

The Life of Christ

*Sponsored by:
The Christadelphians*

*Learn to Read the Bible Effectively
Life of Christ Seminar
Week 8 - The Messiah's Death,
Resurrection & Ascension*

SECTION 25

Trial and Crucifixion

The most momentous scene in all of history is recorded in all four Gospels. Before Jesus is crucified, there is the agony in the garden, the betrayal and the arrest, and the trial which made a mockery of justice. Yet His sacrifice was a vindication of God's holiness. Flesh was crucified to reveal God's righteousness.

When the Lord was arrested, His Disciples forsook Him and fled. He had sought to warn them of the sufferings, death and resurrection that awaited Him. They appeared to be so preoccupied with the thought of a Kingdom near at hand that they seemed not to hear. That night of tragedy, the Lord was handed from one to another until finally, He was led forth and crucified. He died and He was buried.

GETHSEMANE - JOHN 18:1, 2; MATT. 26:30-34; MARK 14:26-41; LUKE 22:39-46

Before leaving the room, the Lord and the Apostles sang a Psalm. This is the only Biblical reference that we have to Jesus singing.

He then led them from the city, instructing them as He went, (Mark 14:26-31; Matthew 26:31-35), over the brook Kidron to a garden called Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives.

John is the only Gospel writer to refer to the name of this brook. The meaning of Kidron is "dark" or "turbid," and it is described as a turbid brook between the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem. This aspect of darkness and cloudiness conveys the thought of sadness or dejection or mourning. Considering what took place in the garden and the sad events that transpired that night, it is fitting that John took care to record the name of the brook over which they passed.

Bible cross references quickly provide us with Scriptural echoes relating to two very noteworthy ancestors of Jesus. In both cases the reference to the Kidron is associated with sorrow and mourning.

In 2nd Samuel, we have reference to David leaving Jerusalem by the Kidron at the time of Absalom's rebellion. (2nd Sam. 15:23) Having passed over the Kidron while all the country was weeping, David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives:

"...And wept as he went, and his head was covered and he walked barefoot..." 2 Sam. 15:30

Later, Shimei, the one who cursed David in the incident noted above, was warned by Solomon that if he ever chose to cross the Kidron he would thus signal the mourning of his own death. (1 Kings 2:37)

In one of His prophecies, Jeremiah refers to the Valley of the Dead Bodies and all the fields as far as the Brook Kidron. (Jeremiah 31:40)

In Gethsemane, we find an echo and a foreshadowing. The struggle for man's redemption, foretold in a garden (Genesis 3:15), was now to come to its crisis in this garden and to be finally resolved in another garden – the Garden Tomb. (John 19:41)

When Judas left the upper room to plot the trap for Jesus, he doubtless anticipated that Jesus would go to the garden when they had completed the supper. John records that Judas knew the place, for Jesus had often met there with His Disciples. (John 18:2)

It is probable that Jesus and the Apostles spent the night there on occasions when they left Jerusalem too late to make the journey back to Bethany where He usually stayed in the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. Luke states that they went there that night, "as was His custom." (Luke 22:39)

As they made their way there on this evening, disillusionment awaited the Disciples. Jesus warned them they would be offended that night, for Zechariah had prophesied that He, their Shepherd, would be smitten and they as sheep, would be scattered. (Zech.13:7)

Matthew records the words that Jesus spoke to them as they made their way toward Gethsemane: Matthew 26:31

"...You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, I will strike down the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered."

Led by Peter, they were all indignant at the very suggestion that they would ever be disloyal to their Master. (Matt. 26:33-35; Mark 14:29-31) They had yet to learn the lesson that we all must learn. Flesh of itself cannot overcome trial:

"For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh." Romans 8:3

In his letter to the Romans, Paul had already stressed to his readers, that the strength of the flesh is greater than the strength of the human will. (Romans 7:18-21)

Sharing this weakness of flesh Himself, Jesus knew full well that prayer for guidance and the protection of God's overshadowing care, was essential to overcoming temptation. This had been His constant practice, and He had been sustained.

Jesus knew that from now on His Disciples would especially need such Divine strength, and so, as they arrived at the garden, He gave them a final instruction: ***"...Pray that you may not enter into temptation." Luke 22:40***

Within the hour, the Disciples proved that they were much like us, and too often, left God out of account when faced with trial. When Jesus asked them to pray to overcome the trials before them, they fell asleep. (Matt. 26:40, 43, 45)

We can all take warning from this, and should always endeavour to keep before us the advice that Paul later gave to the Colossians:

“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving;” Col. 4:2

The words of Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane help us to understand His character even more. He knew of the painful death which lay before Him, and of the terrible ordeal and suffering which would be His. He pleaded with the Father, that if it were possible, He might be delivered quickly from this ordeal. But at the same time, He willingly submitted to anything that the Father would require of Him. (Matt. 26:39, 42)

There was no other way possible. In God’s plan, we see the terrible cost of sin. Man’s salvation would be obtained by the sufferings and death of the sinless Son of God. In this we see the magnificent love of Christ for us. He willingly submitted to His Father’s will that we might have life, despite the weakness of our flesh.

Twice in this lonely vigil, Jesus had retraced His steps to where He had left Peter, James and John, a short distance away. He was very distressed and troubled, grieved to the point of death. (Mark 14:33, 34) In essence, He was alone with the conflict within Him, agonizing over it until sweat formed on His brow and fell like drops of blood to the ground.

For the third time, He went back to pray and battle with the protesting forces of His will. This time, He found that He was not alone. An Angel of God stood with Him, and strengthened Him. He found new strength in the presence of this Heavenly Messenger, and with His final victory came a peace.

We cannot leave that lonely scene in the garden without giving some reverent thought to the cause of His desolation of Spirit. Fear of death, even the excruciating death that He knew awaited Him, could not have been a prominent factor. The One who touched a leper’s scaly flesh, who stood on the bulwarks of the storm-tossed boat, who fearlessly faced enemies armed to kill Him, did not fear the wrath of men. There was little that was physical in His cry for release from the cup that was about to be pressed to His lips. It was mental and spiritual.

The Psalms provide continuing insight into the Spirit of Christ, particularly in relationship to the suffering which He was to endure. Whenever we read them, we should be searching for the foreshadowing of these events that point forward to His agony on our behalf. They will help us to remember what He endured for us.

As we read of, and think of, His lonely dejected form in that garden, we do well to read Psalm 69. It abounds with unmistakable references to Christ and His suffering, which find their fulfillment throughout the Gospel record. They are certainly appropriate words

to give insight into Jesus' true suffering in the garden. Consider now just three verses as you think of Him, His eyes raised in pleading to His Father: Psalm 69:7-9

“Because for Thy sake I have born reproach; dishonor has covered my face. I have become estranged from my brothers, and an alien to my mother’s sons. For zeal for Thy house has consumed Me, and the reproaches of those who reproach Thee have fallen on me.”

Betrayal and Arrest

The conflict was over. His mind at rest. Resolve pulsed in his veins. Strengthened by His communion with the Father, Jesus came the third time to His sleeping Disciples:

“...It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man has been betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!” Mark 14:41, 42

The waiting was over. Very soon, Judas would approach to betray Him.

Back at Jerusalem, there would have been scenes of urgent activity. Everything that happened from this point forward, until His crucifixion, is a true echo of the final urgency in the observation of the Passover. One of its aspects was urgency, symbolizing the haste that existed as the nation of Israel prepared for departure from Egypt.

This was required in the observation of the Passover. The meal had to be eaten in “haste.” (Exodus 12:11) Haste was now the key-note of all the Jews’ arrangements. If they were to kill Jesus, as they intended, His betrayal, arrest, trial, and crucifixion had to be arranged before sunset on the 14th day of Abib. Everything would have to be hurried through as it was already well into the night, and delay might defeat their purpose by allowing saner, wiser counsels to prevail.

Furthermore, they did not want to stone Him. They wanted Rome to crucify Him and so discredit Him, for then they could claim that He was rightly condemned, being cursed of God. (Deut. 21:23) They would be innocent of any injustice.

The Roman Governor was Pontius Pilate. Obviously urgent representations had been made to him. As was later revealed, the charge against Jesus was sedition. They had obviously been successful in convincing Pilate that a serious plot was involved. Pilate must have been anticipating a major local revolt, for he sent 600 armed soldiers (a cohort) led by a commander, who was an officer over 1,000 soldiers. (John 18:12)

With the officers (i.e., Temple guard) of the Jews, led by Judas, carrying torches and staves and swords, this group of soldiers converged on Gethsemane. Betrayal was consummated with a tender kiss. (Matthew 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53)

Jesus fearlessly admitted His identity, and like the Good Shepherd in His care for His sheep, He pleaded for His Disciples: *“...Let these go their way” John 18:8*

In identifying Himself, Jesus said simply, "I am He." The effect was dramatic. Overawed by His majesty and His purity, they drew back and fell to the ground. Recovering from their initial reaction, the Roman Cohort, the commander and the Temple guard of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him. (John 18:12)

Peter, alone, offered a defense, once again displaying the impetuous nature that controlled him. Facing hundreds of armed men he attacked with a sword, cutting off the ear of the servant of the High Priest. Jesus said there were available 12 legions of angels to secure their defense – 6,000 angels for each legion – that is 72,000 angels in total. Consider the temptation. This was the power that His Father had given Him. Having pleaded with His Father to let this trial pass, He still knew that He could call upon such Divine support. But, if He had done so, He would not have done His Father's will. He would have failed in his mission, and mankind would be without a Savior.

But it was not then a question of who has the most power - - - men or God. The issue was truth. So, Jesus performed His last miracle of healing, and healed the servant's ear. He told Peter to put the sword away, adding that "all those who take up the sword shall perish with the sword." (Matthew 26:52) When there are no more swords, there will be no more sword wielders! With these simple words Jesus provided a foreshadowing of the day when He will return to this earth in judgment. When the sword is removed from the earth, all those who have lived by its principles will likewise be removed. (Isaiah 34:1-3; Micah 4:3, 4)

The Trial

The trial of Jesus was in fact no trial at all. It was judicial murder. There was a pretense of justice, and with difficulties developing and precious time running out, even that was cast aside. The arrest was illegal. Only voluntary witnesses were allowed to bring a wrong-doer to the Sanhedrin.

The time of trial was illegal. No capital cases were allowed to be tried after sunset. The cross-questioning and challenge by His judge was illegal. He should have been acquitted immediately. The evidence of the witnesses had failed.

But Jesus was arrested by conspiracy, tried by enemies, testified against by hired witnesses. Time was the great factor, time, and a suitable charge which would allow Pilate to confirm the death sentence. He must be condemned before the multitudes of worshipers realized what had happened. Evil was abroad that night, evil concentrated and as yet unrelieved. This was their hour, and the power of darkness would prevail.

Before Annas - John 18:13-24

Jesus was led away and was first brought before the unscrupulous Annas, father-in-law of Caiaphas. Although he was no longer the official High Priest, he kept the title as did five of his sons. He asked Jesus about His Disciples and His doctrine. (John 18:19)

The decision to put Jesus to death had already been made. (Matt. 26:59) The principle that there should be no sentence without a fair hearing, had already been put aside. (Compare John 7:51) While Caiaphas was trying to call the Sanhedrin together, Annas had been appointed to get Jesus to say something that they could use against Him. Jesus was uncooperative, pointing out that anything He had to say in this regard had already been taught openly in the Synagogues and in the Temple. There were no secrets.

The first blow fell on His cheek, the first of many that He would receive that night. (John 18:22) Unsuccessful in his efforts to obtain any incriminating information, Annas sent Jesus, still bound, to Caiaphas.

Before Caiaphas - Matthew 26:57-68

Although it was very late, a call went out to gather the Sanhedrin together. It would not pass sentence of death until dawn broke, (Luke 22:66), but, meanwhile, Jesus was subjected to an illegal trial that went on throughout the night.

Many false witnesses came forward, but their evidence conflicted. When Jesus refused to answer the various charges made against Him, Caiaphas used the one expedient left to him:

“...I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.” Matthew 26:63

Through a misapplication of Leviticus 5:1, regarding testimony, the Jews determined that the High Priest had power to exact an oath from a person. A person could be required to testify, even against himself, on this basis. Silence was considered to mean guilt.

Caiaphas' intention was obvious. Jews would condemn for blasphemy anyone saying that he was the son of the living God. (John 10:36) Caesar would condemn as treasonable, anyone who said his destiny was to conquer Rome. Jesus responded:

“...You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” Matthew 26:64

A review of the references relating to this quotation, will quickly reveal the prophetic echoes that Jesus had incorporated in His response. This reply took in Psalm 110:1, and Daniel 7:13,14, as well as Psalm 2.

Putting these together, Jesus had, in effect, stated to Caiaphas, His position. As Messiah, Israel's deliverer, David's Son, and Son of God, He would be crucified, but exalted to the right hand of the Ancient of Days, and would receive from Him a world-wide dominion.

Caiaphas was not worried about the implications of what Jesus said. He obtained what he was after, evidence of blasphemy. He pressed for and gained the verdict, “guilty of death.” (Matthew 26:65-68) In feigned shock and disgust, he tore his robe!

As soon as it was dawn, a formal assembly of the council would be held to gain a “legal” decision, (Luke 22:66), but meanwhile, Jesus was handed over to the Temple guards to be mocked and spat upon.

Before Pilate - John 18:28-38

Having decided His guilt, the Jews took Jesus before Pontius Pilate. It was their aim above all that Jesus should be crucified. They had charged Jesus with perverting the nation, forbidding payment of tribute, and affirming Himself to be King. (Luke 23:2)

Pilate had been prepared for this when they aroused him to send troops with the Temple guard to Gethsemane. He nevertheless determined to conduct his own interview. A power struggle between himself and the Jewish leaders was brewing! Pilate considered the charges, but found them to be groundless and said so. (John 18:38)

The Sanhedrin was not to be so easily denied. They began to accuse Jesus of many things:

“...He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee, even as far as this place.” Luke 23:5

Before Herod - Luke 23:7-12

At the mention of Galilee, Pilate perceived a way out of this dilemma. That was Herod’s jurisdiction, and Herod was in the city at that time. Pilate saw an excellent opportunity to do three things at once. He could relieve the Sanhedrin’s pressure. He could escape responsibility for what was done to Jesus. He could also placate Herod, with whom he had been at enmity. (Luke 23:12) He, therefore, sent Jesus to Herod. (Luke 23:7)

Jesus now stood before the Baptist’s murderer, who had thought that John had risen from the dead when he heard of Jesus’ fame. He was an evil man, who was under the influence of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife. Herod had illegally married her. (Bible echo - from the time of Elijah). He asked Jesus many questions, but Jesus would not answer. The Chief Priests and Scribes vehemently accused Jesus, and Herod’s mood changed from inquiry to mockery. With his soldiers, he “treated Him with contempt,” dressing Him in a gorgeous robe, and abusing him. What savagery! He then sent Him back to Pilate.

Before Pilate Again - John 18:39, 40; 19:1-15

By this time, the city was astir. Unusual activity always attracts a crowd. Pilate wanted the people there, (Luke 23:13), because he knew that envy was at the base of the charges against Jesus. (Matt. 27:18)

Pilate felt the people had to know what was going on, and quickly the crowd gathered. Pilate’s own mind was made up. Neither he nor Herod had found any fault in Jesus. Added to this, his wife had been troubled by a dream, and had warned him against any injustice against Jesus. (Matt. 27:19) He would, therefore, chastise Jesus and free Him.

(Luke 23:14-16) Alternatively, as the Passover custom was, they could choose the release of either Jesus or Barabbas, a robber, who, during an insurrection or uprising, had committed murder. Swiftly, the Priests incited the people, “not this man, but Barabbas.” (John 18:40)

Pilate, apparently trying to placate the people, scourged Jesus, his soldiers mocking Him, and then, a second time, and a third, protested Jesus’ innocence. It was useless:

“But they were insistent, with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices began to prevail.” Luke 23:23

They Crucified Him - John 19:16-19

Taken out by Roman soldiers, Jesus was crucified at a place call Calvary, Golgotha, the place of a skull. There, as Isaiah had prophesied, He died the death of a common criminal. (Isaiah 53:12) Mark states:

“And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, And He was numbered with transgressors.” Mark 15:28

The prophecy of Genesis 3:15 had said that the woman’s seed would be “bruised in the heel.” But the serpent was itself to be bruised “in the head.” The nails in Jesus’ feet effectively bruised His heel. His walk was then interrupted while He was dead in the tomb. But 3 days later, He rose again and walked among His followers. His death accomplished the crushing of the serpent’s head:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; Hebrews 2:14

Men of darkness had combined to extinguish the “Light of the World.” (John 8:12) He “died unto sin once.” (Romans 6:10)

Throughout His life, the Lord Jesus repudiated the suggestions for self-indulgence inherent to the flesh. He never sinned. (John 8:46; Col. 1:22) As Peter later wrote, Jesus, because of His sinless life, fulfilled the Passover requirement:

“But with precious blood, as of a Lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.” 1 Peter 1:19

Jesus always rejected the call of the flesh. When He died sinless, sin had been condemned, not Jesus. (Romans 8:3; compare Hebrews 2:14)

It was Jesus who had been victorious, not sin. The serpent power of sin had been “bruised in the head.” From noon until 3 p.m., when the first of the Law’s Passover Lambs would be slain, (Bible echo - Exodus 12:6), darkness enshrouded the land. (Matthew 27:45)

At that time, having cried out with a loud voice, (Bible echo - Matt. 27:46) Jesus died and the veil of the Temple was rent in two. (Matt. 27:50, 51)

The rending of the veil of the Temple indicated that the Mosaic Law was at an end and the death of Jesus marked the fulfillment of all the sacrificial types and shadows of the Law. The way into the most Holy Place was now opened, showing a new and a living way, and all have access to the Father through Jesus Christ, our High Priest. (Heb 10:20)

When Israel sinned in the wilderness, and God sent among them serpents whose bite meant death, Moses was told to place on a pole a serpent of brass. If those who had been bitten beheld it, looked upon it, they would be saved from death. (Numbers 21:7-9)

It was not the brass serpent that saved them. What saved them was their faith in God, their conviction that to truly honor Him, the flesh must be hanged on a pole. To behold Christ crucified is to behold the fulfillment of the foreshadow in the brass serpent:

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life.” John 3:14, 15

We must also, as He did, endeavour to refuse to satisfy the impulses inherent to the flesh, even when faced by extreme provocation. Our Saviour did this even when facing the trials inherent to crucifixion. His true disciples are dedicated to rejecting what is bad, while pursuing what is good. We may not always be successful, but we must realize that we are alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord:

“Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Romans 6:4

Burial - John 19:31-42

Normally, those crucified could linger for days on a cross. But, to satisfy the Jewish desire to keep the detail of the Law, it was necessary that death should take place and the bodies be removed before sunset. In the case of the thieves crucified with Christ, death was hastened by breaking their legs, but Jesus was already dead. (John 19:31-37)

Not a bone...shall be broken - John 19:36

The Jewish leaders still had a problem, actually many problems. The physical manifestations that were occurring as Jesus died would have been extremely disturbing since they added credibility to Jesus' position as the Son of God. The obscuring of the sun causing 3 hours of darkness cast an eerie pall over the whole scene. (Luke 23:44) The sudden tearing of the Temple veil was unexplainable. Not only that, it was torn from the top down, not from the bottom up, as it would have been if men had taken hold of it and torn it. (Luke 23:45; Mark 15:38) This was Divine action. Divine intervention!

This occurred as Jesus cried out. At the same time the earth trembled convulsively as an earthquake shook the area. (Matt. 27:50,51) Not many months earlier Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, and Lazarus came forth from his tomb. (John 11:43)

This had been devastating enough to the Jewish leaders that it reaffirmed their need to kill Him. But now, in the last moments of His life, as Jesus cried out with a loud voice:

“...The tombs were opened; and many bodies of the Saints who had fallen asleep were raised;” Matt. 27:52

Even the Roman Centurion keeping guard over Jesus, seeing all these things became frightened, and was prompted to declare: *“...Truly this was the Son of God!” Matt. 27:54*

In addition to all these occurrences, which they might, somehow, have been able to explain away as due to natural causes after Jesus' death, they were faced with the controlling hand of God which could not be shrugged off. Before the very eyes of the people, as Jesus hung on the cross, prophecy was being fulfilled attesting to the fact that He was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God.

His anguished cry, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Mark 15:34), immediately called attention to the fulfillment of Psalm 22 regarding the Messiah.

Even the soldiers who had crucified Christ, unwittingly drew attention to Psalm 22. In so doing they provided living proof of the breathtaking detail and accuracy of God's Word. Each of the 4 guards had taken one of His outer garments. Because His tunic was seamless, they decided to cast lots for it rather than tear it and divide it.

How could David, writing hundreds of years before, have possibly anticipated that these 4 soldiers, at the foot of the cross, would cast lots for the clothing of the Messiah? Yet with pinpoint accuracy, he provides the prophecy given to him by God:

“They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.” Psalm 22:18

The desperate organizers of Jesus' death determined that if they could defeat even one prophecy concerning the Messiah, any claims that He was the Messiah could immediately be branded as false.

An official deputation went to Pilate indicating that the Passover Feast and Sabbath would begin in a matter of hours. According to their religion it was necessary that the corpses of these crucified men be suitably disposed quickly. (Deut. 21:23)

They asked him to command that the legs of the three men be broken to accelerate their deaths. To Pilate, the request seemed harmless enough. What would a Roman ruler know of prophecy concerning a Jewish Messiah?

“He keeps all His bones; not one of them is broken.” Psalm 34:20

The Jews must have been filled with a sense of victory as they relayed the order from Pilate to the Centurion that the legs of the crucified men be broken.

We must stand in awe of God's control as the record tells us that the soldier went first to one thief and then to the other, but last of all to Jesus. Roman discipline would indicate that he was trained to obey every order explicitly. He hesitated and decided that Jesus was already dead. To prove it, instead of breaking His legs, he thrust his javelin into Jesus' body.

To the dismay of the observing Jews, this soldier not only fulfilled the prophecy regarding the bones, but he provided the means for another Scripture to be fulfilled when Jesus returns as the Lord of Glory:

“...They will look on Me whom they have pierced;” Zech. 12:10

Blood and Water - John 19:34

John records that when the soldier pierced Jesus' side, immediately there came out blood and water. John then goes on to proclaim that he himself was witness to this and that in this witness is truth so that his readers might also believe. (John 19:35)

John in all his witnessing, was not totally concerned with simply recording the facts. Of far greater importance in his eyes were the Spiritual truths that such facts proclaim. We might then look for such significance in His witness of the water and the blood. What was their witness?

In relationship to the Messiah, the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testament, written under the Spirit direction of God, contain many, many references to the significance of blood and water. The New Testament alone abounds with allusions to the importance of water and its symbolic association with salvation. Similarly, the blood of the Lamb is stressed as essential to salvation. References to either one provides continuing echoes from the Old Testament.

As a guide to searching out the significance of such signs intended by John, we now draw attention to only three. The student is urged to look for others as each one sheds ever greater light on the importance and understanding of water and blood combining to lead us to salvation.

To begin with, these were symbols of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, when the Passover was instituted. Israel had come out of Egypt; their firstborn having been preserved by the blood of the lamb on the doorposts and lintels. Then the nation was preserved by passing through the waters of the Red Sea. In each case the Egyptians perished.

In His meeting with the woman at the well at Samaria, Jesus stated to her:

“...Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give Him shall never thirst; But the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.” John 4:14

This provides us with a direct echo out of the Old Testament which finds eloquent reinforcement and fulfillment in the piercing of the side of Jesus:

“Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink...” Exodus 17:6

The people in the wilderness had been grumbling to Moses that they and their children were dying of thirst. God commanded Moses to strike the rock and out of it came life-giving water. The rock provides immediate connection to Jesus. (1Co 10:4)

Christ Himself provided an allusion to this incident of the rock in the wilderness. It was on the Feast of Tabernacles, the very day which celebrated the giving of water in the wilderness. Jesus cried out in the Temple:

“...If any man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture said, from his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.” John 7:37, 38

From the Messiah, typified by the smitten rock, would flow living water.

Jesus’ own words reveal another significant connection between these two symbols:

“...Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.” John 3:5

“...Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” John 6:53, 54

Here is plain anticipation of requirements involving blood and water that Jesus instituted in His ministry. Baptism, a birth out of spiritual water, is the beginning of a person’s life in Christ. By this means we are identified with the One whom we acknowledge as Saviour, Master, Lord. The bread and wine are the outward tokens of the grace and power by which that new life, begun in baptism, may be maintained, and matured.

Baptism by itself will achieve nothing. Its work must be consolidated with the spirit of truth and repentance entering our bodies, nourished by a sharing of the fullness of Christ through the life that He can impart.

John ties all these elements together in beautiful summary in his 1st Epistle:

“This is the One who came by water and by blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, the Water and the Blood; and the three are in agreement.” 1 John 5:6-8

In this we see that the Spirit (in the Gospel), and the Water (of baptism), and the Blood of Christ shed on the cross and symbolized in the wine of the Memorial Supper do agree and combine in the truth concerning our salvation.

The Tomb - John 19:38-42

When Jesus was taken down from the cross, His body was taken by loving hands and carefully, if hastily, placed in a new tomb. There, for three days, He awaited the resurrection.

The Jews probably wanted the body of Jesus taken down, and flung, as a criminal, into the burning rubbish heaps of Gehenna. Some awareness of this must have prompted the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea to approach Pilate and claim the body of Jesus. Along with Nicodemus, he buried the body in his new rock hewn sepulchre. Thus was another prophecy fulfilled. It was written of the Lamb of God:

“His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was a rich man in His death...” Isaiah 53:9

LESSON FOR US

The sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ represented the extreme agony that a man could be called upon to endure. Although provoked to sin by every means by which sin might be aroused in a man, Jesus maintained His trust in God, and did not sin. He was convinced of the rightness of God’s Ways, and in His determination to uphold these ways, even to the death of the cross, He was sustained by God. Consider such passages as Galatians 3:13; Romans 3:23-26.

Paul in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians sums it up for us:

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Cor. 5:21

Do we fully appreciate what has been done for us? To what extent has it affected our lives and our actions? Do we really understand that Christ’s example is one of putting God first, upholding God’s supremacy and His righteousness?

Those who do will be prepared to follow Christ’s example, whatever the difficulties. Before us there is the prospect of association with Jesus when He returns in triumph as Lord and Christ in His Father’s Kingdom.

“Then the King will say...Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Matthew 25:34

SECTION 26

Jesus is Risen

Although He was slain by wicked hands, yet the grave could not hold Him. Jesus was the One toward Whom all history moved forward → The true Passover Lamb, the 2nd Adam. On the third day, He rose from the dead, to become the first fruits of them that sleep. Having appeared alive to His Disciples and proved His reality by “many infallible proofs,” He instructed them on how they should continue the work He had commenced.

Passover Lamb

Everything that happened to Jesus, as John presents it, was to make it clear that He was the true Passover Lamb. Even though He referred to the fulfillment of a prophecy, when He said, “not a bone of Him shall be broken,” there was a further Biblical echo.

Bible references relating to this verse in John take us back into two Old Testament records which unmistakably link Jesus to the Passover Lamb. In so doing, they direct our thoughts to His resurrection.

The first reference is in the Psalm 34:19,20

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivers Him out of them all. He keeps all His bones; not one of them is broken.”

The second reference takes us to Exodus 12:46, and the ritual of the Passover Lamb:

“It is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring forth any of the flesh outside of the house, nor are you to break any bone of it.”

To ritually preserve the skeleton of the Passover lamb, (i.e., not to break any of the bones of the skeleton), was a direct foreshadow to the true Passover Lamb provided by God. It suggested that the slain Lamb would live again. It was the doctrine of resurrection. To “keep the bones” of the Righteous as noted in Psalm 34 was to imply His resurrection unto life eternal. Similarly, fulfillment of Zech. 12:10, quoted in John 19:37, could not occur without Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.

The Second Adam

When Jesus was taken down from the cross, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two very prominent Jews, looked after the needs of His body. Gently, they wrapped His body in a linen cloth, anointed it with ointment and placed it in a tomb. (John 19:40) A great

stone, rolled upon the tomb, sealed it. (Matt. 27:60; Mark 15:46) It is recorded of Joseph's tomb that it was in a garden close to where Jesus was crucified. John takes great care to note that it was, "a new tomb, in which no one had yet been laid."

Once again, he provides us with a clear echo from the Old Testament relative to the sacrifice. The fact that the sepulcher had never before been used as a grave, seems superfluous to the description "a new tomb." John is drawing our attention to something.

This clearly designates it as a "clean place" under the law, one that was suitable for the ashes of the sin offering. (Lev. 4:12) Additionally, such a location was fit for the ashes of the red heifer, the one sacrifice under the law for removal of the defilement caused by association with a dead body. (Numbers 19:9)

Remembering that all of God's plan of salvation culminated in His Son, as the sacrifice for the atonement of sin, and the One who would gather the righteous and rule the Kingdom, we see an echo and a foreshadowing in John's phrasing regarding this tomb. It was in a garden, and no one had ever yet been buried in it.

The point at which there was no death was the creation of the first man, Adam. He had been lonely without a wife. God provided Eve and so removed his loneliness. The way He did this is suggestive of death, burial, and resurrection. (Gen. 2:18-22) In this symbolic sense, Adam rose from his sleep and met his wife in a garden. (Gen. 2:8)

So also, Jesus rose from the dead in a garden, and there met Mary, eagerly seeking Him. (John 20:15, 16) As such, she was symbolic of the righteous who will be eagerly seeking the risen Christ at His return. The apparent design of John's words is to present Jesus as the 2nd Adam, the Saviour, coming to claim His bride, the Church.

The Jewish Elders

There is a saying that there is no peace for the wicked. All through this period the minds of Annas and his colleagues were plagued by the thought of dreadful possibilities. So much concerning the Nazarene had seemed to happen that day exactly according to the familiar phrases in the Prophets. Jesus was now dead and buried, but the fears of these Jewish rulers were by no means stilled.

The day following the one on which Jesus was crucified was a "Holy Convocation of the Feast," when people were required to stand apart from routine matters and ponder the meaning of the Feast and of the deliverance that they were observing as it related to the Passover. Both the elders and the people had a lot to think about on the Feast in this particular year.

The Elders especially were troubled as they reflected upon the unusual phenomena of the previous day. The darkness that had overshadowed the land, the earthquake, the torn veil of the Temple, were all events which left a feeling of uneasiness and a sense of disquiet and foreboding.

The miracles of Jesus were fresh in their memories, as well as His warnings. (Matt. 21:41; 22:7) But what troubled them most was the resurrection prophesied for the 3rd day. (John 2:18-21; Matt. 16:21; 26:61) Apart from any of Jesus' public statements, they would have been privy to private comments to His Disciples in this regard, through their conspiracy with Judas.

As they considered the matter, it occurred to them that if the body were stolen, the Disciples would say that He had risen, and Jesus' claims would be reinforced. Perhaps, in their delusion, they thought that if Jesus was not a fraud, they could delay or hinder Jesus' emergence from the tomb on the 3rd day through their own feeble efforts. In any event, they approached Pilate, and gained from him an armed guard for the tomb.

The Disciples

When Jesus was arrested, all the Disciples forsook Him and fled. (Matt. 26:56) While with them, He had warned them many times of His impending sufferings, death, and resurrection. (Matt. 16:21; 20:17-19; Luke 18:31-34) They seemed not to hear or understand. They shared the general impression of the people that the Messiah would rule forever, but found it difficult to accept the thought that the sufferings must precede the glory. (John 12:34)

This gap in their understanding persisted beyond the resurrection, as Jesus' question to two of His followers later revealed:

“Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” Luke 24:26

Not having absorbed the significance of Jesus' statements in this regard, His Disciples were very unhappy and sad. They felt that all their hopes in Jesus were now ended. John, in fact, clearly states:

“For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.” John 20:9

In looking back over history, we have the advantage of knowing that Jesus was raised. At times, we might have difficulty discerning their lack of understanding in the view of the time that they had spent with the Lord during His ministry. Any thoughts of question or criticism should be driven from our minds when we see how their lives were changed. When they finally understood, they became filled with eagerness in the service of their King, and they went out and did a work which transformed the world.

The Resurrection - Matthew 28:1-10

Quite unaware of the anointing of the body performed by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James had prepared spices. They came on the first day of the week to do this work. (Luke 24:1; Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1)

As they approached, they found that an Angel of God had descended in radiant glory, broken the seal, and rolled back the stone guarding the tomb. The soldiers were petrified and had fainted with fear. Jesus had arisen and left the tomb. (Matt. 28:2-4) The Angel invited their inspection of the tomb, assuring them that Christ had arisen. He instructed them to tell the Disciples that Jesus would go before them into Galilee, and would meet them there. (Matt. 28:5-7)

Then, as they turned to hurry away with the news, they were overjoyed to meet Jesus, who confirmed the Angel's instruction to them. (Matt. 28:8-10) The women followed these directions, telling of His resurrection to the Apostles, who did not believe them. They felt their words were nonsense. (Luke 24:11)

Peter and John ran to the garden, and entered the tomb. They found only the burial clothes in which He had been wrapped. Once again, John provides a comment unique to his record. He states that the cloth which had been on Jesus' head, was rolled up and separated from the linen wrappings. (John 20:5-8)

We might consider that John is noting a significant fact which he perceived as foreshadowing the association that Jesus would henceforth have with His followers. He, "the head," would be separated from "His body," the Church. Although He would be with them in Spirit, it would not be until after the resurrection and judgment, at His return, that He would be physically united with all His faithful followers, gathered from over the centuries.

The Bribed Soldiers - Matthew 28:11-15

When the soldiers recovered, some of them went to the Chief Priests to tell them what had happened. The Elders' worst fears had been realized, and they must now take emergency action.

The Chief Priests quickly called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. They decided to deny the resurrection and bribe the soldiers to conceal the facts. The guards were told to say that, "His Disciples came by night and stole Him away while they were sleeping." (Matt. 28:13) The price paid to Judas was only 30 pieces of silver. It would appear on this occasion that their fears generated a larger reward for lies and treachery;

"...They gave a large sum of money to the soldiers," Matthew 28:12

Journey to Emmaus - Luke 24:13-35

That afternoon, two sad followers of Jesus were traveling to Emmaus when an apparent stranger joined them, inquiring about their downcast appearance and words. At that point they were blinded as to His identity. (Luke 24:16) They spoke to Him of Jesus of Nazareth, and told Him of their disappointed hopes: "*But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel...*" Luke 24:21

They told Him of the rumors of His resurrection, the attempt to confirm it, the discovery that the tomb was empty, “but they saw Him not.” They were confused and uncertain. (Luke 24:22-24)

They still did not realize that the stranger was none other than the risen Christ, who admonished them regarding their foolishness and lack of understanding in regard to what the Prophets had spoken. (Luke 24:25)

He proceeded to teach them, expounding Moses and the Prophets. He told them that what had happened was fulfillment of God’s Word and was required. (Luke 24:26, 27) Their hearts burned within them as He spoke. (Luke 24:32)

Emmaus came into view as the afternoon was waning, and they prevailed upon Him to stay with them. Then as He broke bread with them, and extended it to them, He made Himself known to them. As soon as they recognized Him, He vanished from their sight. (Luke 24:30, 31)

Jesus Appears to His Disciples - Luke 24:36-49

These two believers were so overwhelmed with this, that they arose immediately and made the seven-mile journey back to Jerusalem. They located the 11 Apostles who were gathered with others, and presented them with the joyful news. (Luke 24:33) But Jesus, meanwhile, had appeared to Peter, and when they burst in to tell their news to the assembled group, they found that Peter had a similar announcement. As they were exchanging news of Jesus, suddenly He, Himself, appeared in their midst. At first afraid, their doubts were soon dispelled and vanished in the joy of reunion with their Master. (Luke 24:36-41)

Jesus provided evidence of his bodily resurrection, and that he was not just a spirit or vision. He demonstrated this through scars on His hands and feet, His ability to eat, and the fact that He could be touched. (Luke 24:39-43) The Lord then instructed them regarding all things concerning Himself, in the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets. (Luke 24:44-48)

Then, and in the days following, the Lord continued His instructions to assist them in their understanding of the Scriptures. He also provided them with the promise of God’s power. They were to be filled with the Holy Spirit, just as He was, to enable them to continue the work that He had commenced. (Luke 24:49)

The Resurrection - Doctrinal Evidence

The Doctrine of the resurrection is a cornerstone of the hope in Christ. To deny a future resurrection is to overthrow faith in the promise that is provided to all those who follow Jesus Christ: 2 Timothy 2:18

“Men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and thus they upset the faith of some.”

Paul provided detailed consequences regarding denial of the resurrection:

“Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, Whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.” 1 Cor. 15:12-18

Paul also provided an extensive and impressive list of witnesses who saw the risen Christ. (1 Cor. 15:3-8)

The death of Christ was necessary because of existence of sin in the world: ***“He who was delivered up because of our transgressions...”*** The resurrection of Christ was necessary because of the existence of death in the world. This verse goes on to say: ***“...(He) was raised because of our justification” Romans 4:25***

“Justification,” or final acquittal from the results of sin, without the total abolition of death, is meaningless because it cannot be permanent. As with Christ, resurrection unto life eternal depends upon endeavoring to follow a life of holiness, depending upon grace and forgiveness for the times in which we fail. To begin the race for life, we must leave Adam, (whose we are by natural descent), and enter Christ, (whose we can become by choice): ***“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.” 1 Cor. 15:22***

The pathway from Adam to Christ is through baptism, which stands for death, and burial of the old way of life, and resurrection to a newness of life;

“Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead, through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” Romans 6:3, 4

LESSON FOR US

To all true Christians, one of the most certain facts of history is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This fact, the growth of Christianity stemming from it, and the assurance of a risen Christ who has said He will return, places us in the position where we must consider our own personal standing. Through baptism, we voluntarily associate ourselves with the risen Christ. By a consecrated life, those baptized reveal that they understand “the power of His resurrection.” See Philippians 3:9-10

Learn to Read the Bible Effectively

SECTION 27

The Ascension

Before Jesus ascended bodily to the Father, He was with His Disciples for 40 days, (Bible echo), speaking of the things of the Kingdom of God. Much instruction took place during this time of preparation as He made them ready for the work they were to do. He then ascended to the Father, where He remains while we await His promised return.

Final Instructions - Acts 1:1-3

After the resurrected Lord appeared to His Disciples, He was seen by them “over a period of 40 days,” before He was “taken up.” (Acts 1:3, 11) These were days within which He gave “orders to the Apostles whom He had chosen,” (Acts 1:2), and spoke “of the things concerning the Kingdom of God.” (Acts 1:3)

There was a great deal to be accomplished during those 40 days. They needed instruction regarding the full meaning of the covenants made with Abraham and David. They must understand these promises, and be able to convey them and the hope they represented regarding the Kingdom to all those who would follow. Additionally, they must understand the disciplines that were to be observed and taught consistent with a life of holiness and virtue.

They were to constitute a new creation, a multitude to be compared with “one body” having many parts. The “head” was Jesus Christ, whose direction the body followed:

“...And every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He (God) put all things in subjection under His (Jesus) feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the Church, Which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” Ephesians 1: 21-23

“He is also head of the body, the Church; and He is the beginning, the first born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything.” Colossians 1:18

“Yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him Holy and blameless and beyond reproach - if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the Gospel that you have heard...” Colossians 1:22, 23

The “second Adam,” Jesus Christ, was the focal point, or the center, of this new creation. He reminded His Apostles that, just as He had been sent by the Father, so they were sent by Jesus:

“...Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them...” John 20:21,22

Once again, we find evidence of John’s careful recording in order that we will see the echoes of foreshadows that were completed in Christ. In His wording, we see a virtual reenactment of Adam’s creation, when God “formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.” Jesus breathed on them, and promised that they were to receive the Holy Spirit of His Father. Life was breathed into them and they would become the first of the body of Christ, His Church.

Later, at Pentecost, the Apostles would receive that power to perform miracles. (Acts 2:1-4) What Jesus was doing while with them was inviting them to embrace the mind of the Spirit, assuring them, that if they did, God would endorse their actions. (John 20:21-23)

Before You Into Galilee - John 21:1,2

Jesus warned His Disciples before His death that Zechariah’s prophecy (13:7) would be fulfilled. He, the Shepherd, would be smitten and they, the sheep, would be scattered. (Mark 14:27) He had then added: ***“But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.” Mark 14:28***

Peter had protested that all others might be offended and fall away, but that he would not. He was told that, “that very night, he would deny his Lord 3 times.” And it came to pass.

Later, following the resurrection, the Angel at the sepulcher instructed the women:

“But go, tell His Disciples, and Peter, He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He said to you.” Mark 16:7

John, like the other Gospel writers, informs us that immediately after the resurrection Jesus appeared to the Disciples on various occasions in Jerusalem. He concludes the record of these initial appearances with the account of “doubting” Thomas’ acknowledgment of Jesus’ identity, upon seeing the wounds in Jesus’ hands, feet, and side. (John 20:26-29) He then says:

“Many other signs, therefore, Jesus also performed in the presence of the Disciples...” John 20:30

He now draws our attention to the fulfillment of the promise that had been made regarding meeting Peter and some of the Apostles in Galilee after His resurrection. It was the action of a shepherd to go before his flock, and it was the duty of a flock to seek and follow the shepherd. So, John states: “After these things, Jesus manifested Himself again to the Disciples at the Sea of Tiberias...” John 21:1

He records that a group of 7 Disciples, led by Peter, moved north, and came to the Sea of Galilee, (Sea of Tiberias) which they knew so well. This was the area from which Jesus had first called them. (John 21:2)

It was fitting that Jesus should confirm His Holy charge to them, in a manner that was reminiscent of their activities when He called them in the early days of His ministry. (Luke 5:5) John clearly shows us that this early call was a foreshadow of their final commission.

Fishing- John 21:1-14

As soon as they returned to familiar surroundings, nothing seemed more natural than that Peter should say, "I am going fishing." The others agreed with him. Immediately, they entered the boat, and though they tried all night, they caught nothing. (John 21:3)

Early the next morning, Jesus, (unbeknownst to them), stood on the shore in the half light of dawn. He inquired of their success: *"...Children, you do not have any fish, do you?"*
John 21:5

Following their negative response, He invited them to "cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat." They immediately acquired a catch of fish that was so large that they were not able to haul it into the boat. This is the 8th and final sign recorded in John's Gospel.

John recognized the "stranger" on the shore as the Lord. And Peter, with his usual enthusiasm to get to Jesus, jumped overboard and went ashore. The others brought the fish to land, with Peter later joining them in the work.

On arriving on shore, it was noted that the Lord had before him a fire on which fish was already cooking. And He had bread. He said, "come and have breakfast," and He gave them the bread and the fish.

Significance of the 8th Sign

As suggested earlier there is a close relationship between the 8th sign of John's Gospel and the record in Luke 5: 4-7, when the Disciples netted "a great multitude of fish" at the word of the Lord. On that occasion there was such a great load that their net broke.

On that previous occasion, the Disciples, had already embraced the Lord's Discipleship. They had returned to Galilee with Him following the first Passover visit, and went back to their daily occupation. At that time, however, He had told them that they should remain with Him during His ministry and become "fishers of men." When this was explained to them, "they left everything and followed Him." (Luke 5:11)

On this occasion recorded by John, Peter and the other 6 Disciples had been sent into Galilee, as sheep in search of their shepherd. They were Apostles (men sent), and as such they should have followed His instruction exactly. Instead, they lapsed again into the mundane affairs related to their old life. Jesus, now, once again, provided them with the

lesson that there was a great multitude of fish ready to fill the Gospel net for the Kingdom of God. As they performed the work of this calling the Lord would see to it that they would not go hungry.

He signified this by providing them with a breakfast of bread and fish. Consider the full significance. After a hard night's work, they were provided with a meal prepared by Jesus, through no effort of their own. While they carried out His directions regarding this large catch of fish, He, although they had not even been aware that He was observing them, saw to it that they received nourishment, providing their natural needs of the body in regard to sustenance.

We see further meaning in the detail that John provided. Consider first, the bread and fish that were already prepared when they came ashore after catching the 153 fish.

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is identified with the bread of life. The 7 Apostles were His early Disciples. As such they were represented by the fish that He had prepared and were now "ready" to perform His work as "fishers of men." Jesus' efforts satisfied their hunger.

Additionally, we are told that in the first miracle of the great catch of fish, He was in the boat with them. (Luke) In this final miraculous catch, recorded by John, He was on the shore, separated from them. They carried out this work of netting the fish on their own, under His direction, which He provided from a distance. Similarly, we know that He would shortly go to His Father and that they would continue in their labors on earth, while He provided direction from "His Father's side."

Finally, we might look for significance in the fact that John was very careful to record the specific number of fish that they caught. In the previous record of a miraculous catch of fish, as recorded in Luke, there was no record of number. In fact, it is very unusual that professional fishermen would count the number of individual fish caught in their nets during a night's work.

It is reasonable, therefore, that a Bible student might ask why John was so careful as to specify the number of fish caught. Over the years thousands of the readers of this Gospel have suspected a special significance here. We suggest that there is a sound instinct behind this.

Many theories have been developed, and provide a challenge for Bible students interested in pursuing such matters. For the purposes of these lessons, however, we suggest as a starting point, only two.

2nd Chronicles, chapter 2, verse 17, refers to 153 thousand and 600 as the number of "strangers," that is Gentiles, in Israel who were numbered by David, the ancestor of Christ. In Exodus 30:14-16, such numbering of the people is associated with atonement and redemption. Is the number 153 representative of all those nations, other than Israel, who would now be redeemed through the atoning work of Jesus?

The 2nd suggestion stirs the imaginations of all students who search for significance in Scriptural records such as this. Contemporary Greek Zoologists asserted that the sea contained precisely 153 different species of fish. This number could then be seen as symbolizing or representative of individuals out of all nations within the Gospel net.

Perhaps the key point, made several times by the Lord, is that NONE would be lost! Jesus knows exactly who are his, he knows them all by name, and he knows the exact number of them all.

Shepherding the Sheep - John 21: 15-19

These verses provide an excellent example for using study aids, such as concordances, if we wish to read the Bible effectively. Jesus' three questions, Peter's replies, and the reference to the sheep, do not appear to present a clear message when considered only in the English translations. If we go back to the meanings of the Greek words, the record comes alive with additional significance.

We should not be intimidated by this, because a total understanding of the significance of such verses is not essential to our salvation. But the meaning that is clarified through such understanding provides an insight into an integral part of being a disciple of Christ. All such meaning and clarification helps us in seeking to follow what Christ desires of us.

The principle involved is provided throughout the message. An understanding of Jesus' message to Peter, as applied through John's record, brings us closer to that principle. It is our privilege to search it out, and share Peter's understanding and learning, if we so desire.

But, in Jesus' mercy, our salvation is not dependent upon understanding and explaining every point that is recorded, such as in the message that Jesus presented to Peter and the other Apostles on this occasion. Salvation in Jesus, is not an intellectual exercise. His Apostles did not understand every message that was presented, and yet they were chosen and accepted. The important issue is to believe, realize our limitations, and needs, repent and be baptized into an understanding of salvation and hope in Christ. Never abandon this hope because you feel that you cannot understand every shade of meaning and significance in the record.

Coming back to John's record of the breakfast meal, John records no conversation until after the meal was finished. Jesus then addressed Peter: ***"...Simon, Son of John, do you love Me more than these?" John 21:15***

We must here remember Peter's boast that, although the other Apostles might desert their Lord, he would never do so, thus implying a greater love. The verb that Jesus used for "love" was "agapao," meaning to love sacrificially, in the sense of preferring others, while denying self. The Apostle Paul provides us with an excellent definition of this type of love:

“Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails...” 1 Cor. 13:4-8

Peter could not claim this, but he did have a strong affection for the Lord. So, in replying, he used the Greek word “phileo,” which means to love affectionately: *“...Yes, Lord; You know that I love You...” John 21:15*

Peter did not now claim to love the Lord “more than these.” His experiences had humbled him. The Lord replied: *“...Tend My lambs.” John 21:15*

The word for “tend” used here means to pasture. It is the duty of shepherds to lead the sheep into pasture, not to neglect the flock by divided loyalties. The Lord then asked Peter another question, this time retaining agapao, but dropping the words “more than these:” *“...Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” John 21:16*

This question, relating to Jesus alone, essentially challenged Peter’s own sacrificial devotion to the Lord. His reply, again using phileo, was an admission that the love that he felt for the Lord could not justly be described by agapao. It was emotional, but did not include a full intellectual understanding of the agapao type of love: *“...Yes Lord; you know that I love you...” John 21:16*

Back came the Lord’s reply: *“...Shepherd my sheep.” John 21:16*

This represented an extension of the work of the shepherd. The Greek word now used by Jesus regarding the sheep was changed. The one He used now meant to act as a shepherd in the sense of leading or governing. Additionally, a shepherd’s duty extends to other members of the flock, the sheep, as well as the younger lambs. By saying, “I’m going fishing,” Peter had led the other sheep in Jesus’ flock in the wrong direction. He had failed as a shepherd, even though Jesus had singled him out.

There was one final question that the Lord asked, a stinging one, which Peter would find difficult to bear: *“...Simon, son of John, do you love me?” John 21:17*

This time, Peter was extremely grieved. The Lord had used Peter’s own word, phileo. Was it truly a fact, as Peter had already twice claimed, that he really did feel emotionally “tied” to the Lord? Peter burst in with a vehement declaration of his love: *“...Lord, You know all things; You know that I love (phileo) Thee...” John 21:17*

Jesus replied: *“...Tend My sheep.” John 21:17*

Jesus once again reminded him of the duty to lead the sheep into pasture. This time in using this word, He referred to, not just the lambs as in the first instance, the new and the young members of the flock, but to all of His sheep.

Peter had denied his Lord 3 times, and 3 times he had now been questioned and had affirmed the tender regard for which he held his Lord. There is a simple test of the regard that one has for another and what one is prepared to do about it. Peter was, therefore, admonished to pasture the lambs, then govern the sheep, then pasture the whole flock, whether sheep or lambs.

Our love, whether “agapao” or “phileo,” must be revealed in action: ***“Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.” 1 John 3:18***

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.” 1 John 5:2,3

In the Gospel record, John goes on to record that, as the Lord pointed out, Peter would come to manifest his love for Him sacrificially. Before him lay the prospect of crucifixion. In this, he would indeed follow his Lord ultimately. (John 21:18, 19)

The Gospel of the Kingdom - Acts 1:4-8

In addition to matters relating to personal conduct, the Lord spoke to them “of the things concerning the Kingdom of God.” (Acts 1:3) He explained to them the Old Testament Prophecies, answered their questions, and helped their understanding.

They knew that Israel was once the Kingdom of God on earth, (1 Chr. 29:23; 28:5). Through disobedience, it had been broken up. (Ezekiel 21:27)

They remembered how the Lord had spoken of these things to the Jewish people as He went from city to city. (Matt. 21:43) He had warned the leaders of the Nation that authority in the Kingdom, in the day of its restoration, would be taken from them and given to His Disciples. (Luke 12:32) The Kingdom would be restored under Christ, and the Disciples would be rulers in that Kingdom. (Micah 4:8; Luke 1:32, 33) In fact, Jesus had specifically told Peter and the other Apostles:

“...Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel.” Matthew 19:28

But when? The Disciples pondered the question, and they all hoped that it would be soon.

Forty days after His resurrection, the Lord took His Disciples up to the Mount of Olives, for the time had come for His ascension. (Luke 24:50, 51) The Disciples did not realize that this was the last time that they would see the Lord before His second coming. Before leaving Jerusalem, He had commanded them to return to the city:

“And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” Luke 24:49

“And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, which, He said you heard of from Me; For John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” Acts 1:4,5,

As they had been walking to the Mount of Olives with Jesus, they had been grappling with the time of restoration of the Kingdom. They did not understand how far away it was. When they reached the Mount, they asked their question: “...**Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the Kingdom of Israel?**” Acts 1:6

They clearly believed that the Kingdom would be restored to Israel, and that Jesus would have power to accomplish the restoration. The only question was, “when”?

Jesus replied: “...**It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority;**” Acts 1:7

He then confirmed that they would receive the power from God, and would witness to the truth “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

The Ascension - Acts 1:9-12

The Lord finished speaking to them. Suddenly He left the startled Disciples, ascending into heaven until a cloud received Him out of their sight. But just as suddenly as He had been taken from them, two Angels in white apparel stood before them, and from their lips, the Disciples heard the thrilling message:

“...Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.” Acts 1:11

We notice that the Disciples were told that Jesus would come in the same manner as they had seen Him go. As He had departed visibly, so His second coming would be a literal and visible one.

With this wonderful message ringing in their ears, they returned to Jerusalem as the Lord had requested them, to await the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. By its power, they would be able to carry on the work that He had begun.

LESSON FOR US

Today, we are privileged to witness many signs that herald the second coming of the Lord. The return of the Jews, and the existence of the State of Israel, tell us that the time when “the Kingdom will be restored to Israel” is approaching. Other prophecies as well, too numerous to mention in these lessons provide the same message.

Like the Disciples, we now can spend the time at our disposal in preparing for the return of the Lord, and the establishment on earth of the Kingdom of God.

It is fitting to close the lessons of this seminar with the words of Peter, who obviously learned the lessons that Jesus provided to him during those last wonderful days together.

“...He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you may become partakers of the Divine Nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about his calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; For in this way the entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, will be abundantly supplied to you.”

2 Peter 1:4-11