though no longer holding the office, was Caiaphas' father-in-law and the apparent power behind the throne, so it was to him that our Lord was first brought after being arrested in the garden of Gethsemane. Under intense interrogation, Jesus refused to answer questions about His disciples and remained unintimidated in spite of physical abuse (cf. Jn.18:21-23 with Is.50:8-9).

2) The Trial before Caiaphas (Matt.26:57-68; Mk.14:53-65)

From comparing the accounts of John and Matthew, it seems likely that Annas' residence shared an inner courtyard with the official residence of the high priest. As in the first interrogation, this trial must have taken place on the portico of the residence, for Peter is able to observe its progress, and our Lord is able to see Peter immediately after his third denial (Lk.22:61). While the first trial seems to have been focused upon gathering intelligence in order to round up all of our Lord's followers, this second trial seems to have served a probouleutic function, having the purpose of concocting an appropriate charge for a death penalty at once acceptable to and persuasive for the Roman governor. None of the witnesses interviewed provided anything convincing, however, and it was only when our Lord affirmed His status as the Messiah under direct questioning that His accusers became satisfied that they had enough evidence to convict Him. In the process of this trial, Jesus was spit upon, slapped, beaten, blindfolded, and mocked.

3) The Trial before the Sanhedrin (Matt.27:1; Mk.15:1a; Lk.22:66-71; cf. Jn.18:28)

While the first two trials took place in close geographic proximity, probably just before dawn our Lord was marched to the council house where the Jewish senate or Sanhedrin met. All four of the

gospels indicate that this third trial, coming very shortly after the second and, with Peter's denials sandwiched in between them, that it took place at day break. The purpose of this trial before the most politically powerful individuals in Jerusalem and Judea (outside of the Roman governor and his staff) was merely to place a formal “rubber stamp” on the charge prepared by the high priest. The details of this trial are recorded only in Luke and the only accusation about which our Lord is asked is the same one which caused Caiaphas to rend his garments:

And they all said, “Are you the Son of God then?” And He said to them, “Yes I am.”

Luke 22:70 NASB

The outcome of this apparently very short trial was a rapid sentence of condemnation, after which our Lord was led, bound, to the praetorium or headquarters of the Roman governor (Matt.27:2).

4) The Trial before Pilate: First Phase (Matt.27:11-14; Mk.15:1b-5; Lk.23:1-5; Jn.18:28-38)

Bringing our Lord before Pilate was necessary inasmuch as that in Judea, being a Roman protectorate, the power of capital punishment was reserved for the Roman governor (Jn.18:31). (72) That was the sole purpose of the change of venue. For inasmuch as the rulers of Israel had determined that Jesus should die, the only thing left was effecting this decision, and that required persuading the Roman governor to acquiesce in their sentence of death. For this purpose, the priests, elders, scribes and Pharisees were willing to resort to any sort of falsity, and were clearly irritated that they had to provide any sort of rationale for a decision they had already reached (“If this man were not doing wrong, we would not have handed him over to you”; Jn.18:30). Luke records a threefold indictment in response to Pilate's demand for a reason to execute Jesus:

“We discovered this man [1] misleading our people and [2] preventing [us from] paying taxes to Caesar and [3] saying that he is Messiah, [that is,] king”.

Luke 23:2b

The idea that they had only just now “come upon” our Lord acting in a criminal way is designed to prejudice the entire proceeding (by removing any suspicion of jealousy for one thing). “Misleading the people” is an entirely generic charge and meant to give Pilate a reason to agree in case he might be inclined to give them a blank check without further ado. “Preventing the paying of taxes” is, of

course, a complete canard, for the command of our Lord to “render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's” had unquestionably become very well known. Resentment over the paying of tax to gentile occupiers and conspiring to avoid and resist such taxation was actually a crime of which these men were likely to have been guilty themselves. This second charge did, however, furnish Pilate with an appropriate rationale for granting an execution in case he were inclined to do so but not without at least a fig leaf of respectability. Finally, almost as an afterthought, they include the charge upon which the Sanhedrin had actually agreed: Jesus claimed to be the Messiah.⁽⁷³⁾ This was blasphemy in their unbelieving eyes, and they add the word “king” by way of explanation, no doubt because they knew very well that any claim of kingship as an alternative to Caesar, and especially one which claimed a divine mandate, was likely to be viewed as a traitorous threat by the Roman administration. They did not, however, count on Pilate's seeing through and dismissing the first two charges out of hand and concentrating on the third.

“Are you the king of the Jews?”

Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3; John 18:33

“You say [so].”

Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3; John 18:37

Only John records Jesus' more extended explanation. He is indeed a king, but His kingdom is not of this world. He has come to testify to the truth, not to replace any earthly rule (at this time). Pilate's infamous answer, “What is truth” (Jn.18:38), indicates that he understood quite clearly that our Lord was not instigating any sort of earthly rebellion. As a result, Pilate's first and just verdict was an easy one for him to render:

“I find no guilt in this man.”

Luke 23:4 (cf. John 18:38)

But this verdict was met with a vigorous appeal by the accusers against the acquitted. Contrary to every standard of justice, Pilate allowed this verbal onslaught to continue for some time and was “amazed” that our Lord did not respond to any further charges (Matt.27:14; Mk.15:5): Jesus had

cooperated with all the prior legal process to which He had been subjected despite its overwhelming unfairness. But having been officially acquitted, He was no longer bound by any standard of justice no matter how perverse to answer further, thus giving Pilate no further avenue of approach (despite his attempt to elicit one: “Don't you hear what terrible things they are accusing you of?”; Matt.27:13; Mk.15:4). This explains why Pilate seized on the fact that Jesus' ministry had begun in Galilee as soon as he was apprised of that fact (Lk.23:5-7).

5) The Trial before Herod (Lk.23:8-12)

Sending our Lord to Herod must have seemed to Pilate a perfect solution. It was a marvelous way of passing the responsibility off. Herod's father, Herod “the great”, had, after all, ruled Judea as king under a Roman protectorate which had only been dissolved upon his death (following the malfeasance of the eldest son, Herod Archelaus), and we may well imagine that this other son also had some hopes of regaining his father's position. If anyone was likely to take offense at someone else proclaiming themselves “king”, it was surely Herod. Herod's father had attempted to kill Jesus, and had killed the male children of Bethlehem (Matt.2:1-19), while his son, the present Herod (Antipas), had executed our Lord's herald, John the baptist (Matt.14:3-12; Mk.6:17-30; Lk.9:9). Thus, sending Jesus to Herod was far from a benign act, and that fact was surely not lost on our Lord. But while Herod was pleased to be provided with this entertainment and questioned our Lord at length (to no effect, since our Lord did not respond to this illegal proceeding), he apparently had no desire and no intention of becoming involved in any legal process. After subjecting Jesus to more abuse, he sent Him back to Pilate.

6) The Trial before Pilate: Second Phase (Matt.27:15-26; Mk.15:6-15; Lk.23:13-25; Jn.18:39 - 19:16)

Pilate interpreted Herod's return of our Lord to him as ratification of his own previous acquittal (Lk.23:15). Upon that return, Pilate made several further attempts to prevent our Lord's crucifixion. There are no doubt several reasons for this, but we need not attribute any deep respect for justice on his part as one of them (cf. Jn.18:38: “What is truth?”). The witness of our Lord and the power of His presence caused the Roman governor some serious foreboding (cf., Jn.19:7-12), and it is also likely that his wife's warning to him not to have anything to do with our Lord had been the source of some further unease (Matt.27:19). But Pilate is also likely to have been motivated to spare Jesus out of 1) his desire not to lose this “contest of wills” between himself and the Jewish authorities, and 2) a further desire to avoid becoming implicated in any way in what he clearly saw as a political murder – not out of a sense of justice but rather out of a desire to stay

above the fray of Jewish party politics in order not to alienate any faction unnecessarily (i.e., he recognized that Jesus had been arrested “out of envy”: Matt.27:18; Mk.15:10; this also explains why he literally “washed his hands” of the matter after being unable to convince the crowd otherwise: Matt.27:24-25).

When his attempt to proclaim Jesus innocent based upon his own and upon Herod's examination failed to persuade, in order to relieve himself of this situation which was growing increasingly tense Pilate tried to find an acceptable alternative to crucifixion, first by making use of his politically astute custom of releasing some well-known prisoner every Passover. But the crowd, egged on by the chief priests and the elders, shouted for Barabbas instead (Matt.27:20; Mk.15:11). He also tried humiliation and abuse, having our Lord beaten and whipped further and ridiculed by the soldiers (Matt.27:27-30; Mk.15:16-19; Jn.19:2-3), then presenting Him to the crowd dressed in purple but wearing a crown of thorns (symbolic, though unbeknownst to Pilate, of the curse He was about to be made for the sake of the whole world: cf. Gen.3:18)(74), and providing the comic introduction himself: “Look, here's the man [now]!” (Jn.19:5). When this overture too was refused, and when a further interview with our Lord provided no insights or help to his dilemma (“Don't you know that I have the authority to release you and the authority to crucify you?” – “You would have no authority over Me unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me up to you has the greater sin”; Jn.19:10-11 NASB), Pilate finally delivered Jesus over to crucifixion when the people under the guidance of their Jewish leaders played their ace trump: “If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar” (Jn.19:12 NASB). Pilate, the ultimate political pragmatist, knew that he had been beaten at this point. Failing to give our Lord over to the people and their will would now be very costly for him (even though it was certainly within his power), and he was unwilling to suffer any possible disadvantage (whether in terms of an immediate riot, future instability, or a possible charge of malfeasance lodged with Caesar) just for Jesus' sake. However, wishing to make it crystal clear that he was only acquiescing in a decision of their making, he first washed his hands to demonstrate his “innocence” (cf. Deut.21:6), and the people responded: “His blood be on us and our children!” (Matt.27:25 NASB). Then, to leave no doubt, and to gain some political capital from this defeat, Pilate referred to Jesus as their “King”, questioning whether or not they really wanted to crucify their own king, until they responded “We don't have a king – except Caesar” (Jn.19:15). Having made the best of a bad situation (from his spiritually blind point of view), Pilate “handed Jesus over to their will” to be crucified (Lk.23:25; cf. Matt.27:26; Mk.15:15; Jn.19:16).

61 But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?"

NIV SB: 14:61 remained silent. See Isa 53:7 and note. Messiah. See first NIV text note on 1:1. Son of the Blessed One. "The Blessed One" was a way of referring to God without pronouncing his name (cf. note on 11:30). The title was therefore equivalent to "Son of God" (1:1; 15:39), though in this context it would seem not to refer to deity but to royal Messiahship, since in popular Jewish belief the Messiah was to be a man, not God.

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Q: Do you agree that the Jews didn't expect the Messiah to be God? It's difficult for me to reconcile this conclusion with what NIV SB says shortly after:

14:64 blasphemy. Not only involved reviling the name of God (see Lev 24:10-16) but also included any affront to his majesty or authority (see Mk 2:7 and note; 3:28-29; Jn 5:18 and note; 10:33). Jesus' claim to be the Messiah and, in fact, to have majesty and authority belonging only to God was therefore regarded by Caiaphas as blasphemy, for which the Mosaic law prescribed death by stoning (Lev 24:16).

So if the Jews didn't believe in Messiah's deity, then why did they consider Jesus' claim to be the Messiah as a blasphemy which included usurping God's majesty and authority?

A: It's a good point; I don't undertake to defend the SB on this point. Clearly, the position of the Jewish leaders at that time was ambiguous. Also clearly, they were really not interested in God at all, even though they devoted their lives to pretending they were, because if they really did love Him they would have accepted Him by accepting His Son (Is.29:13; cf. Jn.1:11). There was for "this generation" and there remains today in Israel a "blindness in part" when it comes to the One who died for them and for us (Rom.11:25). They seem willing enough to accept God but not a Messiah who is human and divine. Still, it is also true that the office of Messiah is so august in their eyes that anyone falsely claiming to be that is guilty of "blasphemy". For those who did see in the title Son of God something divine (if not somehow on the level of the Father), the idea of a suffering Messiah – as opposed to a conquering one – was equally repugnant. So to be fair to the SB, it's not as if we can assign any sort of solidarity to the false opinions of the day or any consistency therein.

65 Some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, "Prophecy!" And the officers received Him with slaps in the face.

NIV SB: 14:65 began to spit at him ... struck him with their fists. Conventional gestures of rejection and condemnation (see Nu 12:14; Dt 25:9; Job 30:10; Isa 50:6 and note). blindfolded him. A rabbinic interpretation of Isa 11:2-4 held that the Messiah could judge by smell without the aid of sight. Prophecy! Say who it was who struck you!

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Q: Could you refer to the point about the rabbinic interpretation of Isaiah 11:2-4 and the application of it to these events?

A: These interpretations come centuries after the fact, and while they may occasionally contain information that does go back to early days, there's no guarantee of it. Also, there is no guarantee that the people doing this had such a parallel in mind. It's pretty clear from the context what is happening.

Mark 14:68 (NIV)

68 But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway.^[a]

a. Mark 14:68 Some early manuscripts entryway and the rooster crowed

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Q1: I take it that the fragment from the footnote is a late addition and not a part of the scripture?

NIV SB: 14:68 I don't know or understand what you're talking about. An expression used in Jewish law courts for a formal, legal denial.

Q2: How do we know that this expression was used in Jewish law courts?

A: I note that no citation is referenced, and know of no parallel. Also, I'm not sure how it would be possible to know this, given surviving sources (so I would be curious to know the putative basis for this assertion). I don't think we need to make this any worse for Peter than it already is. On the crowing of the cock, three denials precede the crowing, just as our Lord prophesied. How false ideas intruded into the ms. tradition is discussed at the link: [Crowing of the Rooster](#)

Mark 14:72 (NASB)

72 Immediately a rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had made the remark to him, "Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." ^[a]And he began to weep.

a. Mark 14:72 Or Thinking of this, he began weeping or Rushing out, he began weeping

*

Q: What should the end of the verse say?

A: The issue is the translation of the participle *epibalon* which, translated literally without taking the idiom demanded by the context into consideration, ought to mean something like "having shot at [something]". However, the verb *ballo* and its compounds are frequently used in a wide variety of ways. I think, "he broke down and began to weep" is a good way to render it. At Mark 4:37 the verb means "rush upon" of waves against a ship (so "rush out" might be possible); the other suggested meaning would require us to understand "his heart/mind" as the object left out and "this matter" as the secondary object, also left out – but I don't know of any parallel in the language for this *double* omission in the case of this verb. The verb in the aorist as it is here often means to interject or interrupt, so "broke down" as in "interrupted himself in this pattern of thinking so as to come back to his spiritual senses" is about as close as I can come here.

Mark 15:1 (NIV)

15 Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

NIV SB: 15:1 Very early in the morning. The working day of a Roman official began at daylight. morning. Friday of Passion Week. Sanhedrin. See note on 14:55. made their plans. Apparently to accuse Jesus before the civil authority for treason rather than blasphemy (see Lk 23:1-14 and note on 23:2). Pilate. See note on Lk 3:1.

*

Q: This seems like a valid observation - would you agree that the Jews wanted to accuse our Lord for treason rather than blasphemy, as this perhaps would make it more likely that He would be convicted?

A: I think it was the penalty that was the issue rather than the conviction. It seems to be the case – although this is a perennially debated question – that the Romans had reserved the right of capital punishment for themselves, taking it away from the Judean officials (whether religious or civil). Blasphemy, according to the Law, was punishable by death, but whether Pilate would see claiming to be the Messiah as a capital offense was far less certain – and indeed they were right about this point. What swayed the case is recorded in John:

From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar." John 19:12 NIV

Mark 15:2 (NASB)

2 Pilate questioned Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” And He *answered him, “It is as you say.”

*

Unger’s Commentary

1. (v.2a) Pilate governed Judea and Samaria (A.D. 26-36) and was unpopular with the Jews because of his harsh treatment of his subjects. Noting the charge against Jesus, Pilate quite naturally asked him “*Are you king of the Jews?*”.
2. (v.2b) *It is as you say* – was a clear answer in the affirmative. Mark/Matthew simply record the reply, not Jesus’ explanation of the nature of His kingdom (John included this explanation, as it was suitable for the scope of his gospel; John 18:34-38). This interview between Pilate and Jesus took place within the Praetorium (the hall where the Roman procurator sat in judgement).
3. The Roman procurators were accustomed to would-be liberators and insurrectionists, for Palestine in that era seethed with political turmoil, and they were watchful for any indications of rebel leaders.
4. Jesus’ confession of messiahship during the illegal night court sessions (Mark 14:62) had been twisted into a political crime against Rome. This false and trumped-up charge, and the severity with which the Jews (who hated Rome as much as any rebel) hypocritically viewed it, highlighted not only their hypocrisy but the abysmal depth of their apostasy and wickedness.

Mark 15:9 (NASB)

9 Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?"

*

1. Pilate's question was as innocuous as it was pointless, displaying the weakness of the procurator's character, as if the excited feelings of a mob should have any bearing on justice, or that their desire as to what he should do with an innocent prisoner should even be mentioned, much less followed.
2. Pilate, to his perpetual shame, got the answer his pitiable weakness invited.

Mark 15:12 (NASB)

12 Answering again, Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?"

*

1. Pilate's second question directed to the crowd displayed further weakening in his already weakened position.
2. With this question, the procurator cleverly, but with evident cowardice, shifted the Jew's baseless, trumped-up political charge upon the shoulder of the Jewish leaders themselves.

Mark 15:13-14 (NASB)

13 They shouted back, "Crucify Him!" 14 But Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify Him!"

*

1. The procurator could have released Jesus, and with any semblance of boastful Roman justice, he should have done so.

Mark 15:15 (NASB)

15 Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

*

1. Pilate was rather willing to content (satisfy) the people, handing Jesus over to the Roman soldiers to be scourged.
2. This brutal preparation for crucifixion was administered with a whip of leather cords, in which sharp pieces of metal and bone were embedded. Scourging left the victim's back as a mass of lacerated flesh.
3. By his spineless accommodation to their desires, Pilate prepared the way for his betrayal of justice in delivering Jesus to be crucified and the murderer, Barabbas, to be set free in His stead (Matt.27:26).

Mark 15:16 (NASB)

16 The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they *called together the whole Roman cohort.

*

1. Pilate had been given the order to crucify Jesus, and the Roman soldiers took Him to the Praetorium, the residence of the procurator.
2. There, to amuse themselves by idly mocking "the King" they summoned together the cohort (band; battalion) which consisted of about six hundred men; also "maniple", which had two hundred men; the latter was probably meant in this scene.
3. The soldiers, as part of a ruthless military machine whose prime loyalty was to the Roman emperor and who detested the Jews, engaged in the shocking scene of making sport of the prisoner, which was not an uncommon occurrence.

Mark 15:17-18 (NASB)

17 They *dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; 18 and they began to acclaim Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

*

1. They attired Jesus with grotesque emblems of kingship, dressing Him in purple – evidently a scarlet military cloak, a part of their own military uniform, and pressing a crown woven of thorns over His brow.

2. Then they saluted Him as the Emperor of the Jews, which carried the meaning of King to them.

Mark 15:19 (NASB)

19 They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him.

*

1. They kept on heaping insults on Him, striking Him on the head with a reed or mock scepter (cf. Matt.27:29, 36), spitting on Him and bowing before Him in mock homage (Isa.50:6) and bitter scorn of His misunderstood claim to be King.

Mark 15:21 (NASB)

21 They *pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross.

*

1. As the procession set out for the scene of the Crucifixion, Jesus was carrying His own cross (cf. Jn.19:17). Shortly, the soldiers came upon Simon and compelled (NKJV; forced) him to carry the instrument of execution. Mark and his Roman readers were familiar with Simon, for his sons Alexander and Rufus were mentioned as well-known persons (?)
2. He was designated Simona Cyrenian, a resident of Cyrene, a port in North Africa, which had a large Jewish community. He was coming from the country into the city, evidently another pilgrim on his way to Jerusalem to keep the Passover.

Mark 15:22 (NASB)

22 Then they *brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull.

NIV SB: 15:22 the place of the skull. It may have been a small hill that looked like a skull, or it may have been so named because of the many executions that took place there.]

*

Q1: Do we know the etymology of this name?

A1: The etymology is biblically given so yes.

*

Q2: I asked wrong question here - do we know why the place was named "Place of a Skull" - is it to do with its shape or the executions that took place there?

A2: I don't know of any biblical reference which would further elucidate this. The place considered to be Calvary today may not even be correctly identified (that's true of many traditional locales in Jerusalem). Positing that the place looked like a skull seems reasonable. There has been a lot of speculation about this both in antiquity and modern times.

Mark 15:23 (NASB)

23 They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it.

*

1. The soldiers offered Jesus a sedative composed of sour *wine mixed with myrrh*, but He would not take it.
2. As the Servant, obedient to the point of death, He refused to shrink from the full suffering His death would entail or resort to any expedient to dull His pain or submit to anything that would hinder his full obedience to the Father's will, as He had prayed in the garden (cf. 14:36).

Mark 15:24 (NASB)

24 And they *crucified Him, and *divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them to decide what each man should take.

*

1. (v.24a) Mark, like all the Gospel writers, narrated the actual crucifixion of Christ with chase brevity. Mark simply said, *And they crucified Him* (Matt.27:35; Luke 23:33; John 19:23).
2. This form of capital punishment, which the Romans had employed for generations in the case of those of lower social and legal status, was incredibly harsh and inhuman. Roman citizens, however, were exempt from its horror.
3. (v.24b) The soldiers first of all removed the clothing of the victim and distributed *His garments among themselves* (Psalm 22:18; John 19:24), *casting lots for them to decide*

what each should take (who should take what – NASB), as the garments of the victim were customarily left to the executioners.

4. Then His hands were nailed to the cross beam (Jn.20:25) and His body lifted to the upright post and supported by means of a peg. His feet were then impaled or tied to the post. The resulting excruciating pain with the loss of blood, impaired circulation, and thirst, coupled with mistreatment from sadistic spectators, made this form of death for our Saviour not only shameful (Phil.2:8), but agonisingly painful.

Mark 15:25 (NASB)

25 It was the third hour when they crucified Him.

*

1. Christ was crucified at the *third hour* (9:00 am, Jewish reckoning). The trial before Pilate had occurred at about the first hour (or 6:00am; the sixth hour, Roman time). John used the Roman reckoning, with the hours starting at midnight and noon, as we do today (Jn.19:14). The synoptics, however, employed the Hebrew reckoning, beginning at sunrise (or 6:00am).

Mark 15:26 (NASB)

26 The inscription of the charge against Him read, "THE KING OF THE JEWS."

*

1. The written notice of the charge against Jesus followed the normal custom of using a placard of some sort to indicate the accusation of the condemned man.
2. Mark recorded only the crime of which Jesus was accused – *THE KING OF THE JEWS* (cf. Jer.23:5; Matt.27:37; Lk.1:31-33).
3. John, with greater detail, indicated that the superscription also contained the identification, "Jesus of Nazareth", and that Pilate had written it and had it posted in "Hebrew [Aramaic], and Greek, and Latin" (John 19:19-20).

Mark 15:28 (NASB)

28 [a]And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with transgressors."]

a. *Mark 15:28* Early mss do not contain this v.

*

Q: Should this verse be a part of the scripture?

A: It's not in the best mss. and seems to have been put in as a gloss; since it is so close in language to what one would expect from the text (based on Isaiah 53:12 and Luke 22:37), it made its way therein in one late tradition.

Mark 15:31 (NASB)

31 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself.

*

1. The mocking jibes of the chief priests and scribes constitute the supreme irony of history. He could have come down from the cross, but in obedience as the Servant, He did not.
2. His staying there was not only the climax of His entire incarnate life of utter submission to the Father's will but the supreme act that procured our salvation.
3. Had He saved Himself, He could not have saved us, and His salvation "costs us nothing, because it cost Him everything" (C.E. Graham Swift, NBC, 884).
4. It turned out, therefore, that those who were mocking spoke the bitter truth, though they did so unwittingly and out of unbelievable moral blindness.

Mark 15:33 (NASB)

33 When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour.

*

A:

BB 4A Christology – Spiritual Death of Christ

f. Christ Paid the Penalty for our Sins: Simply put, our Lord's expiation of all human sin required that He suffer for them physically and literally – not the sufferings leading up to and including His being nailed to the cross (as horrendous as these were), but the sufferings involved in being punished corporally for our sins in the three hours of darkness on the hill Calvary before He gave

up His spirit. The gauntlet He ran to get to the cross is itself a tale of woe and endurance beyond our ability to truly appreciate, but its chief function in this respect is to give us some very small idea of what the true judgment for sins in the darkness immediately thereafter was going to entail: ***if the sufferings that led to the cross were beyond imagination, what then of the task of bearing and suffering for the sins of the world?***

The most extensive and explicit passage dealing with this issue is Isaiah chapter fifty-three. It seems appropriate, therefore, to quote the pertinent parts of that passage in full as our departure point for considering what our salvation cost our Lord Jesus and His heavenly Father. For Isaiah's prophecy, while explicating many aspects of our Lord's passion, also vividly describes the suffering of the Messiah in bearing our sins. He “bore our sicknesses and He carried our weaknesses” (v.4); He is One we considered “punished, smitten and afflicted by God” (v.4); He was subjected “to torment on account of our transgressions” (v.5), and He was “crushed because of our collective guilt (lit. “guilts”)” (v.5); the “punishment [required] for making peace [with God] on our behalf [fell] upon Him” (v.5); and we have been healed “because of His wounding” (v.5); the Father “caused the guilt of us all to strike Him” (v.6); He was “oppressed and afflicted”; He was “cut off from the land of the living” (v.8); and He was “punished for the transgression of my people”; He suffered “His deaths (sic – plural)” on our behalf (v.9); for it was the Father's will “to crush Him” (v.10) and to “subject Him to torment” (v.10); He had “trouble [inflicted] upon His life” (v.11), and He “carried our guilt (lit., “guilts”)” (v.11); He “lay bare His life unto death” (v.12), was “dealt with as transgressors [are]” (v.12); He “bore the sin of the many”; and He “substituted [Himself] for the transgressors”:

(4) For He bore our sicknesses and He carried our weaknesses. And yet we considered Him as [the One who had been] punished, smitten and afflicted by God. (5) But [in fact] He was made subject to torment on account of our transgressions, and He was crushed because of our collective guilt (lit., “guilts”). The punishment [required] for making peace [with God] on our behalf [fell] upon Him. Because of His wounding, we have been healed. (6) We have all gone astray like sheep. Each of us has turned to his own way. And the Lord caused the guilt of us all to strike Him. (7) Though He was oppressed and afflicted, like a lamb led to slaughter He did not open His mouth, and like a ewe before her shearers He did not open His mouth. (8) By repressive judgment He was taken away, and who gave any thought to His posterity? For He was cut off from the land of the living. He was punished for the transgression of my people. (9) And they assigned Him a grave with the wicked (pl.) and with a rich [man] in His deaths (sic). Not for any violence that He had done. Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. (10) For it was the Lord's good pleasure (i.e., “will”) to crush Him, to subject Him to torment. But though you make His life a guilt offering, He will see His seed, He will lengthen His days, and the good pleasure (i.e., “will”) of the Lord will prosper in His hand. (11) [Released] from the trouble [inflicted] upon His life, He will [again] see [the light of life] and be satisfied (i.e., in resurrection). My righteous Servant will provide righteousness for the great [of heart] (i.e., believers) through the[ir] acknowledgment of Him, and He Himself will carry their guilt (lit., “guilts”). (12) Therefore I will allot to Him [the plunder] among [His] many [brothers], and He will apportion plunder to the mighty [among them]. Because He lay bare His life unto death, and was dealt with as transgressors [are], so that He bore the sin of the many, and substituted [Himself] for the transgressors.

Isaiah 53:4-12

It would be difficult to imagine scripture being any clearer about the physical toll of pain and torment our Lord's suffering to pay the penalty for our sins entailed. That penalty required His death (Rom.6:23; cf. Gen.2:16-17; Rom.5:12), not the ending of His physical life (which He voluntarily gave up after redemption was an accomplished fact), but the “death” of being separated from His previously unbroken and perfect fellowship with the Father, wherein He was made a curse to deliver us from the curse of the second death (Gal.3:13), that is, His spiritual death in the darkness wherein He paid the penalty charged to our account, a death of suffering in alienation from God so intense that Isaiah, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit, because He had nothing else to call it, called it “deaths” instead of death (Is.53:9), pluralizing the experience to

express in some small way just what the Messiah would have to suffer for us to be saved. And, indeed, since the penalty for sin is death, the “deaths” our Lord Jesus suffered were in effect the total collective penalty of deaths for every human being who would ever be born. He died for us all. He died for every sin ever committed.

(27) And inasmuch as it is ordained for mankind to die once (i.e., the first, "physical" death), and after this [face] judgment (i.e., “the second death”; cf. Rev.2:11; 20:6; 20:14-15), (28) so Christ, having been offered up once *to bear the sins of many*, will appear a second time – without [any further need to bear] sin – unto those who are awaiting salvation.

Hebrews 9:27-28

In the passage above, we see clearly that Christ's spiritual death in bearing sin on the cross is set in parallel to the second death of unbelievers who refuse to accept His sacrifice for their sins. He was judged in their place and in ours so that we and they might not have to face the Last Judgment whose end is the lake of fire. We are redeemed and transferred from judgment into life through faith in Jesus Christ (Jn.5:24; Col.1:13; 1Jn.3:14), through our acceptance of His work on the cross on our behalf. But the lake of fire is reserved for all unbelievers who could not even be troubled to give the slightest minimal nod of appreciation to Jesus for what He did for them (Jn.3:36). As sobering as this realization is, for our purposes here the critical thing to observe is that we are delivered from the lake of fire, the second death, the darkness and the fire, because our Lord endured the punishment for our sins in our place, and the final fate of all who willfully fail to avail themselves of the grace provided through the blood of Christ points us in the direction of what has been substituted in our case: we are spared the eternal lake of fire, because what our Lord endured in the darkness for us hanging on Golgotha's cross is deemed by the Father to be an acceptable equivalent to the eternal torment of all mankind, both for those who refuse release, and especially for those of us who have chosen Jesus and eternal life instead.

*

A2: In the above verse, we see the spiritual death of Christ directly equated with His suffering. And that suffering was clearly intense (Heb.2:10-18; 13:12-13). For the penalty of sin is death, the second death of the lake of fire.⁽¹²¹⁾ How exactly Christ was put to death for *every* human sin, punished and made to suffer in our places that we might be saved, is as awe-inspiringly unfathomable as the contemplation of God Himself. But just as we know that there is a God from what He has done and does, so we know that Jesus paid the price for all our sins in His

own blood, because we owe our salvation to Him and what He did for us during those three hours of darkness on the cross.

He made Him who had no [personal] experience of sinning [to be] sin (i.e., a sin offering) for us, so that we might have (lit., “become”) God's righteousness in Him.
2nd Corinthians 5:21

Thus it is wrong to think of our Lord's sacrifice merely in terms of the punishment He suffered at human hands, as horrific as that was. It was only **after** being betrayed, forsaken, denied, abandoned, arrested, falsely accused and condemned, maligned, ridiculed, spit upon, tortured, beaten to the last reserves of His strength, was nailed to a cross, and shown the loss of everything He had, that our Lord entered the darkness to die for our sins. The gauntlet of suffering He went through to reach the time and place of judgment merely gives us some small idea of what our salvation cost Him, for the suffering of the death He endured in darkness exceeded those preliminaries by unknown orders of magnitude. For our Lord, those three hours of darkness must have lasted more than a lifetime. After all, He created the universe in an instant. But in those three hours, the true history of the universe was written. They are the basis of all that ever was or will be good and blessed and glorious for us and for all who have gratefully accepted and delight in the ineffable gift of Jesus Christ.

Although there is much we shall never know about the monumental sacrifice our Lord made, suffering the ultimate punishment for us all in order to deliver us from death, we do know that when it was over He proclaimed “*tetelestai*”, “It has now been accomplished!” (Jn.19:30). With those words the entire plan of God was complete: Man who had been created to answer creature rebellion had been saved and made one with God forever (for all who choose Him), and the entire universal rift that had been started eons ago by the evil one had been made whole and right in principal – but at a tremendous cost, *the blood of Christ*. Now we who have gratefully accepted the grace bought for us by Jesus' death on our behalf need only wait for God's good timing when all things will be put under Christ's feet, and then will come the final end when He hands over the kingdom to the Father so that God will finally be “all in all” (1Cor.15:28).

He paid the death penalty on the cross for you and every other human being. Every sin ever committed – past, present and future – was judged on the cross. God the Father pronounced the sentence, and Jesus Christ obeyed it.⁽¹²²⁾

That obedience and death for our sins on the part of our dear Lord Jesus is what has opened the gate of salvation for us all. Moreover, scripture describes the results of the blood of Christ, Jesus' spiritual death in our behalf, in four separate ways in terms of its efficacy in solving the problem of sin: *propitiation* (the provision of the fundamental requirement of salvation in the removal based upon the blood of Christ of God's displeasure towards sin); this foundation has three immediate results for sinful man: *redemption* (the deliverance of man from sin's grasp), *justification* (the judicial pronouncement of forgiveness for all who believe), and *reconciliation* (the removal of the enmity on account of sin between God and man and the restoration of a relationship of blessing).

Mark 15:34 (NASB)

34 At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

NIV SB: 15:34 The words were spoken in a dialect of Aramaic, one of the languages commonly spoken in the Holy Land in Jesus' day. They reveal how deeply Jesus felt his abandonment by God as he bore "the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29; but see introduction to Ps 22 and note on Ps 22:1).

*

Q1: Would you agree with the note here about these words revealing "how deeply Jesus felt his abandonment by God"? From our correspondence I gather that it is a deliberate quotation of Psalm 22:1, which ends with a proclamation of victory.

A1: You are correct. The SB version is the standard interpretation which absolutely misunderstands everything about our Lord and His sacrifice. Full and formal coverage is found at the link: *The 22nd Psalm*

*

A2:

BB 4A Christology – Spiritual Death of Christ

My God, My God, why did You forsake Me?

Psalm 22:1 (cf. Matt.27:46-47; Mk.15:34-35)

These words spoken were after the sins of the world had been judged in Jesus' body in the darkness on the cross. Moreover, as observed earlier, they were spoken for our benefit. For Jesus knew very well why the Father had broken fellowship with Him, and He had known it even before the cross. He was judged in our place, and therefore had to be forsaken for our sake in order to undergo that judgment.

This cry of dereliction [i.e., “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”: Matt.27:46; Mk.15:34] reflects the heart of Jesus' purpose in His first advent and death; to bear the penalty for human sin (Heb.9:28). Since sin separates from a holy God, He had to endure that separation in the moment of His death. Otherwise, the penalty could not have been paid.⁽¹¹⁸⁾

Hell in its essence is being without God. All inconsolable pain in this life is part and parcel of estrangement from God; all of our true joy is inseparable from our closeness to Him. It is doubtful that, this side of heaven, anyone can come close to appreciating the magnitude of this particular part of Jesus' sacrifice, either what this separation cost Him or what it cost the Father. What we can say in this regard is, firstly, that the judgment for our sins was over after the darkness lifted, for in Psalm 22:1 quoted directly above our Lord presents the forsaking as now past (i.e., “why did You forsake me?”). Secondly, His forsaking, far from being in vain, accomplished the mission for which He had been sent, the removal of the sins of the world as an impediment to salvation, for He Himself pronounces that mission successfully accomplished (i.e., tetelestai: “it has been accomplished”; Jn.19:30 compared with Jn.19:28 and Ps.22:31). And, thirdly, the death which delivers us from sin was not His physical death (still future at this point), but the death He died to sin in the darkness, namely, His spiritual death, the blood of Christ, the suffering of our dear Lord Jesus in paying the penalty for all human sin. For it was there in the darkness on the cross that He was “cursed”, made sin, a curse for us, forsaken for us, separated from the love of the Father and made to undergo His wrath in our place so that we might be delivered from that wrath through faith in Him (cf. the stricken rock of “forsaken” Mt. Horeb: Ex.17:5-7).

Christ bought us free (i.e., “redeemed” us) from the Law's curse, having become a curse on our behalf. For it is written: “Cursed is everyone [who is] hanged upon a tree” (Deut.21:23).

Galatians 3:13

Thus His hanging on a cross, His being made a curse for us (cf. Rom.9:3; Heb.6:8), and His exile into the darkness (Matt.8:12; 22:13; 25:30; 25:41) all speak of the separation or forsaking that Jesus had to endure in order to be made sin for us, in order to bear our sins, in order to be judged and punished in our place for our sins. All of these things speak of the alienation from the Father

which His spiritual death necessarily entailed, a horrific price whose true cost we can scarcely begin to understand.

Mark 15:35 (NASB)

35 When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, "Behold, He is calling for Elijah."

NIV SB: 15:35 Elijah. The bystanders mistook the first words of Jesus' cry ("Eloi, Eloi") to be a cry for Elijah. It was commonly believed that Elijah would come in times of critical need to protect the innocent and rescue the righteous (v. 36).

*

Q: Would you agree that Jesus' words were misinterpreted by the bystanders?

A: Absolutely yes. The crowd were mostly Judean and spoke Hebrew, so they misinterpreted the Aramaic quotation.

Mark 15:39 (NIV)

39 And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died,[a] he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

a. Mark 15:39 Some manuscripts saw that he died with such a cry

*

Q: What should the scripture say in this verse - should the words from the footnote be included?

A: No. *kraxanta* only occurs in one later ms. and in the Latin version.

Mark 16:1 (NASB)

16 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him.

NIV SB: 16:1 Sabbath was over. About 6:00 p. m. Saturday evening. No purchases were possible on the Sabbath.

*

Q: How do we know that Sabbath was over at 6:00 p.m.?

A: In the ancient world, hours were determined by sunlight or the lack thereof, not according to mechanical watches (which is how and why sundials work). So the Sabbath (or any day) would always end at sundown, the end of the "twelfth hour" – which would then begin the first hour of the night. I suppose for the benefit of English readers, therefore, this is not a bad approximation for a date close to the spring equinox where a Greek/Roman hour would be close to sixty minutes day or night (they get longer in the daytime until the summer solstice).

Mark 16:7 (NASB)

7 But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.'

NIV SB: 16:7 and Peter. Jesus showed special concern for Peter, in view of his confident boasting and subsequent denials (14:29-31, 66-72). just as he told you. See 14:28.

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Q: Our Lord showed concern for Peter in view of his boasting, but why does the angel make a special mention of him? Should angel's mentioning of Peter be taken as evidence for Peter's preeminent position among the disciples?

A: This does show that Peter is the leader of the group in terms of personality; we see that in the early days of Acts as well. In any group of eleven men, someone will usually take the lead, just by virtue of differing personalities. This mention recognizes that fact without investing Peter with any special spiritual authority.

Mark 16:8 (NIV)

8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.^[a]

a. Mark 16:8 Some manuscripts have the following ending between verses 8 and 9, and one manuscript has it after verse 8 (omitting verses 9-20): Then they quickly reported all these instructions to those around Peter. After this, Jesus himself also sent out through them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation. Amen.

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Q: Is the verse quoted in the footnote a part of the scripture?

A: No. The verse and the book ends with this – to us – odd seeming conclusion. On the other hand, it leaves the reader hungry for more, eager to know more about the resurrection, the kingdom to come, and all other doctrines of the Bible – so a non-conclusion conclusion at the end of the gospel story makes a great deal of sense when you think about it: keep reading, keep seeking the truth.
