

Jesus Who?

*Cool History and more
Discovering Faith in A Most Improbable God*

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(pseudonym)

Dedicated to Dr. John T. Lam, who showed me what Christianity was when My heart and mind were hardened against it. Thank you.

Read this book and you will know who you should pass it on to.

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Corinthians 9:18

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Introduction

This text is intended for non-church educated people who have been either confused or alienated by contemporary commercial Christianity. The information presented here has been reported by many other Christian sources. This text is intended to provide an easily readable biblical history and in-depth information for anyone who, like myself, may have struggled with the wording of older editions of the Bible. This is also written as a reminder to those who are very busy with life and may have forgotten that they were raised in a Christian household. I was long discouraged with the dated Elizabethan English of the old King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. At the age of fifty-five, a friend perceived that I had problems with the Bible's language and showed me a modern translation of the New Testament. Woah, it caught me off guard. I had been reading the Bible as an 'adult duty', out of a sense of obligation and was thoroughly expecting that God was a fabricated extortion tool of the Catholic Church—I was raised Catholic. So, I started reading a modern version of the NT. This modern version was mercifully clear, engaging, and surprisingly compelling. Much about The Messiah or the Christ—same person, was foretold in Bible prophecies written long before the time of Jesus.

The Bible is a collection of Christian writings by inspired prophets which was translated from the original Greek into English under the direction of England's King James in 1611—that was five years before the death of Shakespeare as a historical bookmark. Hence the dated Elizabethan English of the KJV. The Bible is not just an old story. It is a historical record; an accurate and well-documented meticulous historical account, if historical authenticity matters to you. For those looking for more readable versions, I recommend *The Message* by Eugene Peterson, which offers an apt paraphrased narrative, and the *New Living Translation (NLT)*, which is a popular straightforward translation.

The Bible comprises two main sections: the Old Testament, OT, and the New Testament NT. The OT, makes up a hefty seventy-five percent of the Bible. It covers thousands of years of Jewish history and their unique relationship with God. Much of that is challenging to understand without significant advanced historical study. The NT, however, is where the story becomes more directly relevant to people today. The NT is only about twenty-five percent of the Bible and it includes *The Gospels*, which narrate the life of Jesus. The Gospel accounts are written by four authors—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—each offering their perspective on the story of Jesus.

The Gospels are a small portion of the Bible but incredibly powerful once you know the context. Gospels are known by the names of their authors; Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, followed by chapter and verse. Jesus' life and teachings serve as the dividing line between the Old Testament or OT and New Testament or NT. His impact was so profound that it split history into two eras: BC or Before Christ, more recently termed BCE; Before Common (or Christian) Era and AD or Anno Domini, Latin for Year of our Lord referring to the number of years since Jesus' birth and its more recent term, CE Common (or Christian) Era. This text stays with the original BC and AD nomenclature for simplicity.

This text strives to provide a clear perspective on The Gospels using exclusive primary sources which include eye-witness accounts and first-hand historical information to highlight key moments and offer eye-opening background information. Whether or not you have read The Gospels before, this work serves as an introduction or companion guide, offering historical context that enriches understanding for students. This text covers the most significant and historically intriguing aspects to make the reading of The Gospels of the NT enjoyable and engaging, rather than a chore for beginners.

This text aims to be historically accurate while also providing an enjoyable experience for the reader. This is not a stealthy effort to convert anyone, although a positive impact would be nice. Instead, this is an expression of cathartic energy, a sharing the joy of discovering profound and wonderful information that has been long hidden in the cryptic language KJV of the Bible. Just as discovering a great surprise can change our perspective forever, this book offers a pleasant and delightful read, reveals new insights, and fosters a deeper appreciation of The Gospels of Jesus. Of course, a greater surprise discovery provides a greater pleasure.

Jesus Who

Jesus of Nazareth was a humble and peaceful Jewish man who lived at the beginning of the first millennium. Being Jewish at that time was a lifestyle, a grand all-encompassing culture not just a religion. Jesus traveled around Israel preaching, sometimes a bit cryptically, and performing hundreds of stunningly inexplicable acts right out in the open within sight of thousands. His message was to have faith in God or to trust God. He attracted attention from a huge following of Jews and Greek-speaking locals as well as a persistent group of hostile Jewish religious authorities. Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a tiny rustic Jewish town in Israel's northern province of Galilee. Scholars estimate there were about four hundred to maybe six hundred inhabitants in and around the Nazareth area at the time of Jesus. Nazareth was a quite agricultural Jewish village. Israel was divided into two provinces, Galilee in the north included a few non-Jewish cities and was generally more rural than Judea in the south which was the location of the capital, Jerusalem and The Great Temple which was the geopolitical center of gravity in Israel. There is not a lot of primary source information available on what life was like in small towns in Israel at this time, however, there is reasonable information on what conditions were like in the capital, Jerusalem. The population of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus was likely 30,000 to 50,000 and would swell to about 80,000 to 130,000 at the big three annual festivals. This was a good size city for the time, mostly confined to within the city walls. Jerusalem was dusty and busy on most days except the Sabbath. It would appear as an abandoned city on the Sabbath because, still to this day, Jewish Law forbids any business to be conducted on the Sabbath. Most days, there would be sedate pedestrian activity and donkeys or oxen slowly pulling two-wheeled carts. There would be restrained, not boisterous street vendors clustered according to their products and the smell of fresh-baked flatbread and scrumptious middle-eastern foods as well as the aroma of wood fires used for cooking and winter heat. There would be a smog of wood smoke over the city from animal sacrifices being burned at the temple, much worse during the big three annual festivals.

A startling difference of Jewish cities, in sharp contrast to European cities of the time, there would not be the overwhelming stench of people who never wash or bathe. We would be repulsed by such foul human stench in all western cities outside of Israel at this time. It is the Jewish culture that initiated western cleanliness. Romans, the political overlords, were also comparatively clean, with public baths common in their culture. The streets of Jerusalem would be calm, crowded, and dusty but free of trash and refuse. The streets in European cities, by contrast, would be clamorous and filthy with trash and refuse, both animal and human. Jerusalem would be tranquil yet congested with people softly chatting, shopping, bargaining, looking, or congregating in small groups. You would likely hear spoken fragments of Greek mixed with Aramaic, their primary language, lingua franca. Roman soldiers would cause Jews to step aside quickly to show respect as Rome had conquered and was occupying Israel. Roman soldiers are well known to have been casually brutal, rarely lethal towards conquered peoples. The dirt streets were unlit and a bit perilous at night with a few street criminals or desperately poor transients lurking or sleeping on the street. Inside a house or apartment, living conditions were cramped and not very secure. People could break in fairly easily. It is not known how much street crime existed at this time, but there was some and there are historical records of courts and punishments. The misery of those at the bottom of society existed because there was no social safety net, even though the economy was doing better than it had done in pre-roman rule. Rome would summarily execute all resistance anywhere they conquered and then give the survivors Roman administrative benefits of greatly improved infrastructure typically roads, sewage, and potable water.

The Bible is historically accurate and meticulously documented if historical proof is important to you. Two readable modern versions of the NT that I am fond of are; The Message by Eugene Peterson, previously mentioned, again this is paraphrasing not translation and The New Living Translation (NLT). The Bible is a huge amount of ancient historical and, in the case of the OT, some of it seems cryptic information. It is difficult to digest the OT without a lot of advanced study. About three-quarters of the Bible is OT dealing with a few thousand years of ancient history of the Jewish people and their unique relationship with God. The remainder of the Bible is the NT. This is where the real action is. That is, the easily understandable information that applies to people today. Included in the NT is a cool and personal part that is especially relevant to people today. That cool part is called The Gospels and it is the stories of the life of Jesus. Again, these stories are told by four guys; Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The four Gospels, by themselves, without the NT represents only about ten percent of the total Bible. It is not a big read, and once we know what is going on in the background of the story, it is hugely compelling.

Restating, this text uses exclusive primary source—or eye-witness, historical documentation to report highlights from and background information about The Gospels. It helpful but not necessary if you have already read The Gospels. This is intended to be a pre-Gospel or a companion Gospel reader, a discovery-type of account in historical context for anyone who has not studied The Gospels. This text will cover the high points and most historically revealing aspects so that the reading The Gospels of the NT will be fun and interesting rather than a chore. This is historically accurate and hopefully enjoyable for the reader. Repeating, this is not a stealthy attempt to win you over even as I would prefer a positive outcome. This is cathartic energy that I share with you. When we see something wonderful which has previously been concealed, that is a delightful surprise and we can never go back to not seeing that ever again. Of course, a bigger surprise discovery provides a bigger the delight.

Nazareth, Jesus' home town, was in the northern province of Galilee and was separated from Judea, the southern province by the area of Samaria. More on the Samaritans ahead. Nazareth, in Galilee, was a pastoral little town where Jesus lived for most of His life, from an early age into His late twenties or about thirty, when He began His public ministry. Jesus' life occurred in a time of dramatic historical events. His adoptive father, Joseph, had to flee with his wife, Mary, and the infant Jesus from Bethlehem, where Jesus was born. The family had originally traveled to Bethlehem for a mandatory population census and settled in there for about a year. However, King Herod The Great, the Roman ruler of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee had learned from some visiting 'wise men' that a 'king of the Jews' had been born in Bethlehem about a year earlier. Fearful of a rival, Herod ordered a massacre to purge all male Jewish children in the Bethlehem area age two and under. So, as soldiers are coming Joseph is warned by an angel of God (Matthew 2:13-18). Joseph takes his family and escapes to Egypt, where they laid-low for about three years. Jesus' parents handled the "Escape and Evade Capture OP" (operation) with a bit of Divine assistance.

Herod the Great, known for his paranoia and cruelty, died of natural causes—likely kidney failure and gangrene, about three years later. With Herod's death, his oppressive orders were buried with him so the family moves to Nazareth in Galilee. It is supposed that the Jewish people were relieved to move past the tyrannical reign of Herod the Great, even though he had built the much beloved Jewish Great Temple. More on that coming up.

As Jesus grew into adulthood, He and His stepfather, Joseph worked as carpenters, likely taking on various construction projects in and around Nazareth and in nearby non-Jewish cities under expansion at that time. Jesus had four half-brothers and at least two half-sisters, children of Mary and Joseph. Jesus Himself was conceived by the Divine intervention of the Holy Spirit in Mary before she was married and had "known not a man" (Luke 1:34-38), hence the term "Virgin Mary." This Divine conception was necessary for Jesus to be born without the stain of original sin, inherited from Adam and Eve when they were expelled from the Garden of Eden. Jesus needed to be sin-free because He was to become the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of all humanity—past, present, and future. That is according to Mosaic Law; sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins had to be "free of spot and blemish," which is why Jesus had to be and was free of the stain of original sin. His sacrificial death and resurrection marked the end of the OT Age or Mosaic Age, also known as The Age of Law and ushered in the NT Age, known as The Church Age or The Age of Grace. More explanation ahead.

At around thirty years of age, Jesus began His public ministry. He would be offering forgiveness of sins (John 1:29) and proclaim the Messianic Kingdom of God to the Jewish people. The Messianic Kingdom is prophesied in the OT and refers to the earthly rule of the Messiah, lasting a thousand years (Revelation 20:1-6). At that time, the NT had not yet been written yet, but there are existing Messianic prophecies in the OT. Many of the Jews of that era misinterpreted some of those prophecies and were expecting a political or military Messiah who would elevate Israel to global dominance. The Jews generally viewed God as legalistic and distant, which made them skeptical of a mild-mannered Jesus as their Messiah. This skepticism, influenced by corrupt and rigid religious authorities led to Jesus' official rejection as The Messiah by those religious authorities. Despite this rejection, Jesus did establish the Christian Church and more. The complex blend of religious corruption and political intrigue in Israel at that time blinded the religious leaders to the truth that Jesus was their long-awaited Messiah. Even when they eventually do realize it, they had become too entrenched by their repeated public denials of Jesus as The Messiah, so they could not admit it and they instead concoct alternate explanations. This text will present the details of that story in plain language and rich primary source context, hopefully making this engaging for new Christians to read.

Saved into Eternal Life

Why do so many people today, still have such enthusiasm for Jesus? It is because Jesus is exactly who He claimed to be—the genuine article. Jesus made it possible for anyone to attain Eternal Life, regardless of their past. Whether you have been a criminal, a sinner, or otherwise feel unworthy, the promise of Eternal Life with God is available to *everyone*. This is not a vague promise; it is direct and accessible to all. You do not need to be in any way special or to earn it. Salvation is like God's love or the sunshine is free to all who live on earth and it can never be earned, only Divinely received. God wanted it to be easy for us to choose, and I appreciate that simplicity. So, who is this Jesus? According to Jewish archival records, Roman historical texts, biblical prophecies, and The Gospels containing extended verbatim transcripts of His own words, Jesus is a Jewish man who is also The Son of God. Although He usually referred to Himself by the title The Son of Man, it means the same thing and I will explain the term a little later. Jesus is the only son God ever had. Much of what happened in Jesus' earthly life was foretold in the OT, recorded in Bible prophecies, and written thousands of years before His physical arrival here on Earth in human form. Every prophecy has proven true. The Bible's legitimacy is highly-documented. There are about 5,600 ancient copies of the NT, and they all align with 99.5% accuracy. Many events foretold in the Bible have already occurred, and some prophecies are yet to unfold. These are not vague predictions like those of Nostradamus', who wrote about 6,300 enigmatic predictions which missed their mark by a wide margin. Nostradamus also wrote ambiguous horoscopes for rich or prominent people of his day. The biblical prophecies, by contrast, are clear and specific, with over three hundred which have, so far, been fulfilled exactly as written. The chances of all that being faked or coincidental is simply inconceivable. The Bible encourages us to examine its claims, and we look to the words of Jesus as a guide for living our lives.

Jesus introduced The New Covenant, which I affectionately term “the new deal.” He offered everyone the free gift of Grace through the Holy Spirit, which includes two critical components: forgiveness of all sins and Eternal Life with God in Heaven. This offer is no longer limited to the Jews; as it was prior to Jesus, it is available to anyone who asks for and accepts it. Grace has fundamentally changed the conditions in which all humanity lives. This gift is a significant aspect of God's plan, especially important for us Gentiles or non-Jews. More on the gift and meaning of Grace coming up.

The Historical Jesus and His Teachings

The existence of the historical Jesus and His teachings has withstood rigorous scrutiny from all comers; including arrogant skeptics, atheist researchers, cynical academics, and very many pseudo-historians. There is more primary source documentation confirming the life and words of Jesus Christ, from eyewitnesses' accounts, than any other historical figure. Also, The Gospels reference well-documented and historically definitive events, such as:

“Herod being tetrarch of Galilee” (Luke 3:1)

“When Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea” (Luke 3:1)

The population census, administered under Quirinius (Luke 2:1-4)

“In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar” and

When “Philip was tetrarch in Ituraea and Trachonitis” (Luke 3:1-2)

Those references establish the time, are corroborated by Roman archival records, and many other non-Christian historical sources. Numerous non-religious scholars have examined the evidence intensively, and it can be said with highest degree of certainty that a Jewish man named Jesus lived in Israel during the described period. Furthermore, He performed numerous miraculous acts in public, witnessed by many thousands or people. These miracles served to authenticate His teachings as recorded in The Gospels. This leads to a simple yet profound question: Do you believe Him or not? When we read The Gospels in plain, modern language, Jesus does not come across as a delusional fanatic or a fraudulent cosmic magician. He seems to be genuine, exactly as He claimed to be, which has deep and far-reaching implications. Plenty of compelling primary source historical evidence coming up.

Jesus is The Son of God, which brings up the concept of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). The Trinity comprises three distinct persons who function autonomously yet are unified

as one being, God. This is akin to having two subordinate entities—the Son and the Spirit—who act independently yet remain intrinsically part of God the Father. The Son and the Holy Spirit perform tasks on The fathers' behalf and then they return to Him, as they are part of Him. The complexities of the Trinity are beyond this introductory text. However, much like quantum gravity, the Trinity exists independent of our understanding.

There is only one God, God as emphasized in both Islam and Christianity, despite their significant differences. In Islam, it is conceivable that anyone may be asked to send their child into a hopeless war as a sacrifice for the honor of Allah. While in Christianity, God sends His Son to die for humanity, unconditionally. God created everything; the nation of Israel from a collection of feudal tribes, the entire Universe, approximately 93 billion light-years in size and has existed for about 13.8 billion years—give or take a couple of inches, I assume. God comprehends every aspect of His creation, including the yet unexplained reason that the Higgs boson; the only particle in the Standard model devoid of spin is a lot lighter than it should be. It seems reasonable to trust in both God and in science. God can easily reconcile them, even though we cannot.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). God is intimately aware of every detail of your life, down to the number of hairs on your head (Luke 12:7, Matthew 10:30). He is not a distant, uninvolved creator; He actively governs His Universe in real-time. Success and joy in life are possible if we follow a few “rules of the road,” such as learning to wait upon the Lord. So, if Jesus is indeed who He claimed to be, then everything He said is true. What, everything? Yes, every single thing and there are no “gotchas” in Jesus' words—only profound and life-affirming truth.

God's love for us is unconditional; it transcends human comprehension and is part of the Divine order that governs our existence. Just as gravity is an unseen force that is known by what it can move, God's love is similar; a force that moves our hearts and lives. Like gravity, it operates independently of our beliefs and it moves us undeniably. However, God's love is infinitely more profound and transformative than any mere force of Physics.

God desires to shower us with His love, favor, and blessings, offering far more than we can imagine. His love is a form of spiritual power—gentle yet powerful—whereas humans usually rely on physical or hard power to exert influence. Jesus, sent by the Father, brought us the ultimate gift: Grace the two-part critical asset package; forgiveness of sins and entry in God's Kingdom. This gift is offered freely and requires voluntary acceptance whereas gravity does not. Gravity does not cease to exist based on our understanding or acknowledgment of it, but you cannot ignore it. The gift of salvation through Jesus stands ready, awaiting our acceptance. It is a misconception to think that anyone could be too insignificant or too sinful to receive God's Grace. The cross of Christ is the ultimate symbol and proof of God's boundless love, offering a path to forgiveness and Heaven for *everyone*.

It is easy to get discouraged by the words of hypocrites, in daily life. The term “hypocrite” originates from the Greek word *hypokrite*, meaning stage actors—pretending to be something they are not, acceptable in performance art, but not in real life. While some hypocrisy exists everywhere, do not allow that to distract you from your own spiritual journey. Jesus draws people over to Himself through the force of love which is spiritual soft power, rather than through social coercion. Jesus reaches out to us in our ignorance, freely offering us a relationship that transcends all human understanding, failures, and flaws.

Jesus' invitation is open to all, and no one can be snatched from the Father's hand (John 10:29). Do doubt whether Christ will receive you, remember that He welcomes all with His heart full of love. Whereas there are complexities and sometimes troubling narratives of the OT, in the NT, God has made a way for us to approach Him with confidence. We, as humans, are inherently flawed, often driven by self-righteousness or greed. Yet, even in our lowliness and corruption, we can come before the one, true, Most High God-of-all without fear or doubt. Believers belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God (1 Corinthians 3:23). In His infinite wisdom, all things will eventually be revealed to you, although not necessarily in our desired timing. Learn to wait upon the Lord, as Psalm 27:14 encourages, a valuable lesson with profound rewards.

As humanity progresses in understanding of The Universe, it has become clear that there are limits to what we can comprehend at this early stage of our evolution. The mysteries of God and The Universe are quite beyond us, and we may never fully grasp them before the prophesied End Times. However, the journey of discovery, both spiritual and scientific, continues to reveal the depth and complexity of God's creation and of His love for us.

The Gospels

A Gospel—gōd spell or good news—Middle English, is a text that describes the life of Jesus. The four Gospel writers; Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have been thoroughly vetted and are undeniably legitimate. There are other gospels excluded from the Bible; Thomas', not even written by Thomas. Also, the Gnostic gospels are excluded because they are heretical, saying Christ did not come in the flesh and that only the Gnostics with their esoteric knowledge can be saved. The Apocrypha is also non-eye-witness, written after Malachi died and it contains glaring historical and chronological errors that conflict with actual canonical scripture and so that too is excluded. So, what is left are the original Gospel writer's; Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the only ones whose work is irrefutably authenticated.

Mark, likely retelling the stories of Peter his post-Jesus evangelical traveling companion, seems to have written the first Gospel with Mathew and Luke likely having seen Mark's version, agreed with it, and were influenced by the style. Also note, it is only Luke who puts his Gospel in chronological order. Luke 1 "...having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order." It is only Luke who records things in sequential order and this text always follows his timeline because the correct chronology of events provides a more insightful and logical story flow. Presenting a story in order of occurrence is helpful to understanding the motives and reasoning processes of the participants. Without the Luke chronology, people would be arguing endlessly about what happened when. The Luke chronology invalidates that tiresome human practice, at least for The Gospels.

The other three Gospel writers do not present their material in chronological order which is extremely confusing if, like most of us, you started out as unaware of that. Also, as it turns out, Mark and Luke are two of the four Gospel writers who were not physically with Jesus during His three-plus years of public ministry. You can see in the wording of Luke's Gospel that he is telling the story by interviewing others. John was the last of the four to pen his Gospel and he seems most interested in the exact words that Jesus spoke, even more than His deeds it seems to me. John is the go-to-guy for the exact wording of what Jesus said. All four are way-cool for individual reasons. The accounts of Mathew, Mark, and Luke are known as the Synoptic Gospels—synopsis or general view, because they are similar in style and in the content of what they say. It is convenient to look at all four accounts in a side-by-side chronological format, known as a *Harmony of The Gospels*. So, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are known as the synoptics. Something reported 'across the Synoptics' means that those three have reported on that. Some topics are reported on by one or two of the Synoptics. Sometimes all three plus John report on the same subject, which I think of as sort-of a Grand Slam. It is helpful to have a *Harmony of The Gospels* for study. The side-by-side chronological format is enormously helpful. I recommend you get one, maybe in the English Standard Version, ESV or in the New International version, NIV. They are especially helpful. This will save you a many hours of deciphering the 'when' of anything in The Gospels. A *Harmony* mercifully eliminates the detective work.

Some Christians note that in Mark's Gospel, more so than in the other Synoptics, Jesus seems to conceal His Messianic identity. However, a broader perspective also reveals that whenever Jesus exorcises demons, they recognize Him and refer to Him as the "Son of God" out loud and He usually commands them to be silent, Mark 3:11-12 and Luke 4:41. It seems Jesus preferred not to have the unclean spirits publicly proclaim His identity. He will reveal Himself on His own terms and likely wanted to avoid any association with demons. Of course, as the Messiah, it would be inappropriate to approve of any incidental demon testimony. He will establish His identity and mission through His words and deeds, not by any unwelcome demon testimony.

It was because of the rejection of His Messiahship by the Pharisees—officially representing the nation of Israel, that Jesus changed His teaching method. He began to teach exclusively in parables, using symbolic language that often-required private explanations to His Disciples. This shift is evident in Matthew's Gospel. In Matthew 13:10-11, His Disciples ask Him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" Indicating the change in His teaching style on the very

day of the rejection of His Messiahship by the Pharisees. It is Luke's chronological recording approach that pinpoints the 'when' of this shift in the narrative.

Using a Harmony of The Gospels is particularly helpful to newer students. I like A.T. Robertson's revision of John A. Broadus' landmark Harmony using the KJV. There are many different Harmonies with more contemporary wording. These Harmonies align The Gospel accounts chronologically and often include insightful commentary in the context and sequence of events. I like a Harmony because it saves a huge amount of effort in deciphering the timeline and offers a straight forward and clear view of Jesus' life and teachings.

Geographic and Contextual Background

Around 930 BC, the ancient nation of Israel divided itself into two kingdoms: the southern kingdom, Judah, and the northern kingdom, Israel. In 722 BC, the northern kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians who implemented their standard policy of population exchange among concurred peoples—deporting many Israelites and bringing in foreign peoples from several countries to help resettle the region “under New Management”, so to speak. These resettled peoples, together with remaining local Jews, became known as Samaritans.

About 140 years later, the Southern kingdom of Judah is conquered by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar II in 586 BC. The Babylonians destroy Jerusalem, including Solomon's Temple, and take many Jews as slaves to Babylon (modern-day Iraq). This Babylonian Captivity lasted until Cyrus the Great's decree allowing Jews to return to Israel in 539 BC. During this exile, Jewish religious practices solidified and formalized as they maintained their Jewish identity. Significant portions of the Hebrew Bible were compiled during this period.

By Jesus' time (around AD 30), the region had fallen under Roman control, following Pompey's conquest in 63 BC. Later still, in the Jewish-Roman Wars, Rome crushed Israel and they renamed the province "Palestine" in about AD 132. This region of approximately eight thousand square miles—about the size of New Hampshire—remained a crossroads of civilization despite its small size.

Next, both the northern and southern regions were reconquered by Alexander the Great, ushering in a 270-year period of Hellenistic influence. The Greeks, known as Hellenes, left a lasting cultural impact, including the widespread use of the Greek language among non-Jewish locals throughout the Anatolian peninsula—Asia Minor, as it was known at that time. This period is characterized by the blending of Greek and local cultures, with “Greeks” often referring to Greek-speaking non-Jews rather than people from what we consider to be Greece today.

The Greek influence waned with the rise of the Roman Empire, which conquered the entire area, including tiny Israel in 63 BC. By the time of Jesus' ministry, around AD 30-33, Israel had been under Roman military occupation for nearly a century. The Romans allowed the local culture and religion to continue as long as taxes were paid, a policy that helped them maintain control over their vast empire. Despite this, Israel was unique among Roman provinces in its strong resistance to Roman rule, often leading to conflict.

The Romans maintained order through installing local rulers, such as Herod the Great and Pontius Pilate, who were backed by permanently garrisoned Roman soldiers. These rulers collected taxes from the local population through a system that encouraged corruption; Jewish tax collectors known as publicans (a pejorative) had to purchase the right to collect taxes for Rome and routinely overcharged for personal profit, leading to universal disdain from their fellow Jews. Despite this, Jesus famously called a tax collector, Matthew, to be one of His Disciples and he immediately waked away from his lucrative job and followed Jesus.

Local Roman rulers like Herod the Great often tried to appear sympathetic to captive populations to maintain détente. Herod, half-Jewish by birth, was a prolific builder who renovated and expanded the Second Temple, originally rebuilt by Ezra after the Babylonian destruction. This became known as Herod's Temple, The Great Temple, or the Second Temple. It was a magnificent structure, beloved by the Jewish people. Despite Herod's outward displays of benevolence, he was notorious for his cruelty and paranoia, executing family members he only suspected

of disloyalty. A complex relationship with his Jewish subjects is reflected in the term 'Herodian,' used in The Gospels to describe Jews at the time who advocated superficial support for Herod's rule.

Herod's reign exemplifies the contradictory matters of Jewish-Roman relations in this period. The Romans, while casually brutal, had no inherent desire to destroy Jewish culture. Their primary interest was maintaining control and collecting taxes. However, repeated Jewish revolts against Roman rule, culminated in the disastrous rebellion of AD 132 which caused the total destruction of Jerusalem, The Great Temple, and the death of about half of the Jewish population. The long festering historical context set the stage for the socio-political environment during the life and ministry of Jesus. This was a time marked by tension, cultural diversity, and potent conflicting influences.

The Jews of Jesus' time maintained their identity as the chosen people of God despite living under Roman occupation. The common people faced multiple burdens: Roman taxation, mandatory temple offerings, and occasional exploitation by Roman soldiers.

Central to Jewish religious history was the Ark of the Covenant, a gold-covered wooden chest containing the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, a pot of manna, and Aaron's rod (Hebrews 9:4). According to scripture, Moses communicated with God through the Ark (Exodus 25:22), making it the most significant religious artifact in history.

The Ark resided in Solomon's Temple (the First Temple) in Jerusalem for nearly four centuries until the Babylonian destruction in 586 BC, when it disappeared from the historical record, likely the gold was scavenged. By Jesus' time, some six centuries later, the Temple had been rebuilt and expanded by Herod the Great, becoming the magnificent structure described in the Gospels.

The fate of the Ark is still unknown. While various theories suggest hidden locations—from Ethiopia to Vatican City to Qumran—no definitive evidence has emerged to support any particular claim. The search continues to captivate both scholars and the faithful, even as its ultimate fate, hidden or destroyed remains unknown.

During the Second Temple period, two major Jewish religious-political factions emerged: the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees were scholarly teachers who developed the Oral Law (Tradition of the Elders) which were their interpretations of the written Torah. They maintained these oral traditions were divinely revealed to Moses at Sinai alongside the written Law hundreds of years before they bothered to mention that to the Jewish people. That claim was met with universal skepticism.

The Pharisees made Judaism accessible to common people through their Torah interpretations. They adhered to both the written Torah and their oral traditions, believing in the resurrection of the dead, divine providence, and the existence of angels. While generally meticulous in observance, some Pharisees were criticized by Jesus for creating secret technical workarounds to some of their laws, Matthew 15:1-9 while maintaining apparent compliance.

The Sadducees were primarily aristocratic priests and wealthy elites. They accepted only the written Torah as authoritative. They rejected the Oral Law. Neither did they accept the resurrection of the dead or the existence of angels, both Jewish staples. As Temple controllers, they pragmatically cooperated with Roman authorities to maintain their position.

Though the Sadducees held official power through Temple control, the Pharisees also wielded great influence through their focus on synagogue worship and religious education. This helped preserve Jewish identity under foreign rule. Although the Pharisee influence weakened because of their self-aggrandizing and because of Jesus' ministry they did remain influential. Pharisaism evolved into Rabbinic Judaism later, after the Temple's destruction in AD 70.

The Path to Eternal Life

God desires for us to have Eternal Life with Him, but this opportunity is available only during our lifetime. The key to being saved and entering into God's Eternal Life is simply believing in and accepting Jesus as lord—nothing else. No

number of good deeds, moral living, helping others, selfless dedication, or altruism can grant anyone access to Heaven—only faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior can do that. Good works may earn rewards in Heaven, but they do not open the door; only the acceptance of Jesus does that. Mark 16:16 It is a decisive and automatic process: choose to believe in Jesus, and you are welcomed into Eternal Life; choose not to, and you are *eternally* excluded.

God, understanding our nature and the challenges we face, has provided guidance for those who may not yet understand or believe. Reading The Gospels in plain, modern language, as suggested in this text, can be a transformative experience. The Bible, written under Divine inspiration (Proverbs 30:5, 2 Timothy 3:16), assures us that the truth it contains was delivered through Divinely appointed prophets (2 Peter 1:20-21). Trusting in these writings is life-changing. A few rereading's of The Gospels can lead to compelling belief; further repeated readings often make belief inescapable, as in wondering, "Why haven't I seen this before?" Perhaps outdated language or inaccessible translations were barriers. Fortunately, there are newer, more readable versions available, such as the Peterson, the New Living Translation, NLT, and the English Standard Version (ESV). Jesus said, "Seek and you will find" (Matthew 7:7-8), That applies to everyone. Even if you approach this with skepticism, reading The Gospels will give you a foundational understanding of Jesus, moving you from uncertainty to a confident and a secure view.

Understanding God's Perspective

You might not know what God thinks of you or His thoughts at all and that is understandable. While we cannot fully comprehend the mind of God, we can understand His love and intentions for us, especially through the earthly life of His Son, Jesus, who lived nearly 2000 years ago. Familiarity with the NT offers insight into God's thoughts and desires for humanity. Point of Order; Any familiarity with God is a hugely more rewarding human condition than stone-cold ignorance. Full stop. Knowing God is far more rewarding than remaining in ignorance, a fact supported by personal experience and implied in the Bible. While it may not seem significant at first, Divine knowledge, rather than material wealth, is what is essential for a truly fulfilling life. People often chase money, sex, health, and other temporal things, but these pursuits never fully satisfy. Greed is infinite, and humanity is tragically susceptible. While acquiring great wealth might seem like the worthy goal, true contentment comes from following the path to Divine satisfaction and not fearing death. The varied circumstances of our lives, including differences in abilities and circumstances reflect God's broader plan. These "preparations of the soil," as Jesus referred to them in his parables, serve to shape us into the people God wants us to be, rather than merely being successful by earthly standards. The reality is that we all exist to fulfill God's expectations, not the other way around. Embracing this often leads to a deep sense of joy and fulfillment, beyond anything material wealth can provide.

A Call to Justice and Compassion

To ignore human repression and injustice is to be complicit in it. As Christians, we are called to engage in the pursuit of universal justice and equality. Joining the global Christian community is a great start, offering companionship and a platform for working to alleviate oppressive circumstances. Everyone can contribute at their comfort level, and the experience is enriching. While you do not need to adopt a specific Christian subculture or language, the core message remains that earthly privileges are relative, heavenly values are absolute. Social and spiritual growth is an ongoing journey, as indicated in 2 Peter 1:3-8, 1 Corinthians 11:1, and 2 Timothy 3:16-17. This life is brief compared to eternity, so it is prudent to prepare for what comes after.

The Sacrifice of Jesus and the Gift of Grace

God gave us His Son, Jesus, as a sacrifice on the cross to atone for the sins of all humankind—whether ignorant, intentional, past, present, or future. Jesus willingly gave His life; He was not a victim but chose to sacrifice Himself (John 10:14-18). He did this to fully pay our sin debt with God the father, something we would never be able to do. The reason behind this extraordinary act is simple: only God had the "currency" to pay the immense debt of sin, and Jesus, being Divine, could afford to do so. This immense act of kindness frees us from carrying the burden of guilt, as everything has been forgiven through His sacrifice. When we come to Jesus, we do not need to fear judgment for our past sins because they are erased, canceled, gone by the grace of god. At your judgment, God will not bring up your old sins; instead, He will focus on our good deeds for which we will be rewarded. This is the essence of God's grace—undeserved and unearned Divine forgiveness, generosity, and love.

Jesus' death on the cross is the cornerstone of the NT and the entire Christian faith. It symbolizes God's immense love for humanity and Jesus' triumph over death. This voluntary sacrifice was necessary for our salvation because, just as sin is a voluntary, so Divine redemption must be. Accepting Jesus' grace is a personal choice, freely made. We have free will, and Jesus, fully aware of His mission, chose to go to the cross to fulfill God's plan for our redemption. Accepting Jesus enrolls us in His lifelong school of faith, where we continually grow in our relationship with Him.

Invitation to Eternal Life

Many people do not know what God thinks of us, or any of His hopes for humanity. Via Jesus' life and teachings we can glimpse God's immense love and desires for us; Familiarity with the NT offers insights into God's nature. Repeating; any familiarity with God is a hugely more rewarding human condition than stone-cold ignorance. Restating, true satisfaction does not come from wealth or worldly pursuits but from Divine knowledge. While people often chase after money, pleasure, health, and other temporal things, these can never truly satisfy. Greed for greed's sake remains infinite. The notion that more money will bring satisfaction is a misconception. True fulfillment comes from aligning with God's will, not from accumulating earthly treasures which we all simply leave behind. This text is about a path to Divine satisfaction and not fearing death and it is not the path of storing up treasure here on Earth. That is just a little distracting 'something to do' while we figure out what is truly important and anyone certainly can do both at the same time. That is, we can be a Christian, lead a life pleasing to God, and still make a good living. There is no need to become a hermit, a monk, a nun or to be otherwise without earthly comforts, contrary to over-reactive contemporary Hasidic or Amish type philosophies.

The diverse circumstances we face, including differences in wealth and abilities, may be part of God's plan for Earth's evolution. God calls us to a road trip or a rally with Him to lift people out of ignorance or oppression, shaping us into the kind of people He wants us to be rather than the kind we want to be, you know, successful. Put any secret hardball ambition you may have in the glove compartment for now and read on. Engaging in the pursuit of justice and equality is a part of the Christian life. Learn to align yourself with His will. Repeating, God does not exist to fulfill our expectations, we exist to fulfill His and if we teach ourselves to do that, we become amazingly triumphant, not rich but joyful beyond what you can imagine. Really. Instructions and road map ahead.

The Transforming Power of Christ

Jesus' sacrificial act on the cross is an extraordinary display of God's love and the possibility of renewal for everyone. His voluntary sacrifice, necessary for our salvation, was foretold in the Bible and fulfilled out of love. Our choice to accept Jesus and His grace must also be voluntary, an act of free will. The assurance that "no one can snatch them from the Father's hand" (John 10:29) offers confidence that anyone who comes to Christ is accepted by The Father. This Divine commitment *guarantees* our place in God's love, despite any doubts or misunderstandings about our worthiness or the complexities of scripture. Humans are inherently flawed and often entangled in desires for self-righteousness, which lead to conflicts and war. Our pursuit of being "right" often overpowers our pursuit of happiness, love, and peace. Still, despite our flaws and ignorance, we may always approach the one and only God without fear, knowing that believers belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God (1 Corinthians 3:23). While not all answers are immediate, they are clear. To wait upon the Lord, for His answers, is incredibly rewarding (Psalm 27:14).

In the realm of science, the Before-Before Experiment of Antoine Suarez, Director of The Center for Quantum Philosophy in Zurich provides a glimpse; (<https://www.physicsforums.com/threads/exploring-antoine-suarezs-work-on-entanglement-and-time.288431/>) into the mysteries of The Universe and what it seems could only be Divine influence. It demonstrates that certain particles are controlled by influences from *outside of space-time*. The implications of particles in The Universe being controlled by a power from outside of space-time, where God exists and humans can never go in any kind of physical form is so profound that most scholars do not even know what to think about it. Academic agreement is unlikely to be forthcoming. Still, the experiment is a cool indicator and it does support with actual hard-science the existence of God making up the rules, some of which are beyond our comprehension from outside of space-time. So, humans are getting a tiny amount smarter, still it does not seem likely that we will figure out everything in The Universe in the time we have remaining before the events of the End Times sweep over the planet like a light-speed pyroclastic flow from hell. The End Times are covered farther ahead.

God gave us His Son as a sacrifice on the cross so that act would atone for the sins of all humankind; ignorant, intentional, past, present, and future. Jesus died on the cross voluntarily, He was not a victim, John 10:14-18 and He did this to pay off our sin debt completely. Why would He do that? We can understand the logic of a man giving his life for a friend spontaneously as perhaps in combat, but why would God give his son to pay for our sins? The answer is, again, that only God had what it would take to pay that level of debt, Jesus. In that context, we can see the logic of Jesus paying our sin debt for us because He had the currency, which we will never have, so He could afford to pay the debt. Extremely generous of Him, I will say, since we will never have what it takes to pay that level of debt. So, Jesus paid it for us. When you come to Jesus there is no need to be carrying any guilt around because everything has been forgiven. God is not going to lecture us about our old sins if we come to Jesus in this life. In fact, at your judgment I bet He is not even going to bring that up. Because when we are forgiven by Grace all sin is history, canceled, gone! That is what Grace is. Cool Spoiler alert; God is never keeping track of all our sins to hold against us but He does tally up our good deeds to reward us, an improbability loving God. Measure the power of God's love for you not by your circumstances but by the cross. "For the Law was given through Moses; Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" John 1:17 The death of Jesus on the cross was to make atonement for 'the sin of the world. This is the central reality of the NT and of all Christian religion. The cross is the symbol of God's love for us and of Jesus' victory over death. This is why Christians often refer to 'the Cross of Christ', it is both metaphorical and material. Jesus' suffering on the cross is foretold in the Bible, was necessary for man's salvation and was voluntary as is all sin and so to redemption had to be voluntary. As is our choice of whether to accept Jesus and His Grace. All of that must be voluntary to be valid. We all exist with free will. Jesus the God-man went to the cross voluntarily in obedience to the Father and to perform the redemption that He was sent here to accomplish. Jesus mentions this several times.

Invitation to Eternal Life and the Gift of Grace

God offers us the chance to have Eternal Life with Him, but this offer, if you do not accept it, expires at the time of your death. The way to receive this gift is simple: believe in Jesus as The Messiah. This is the only path to salvation and Eternal Life with God. No quantity of good deeds, moral living, selfless service, altruism, or intellectual prowess can earn us a place in Heaven. Such acts store up rewards for us in Heaven, but the mandatory entrance prerequisite is accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior (Mark 16:16). Salvation is Divinely automated, like gravity it is not visible but is always in-effect. Choose to believe in Jesus, and you are in, choose not to believe and you are Eternally out.

The death of Jesus on the cross is central to the NT and all of Christianity, symbolizing God's love, and Jesus' victory over death. This act was necessary for human salvation and redemption. Accepting Jesus and His Grace is a choice we must freely make. Just as free will is fundamental to our existence, Jesus willingly went to the cross to fulfill God's plan of redemption. By the way, accepting Jesus as Lord and savior, auto-enrolls us in His lifelong school of faith, far more rewarding than any earthly University.

God's love for us is unconditional, it is a part of the Divine realm of possibilities we live in. God's love is like gravity which is known by what it can move, like Dark Matter. God's love and gravity are powerful forces that exist beyond our control. Just as gravity does not depend on our belief, God's love operates independently of our belief or acknowledgment of it. However, God's love is far more extraordinary—He desires to show us His love, Grace, and blessings, offering us the fulfillment of our heart's desires and more than we can imagine. This Divine love is a form of "soft power" a spiritual force in contrast to human hard power which seeks control and dominance.

Jesus provided us with what God wanted us to have: atonement for our sins and entry into His Kingdom. This offer of forgiveness and salvation requires us to accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. I long felt unworthy of any love or attention from the one and only all-powerful God. But I now see His love demonstrated and proven through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. That act serves as a testament so that no person is too insignificant or too sinful to be forgiven and transformed by the grace of God. The cross stands as the permanent symbol of the possibility of renewal and salvation for all people in our age of Grace.

Jesus called me to Him despite my ignorance and lack of worth and with no obligation to do so. His promise, as stated in John 10:29 and repeated here; assures that "no one can snatch them from the Father's hand." This Divine

commitment guarantees that He will accept anyone who comes to Him. He is inviting and full of love. He has made a way for us to approach Him confidently.

Humans are inherently flawed and spiritually corrupt, often trapped by a desire for self-righteousness. Many people prefer being “right” over being happy, loved, or even alive, as in wars. This trait, alongside ignorance and inherent selfishness, is part of the fallen human condition. Despite this, we can approach the one and only God without fear. Believers belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God (1 Corinthians 3:23). God has all the answers, and while not all will be revealed immediately, learning to wait on the Lord is incredibly rewarding (Psalm 27:14).

Contemporary Israeli Politics and Historical Background

In 1922 the League of Nations established “Mandatory Palestine” implying a legal mandate. Mandatory Palestine was under British administration. Prior to that, the region between the Mediterranean Sea and Jordan River was just known as Palestine. The area had a mixed population of Arabs and Jews, and Jewish immigration increased significantly during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, well before WWII. Following the Holocaust and WWII, the UN voted to partition the territory in 1947. Israel quickly declared independence in 1948, which completely surprised the Arab population who had been living there for more than a thousand years. This led to immediate war with neighboring Arab states. During this conflict, around 700,000 Palestinians were displaced, many becoming refugees, while approximately 850,000 Jews from many countries fled to Israel. This created a huge displacement of local Palestinians and lasting demographic shifts with territorial disputes that continue to shape Israeli-Palestinian relations to this day. Today it is even more complex and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had involved into different volatile historical, territorial, and power dynamic claims.

Back in the time of Jesus, He operated within a distinctly Jewish cultural and religious framework. Jews at that time lived under Roman imperial rule, with complex internal divisions among Jewish groups like; the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Zealots each with their own ideas about how to respond to the imposed Roman rule and its brutal occupation authority. This political-religious landscape shaped the context of Jesus’ ministry, marked by significant diversity in religious and political thought. Appreciating the history and the context is helpful to understanding Jesus’ interactions with the various Jewish groups and with the Roman authorities.

Historical and Contextual Background

In first-century Judea, Jews maintained their religious and cultural identity under Roman rule, although not as an independent theocracy. The region was governed by Roman appointees, with Jewish religious authorities (the Sanhedrin) permitted limited autonomy in religious matters. The common people faced multiple burdens: Roman taxation, Temple tithes, and the uncertainty of life under Roman occupation. While Jewish religious life centered on the Temple and Torah observances, Roman authority was supreme in civil and military matters. This dual system of governance—Roman political control overlaid on Jewish religious authority—created significant hardships and tension, particularly for working-class Jews who bore the heaviest relative financial obligations.

A side point, here; at the time of Jesus’ ministry, there were two High Priests in Israel. Annas had served as High Priest until the Romans removed him, replacing him with Caiaphas—his son in law—likely reasoning that the younger man would be more considerate and loyal to Roman interests. Yet, Annas was still considered high Priest by many of the rank-and-file and so thus did the Jews keep one of several little silent protests against Roman authority. As a result, Annas retained some influence behind the scenes. Caiaphas, appointed by the Rome was the official High Priest, representing Roman interests at all public functions. Annas and Caiaphas were not outright adversaries as the political circumstances had been forced upon them by Rome. In fact, the two in-laws will become enthusiastic co-conspirators in the murder of The Messiah later in the story, demonstrating their shared greed and opportunism.

During Jesus’ ministry, the Sadducees oversaw the vast central temple complex in Jerusalem and wielded significant wealth and power, more than the Pharisees, the next lower tier of Jewish authorities. The Sadducee clan of Annas had entrenched themselves in power during his tenure, by appointing Annas’ sons as treasurers and his sons-in-law

as assistants, creating a deeply embedded nepotistic hierarchy that had worn thin with the locals. Some might have been devout and less aware of the extent of the corruption which the working class Jews openly resented.

The Sadducees operated two primary scams at the temple. The first scam involved charging an inspection fee for all sacrifices and then “discovering” fault with the animal brought by worshippers, forcing them to buy preapproved animals from the temple at exorbitant prices. If you had walked three days to Jerusalem for your annual temple sacrifice, you were unlikely to go back home for another lamb, especially since any new animal would likely be just as disqualified for similarly trumped-up reasons. The second scam involved profiteering from currency exchange. Jews had to use a specific Jewish coin to pay the temple tax once a year at Passover. With Roman coinage being far and away the most common due to the nearly one-hundred-year Roman occupation of Israel, Jews were forced to buy the scarce Jewish coins from the Temple at inflated prices, only to deposit them immediately into the temple treasury as their tax, where they would be resold again and again.

The Sadducees of central temple complex religiously camouflaged their criminal extortion activities which recalls the thinly camouflaged criminality of the Michael Corleone family in The Godfather movie. Among ordinary Jews, resentment was palpable. Incidental Jewish texts record bitter complaints against the “Bazaar of the Sons of Annas,” referring to the Jerusalem temple complex's criminal syndicate that openly practiced extortion, brutality, and coercion for profit.

The Pharisees, despite their significant influence, could not displace this Sadducee mafia-esque family due to their long entrenched power and substantial religious authority. Annas and his Sadducee clan, including his son-in-law Caiaphas, the official High Priest, perpetrated fraud upon the common Jewish population, hoarding temple money and power. Jesus' teachings directly threatened this authority, and recognizing the threat, the Sadducees successfully conspired to have Him executed under the guise of Him being an anti-Roman threat. This occurred against a backdrop of intense stress for ordinary Israelites under Roman military occupation, and corrupt Jewish religious kapos, (captive traitors) which created a dire no-win situation for working-class Jews. Such political balancing acts often prove untenable in the long run and the Sadducee power spree had already lasted several hundred years so it seems it was likely approaching a natural end of such a political cycle, and it was.

During this challenging period, Jewish identity was sustained through deeply held classical Jewish spiritual convictions, often expressed through familiar and comforting Covenant theology. Covenants are promises or agreements between God and a group of people, as revealed in Scripture. There are seven Covenants in the Bible: six in the OT—two of which are universal and four specifically for the Jewish people—and there is one Covenant in the NT, known as the Covenant of Grace, which is also universal. It is important to note that one cannot negotiate or create a Covenant with God, even as many people have imagined that they can. Only God can initiate such an agreement. Moreover, three of the four Jewish Covenants are unconditional and partly unfulfilled, a significant point explored further ahead when the End Times are discussed. The unconditional Covenants do not require anything in return from the Jewish people, making them remarkably generous agreements. To reiterate, Covenants can only originate from God and must be revealed in Scripture. There is no quid pro quo with God that originates from our side; we are called to trust Him. The Jewish Covenants signified that God had chosen the Jewish people for a unique role in the world's history.

Before Jesus and the universal gift of Grace, which I affectionately refer to as 'The New Deal,' salvation was thought to be accessible only through being Jewish, with appropriate worship centered at the temple in Jerusalem. This period, known as the Mosaic Age, began with the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses at Mount Sinai and lasted until the Resurrection of Jesus, approximately 1,500 years. The rejection of Jesus as the Messiah by the Jewish religious authorities would prove fatal for the Jews. Even so, the specific unfulfilled Jewish Covenants must still be fulfilled. The death and Resurrection of Jesus signaled the end of the Mosaic Age, or the Age of Law, and the start of what I refer to as 'the modern age,' despite its inception nearly 2,000 years ago. This era, officially known as the Church Age or the Age of Grace, spans the time from the first coming of Christ - His first Advent - to His anticipated second coming. The Covenant of Grace, established by Jesus, introduced a new spiritual reality that had never

existed before. This Grace is available to all people on earth, even though most Jews do not believe in Grace, a topic to be explored further ahead.

At the time of Jesus, the Jewish people expected a prophetic Messiah who would be a king and usher in a period of justice and peace. They anticipated a Messiah who would liberate them by overthrowing Roman rule even though that particular part is not in the Bible. There are prophecies in the OT that speak of the Messiah bringing liberation, although they do not specify from *what*. Jewish expectation was for the Messiah to establish the Messianic Kingdom, bringing peace, justice, prosperity, and liberation—nearly universally interpreted as freedom from Rome. They did not even suspect that The Messiah's mission was to liberate people from sin, not from Roman oppression.

There were also different interpretations of the Messiah's mission, none of which specified overthrowing Rome. Still, almost all the Jews expected the Messiah to bring freedom from Roman oppression, even though that part was not biblically mentioned. This misconception reflects the common human tendency to fill in perceived gaps in Scripture with hopeful expectations. While religion, politics, and civil law have always been interconnected in Jewish culture, Jesus's message was of a spiritual freedom surpassing the political aspirations of His time. Despite His lack of political power or wealth, Jesus' teachings, and actions have had a profound and enduring impact on the world.

Christians have long thought that the Roman siege of AD 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem, The Great Temple and about half of the Jewish people was a form of Divine judgment for the Jewish rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. Matthew 21:42-44. The Jewish leadership's response to Jesus, including Pharisee and Sadducee accusations of demonic influence, was a catastrophic spiritual misstep but it was the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit which was the unforgivable sin leading to the Divine judgment of AD 70. Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10. Accusing Jesus, who had the complete Spirit of God of being in league with the devil constitutes this blasphemy against the Holy spirit which is the unforgivable or unpardonable sin responsible for the siege of AD70. Why did the religious authorities even take what they may have considered a long-shot chance of blasphemy, knowing that the consequences would be catastrophic? I think it has to be because they *absolutely could not* allow themselves to think that Jesus was The Son of God and they 'bet the farm' on it and they lost, big-time as have more contemporary demonic forces; —...and then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for me; Martin Niemöller

Historically, the Jewish religious leaders and the broader Jewish community held that performance of the specific "Messianic miracles" would signal The Messiah's arrival. The Gospel recounts Jesus performing many miracles, including the Messianic miracles which were considered to be Divine. It is bewildering to me that the religious authorities seemed unimpressed with Jesus and His many public miracles. They had to be thinking that Jesus was not The Son of God despite the Messianic miracles to the contrary. Perplexing. They surely got that wrong.

The distinction of the Jews was and is a significant intellectual, cultural, and religious point of Judaism. Jewish communities have often sought to maintain their religious and cultural identity, which includes adherence to Mosaic Law and community solidarity. This distinctiveness has contributed to notable achievements across many areas of study and Jewish individuals have historically made world-class contributions to global intellectual and cultural life in; Medicine, Physics, Economics, Chemistry, and Literature. Jews have won 24% of all Nobel Prizes ever awarded yet Jews represent less than two-tenths of one percent of the total population. This point remains a mystifying source for ongoing antisemitism and it is an astonishingly unconvincing pretext to hate Jews. Yet antisemitism remains right in your face to this day. What in the world could any anti Semite be thinking? Antisemitism, or any racism is completely indefensible. Historical persecution of Jews, from medieval Europe to the atrocities of the Holocaust, stands as a sobering reminder of dangers of human intolerance and hatred.

So, Rome in Jesus' day contributed their part to the historical persecution of the Jews. The working-class Jews accepted the limited freedoms Rome allowed, but even under their own legal system, the Sanhedrin, Jews had to defer major rulings, such as those involving the death penalty, or cases of civil unrest, up to the Roman government. Jews felt chronic hatred toward Romans. They were captive not willing subjects of the Empire.

Around the time of Jesus' birth, King Herod The Great, the local Roman ruler, ordered the massacre of all male Jewish infants in Bethlehem. This heinous act was motivated by Herod's fear of a new "king of the Jews," as reported by 'wise men' passing through—likely serious academic astronomy enthusiasts of the day, who knew that the Messiah had been born because they had observed a significant celestial event. Herod's actions were a genocide, a manifestation of extreme egocentric hubris and have long been considered a demonic atrocity. To scale this up into, how would you feel about the over-night murder of seventy-eight thousand infants in a major American city today. That would be a horrific event, an indelible and eternal stain upon history. It is irrelevant that Bethlehem was far smaller and the number killed far fewer. The crime is the same.

Herod, notorious for cruelty and disregard for Jews, placed forbidden images of Caesar within the Jewish Temple. Although Herod eventually removed these images, it took near-insurrection to persuade him. His half-Jewish heritage and superficial adherence to Judaism only fueled Jewish resentment toward the Roman occupation. This mistreatment of Jewish people was endless during the more than one hundred years of Roman rule over Israel when an estimated twenty-two hundred Jews were crucified—a public and much more gruesome spectacle than public hangings in the American west. These public crucifixions could be seen by all including children at the time. The Romans deliberately chose major roadways and prominent hills for these executions, ensuring maximum visibility to serve as a deterrent to rebellion. Victims could hang for days before death, their prolonged suffering becoming a horrific part of daily life for Jewish people who had no choice but to pass these scenes as they went about their necessary activities.

There are several independent historical confirmations for the existence of Jesus and his deeds outside of The Gospels. Next, we examine three hugely significant historical confirmations which would be unimaginably difficult to fake and are sufficient for my peace of mind on the subject. You can research this subject and find a lot more substantiations if you need more. Historical proof of Jesus' life, manner of death as well as the low regard that Romans held for Jews comes from Cornelius Tacitus, a Roman historian circa AD 56-120. He became a senator, a consul and eventually the Roman governor of Asia Minor. Tacitus wrote four formal systematic accounts of contemporary events. Around AD 115, he published *Annals* in which he explicitly states that Nero blamed and persecuted Christians to draw attention away from his own presumed incompetence in his ignoring of Rome's gigantic and demoralizing fire of AD 64—Nero's lack of firefighting response may have been intentional to clear real estate for himself. In this comment; Tacitus mentions Christus (Jesus) who was put to death by Pontius Pilate.

Christus: Annals 15.44.2-8 *"Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus," (Pilate) "and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome."*

Notice that Tacitus conveniently does not state what the Christians' supposed "abominations" were. A few hundred years further ahead, Rome embraced Christianity and the Holy Roman Catholic Church established its home there, founding Vatican City. But that had not occurred yet and it is chilling to discover the wording in the above historical comment. Christianity was considered a mischievous superstition, an evil. The use of the expression; 'the most exquisite tortures' seems to be an evil all by itself. Such considerations about Christianity were common at the time throughout the sprawling Roman Empire and yet to Rome's anguish Christianity grew swiftly and per Roman perception, by downright alarming orders of magnitude.

Two further corroborations for the historical existence of Jesus outside of The Gospels come from Titus Flavius Josephus, a Jewish/Roman historian. Josephus wrote several major works. He was a survivor of the Jewish-Roman Wars which destroyed the Nation of Israel and nearly exterminated the Jews. It was an all-out Roman extermination effort. Josephus became a Roman advocate and thus a Jewish traitor. In *The Antiquities*, he refers to the stoning of James, who was one of the half-brothers of Jesus (not James the son of Zebedee and a disciple of Jesus). This was twenty-nine years after Jesus' death and Resurrection and eight years before the destruction of Israel. This stoning was part of an ongoing effort by the Jewish religious authority to stamp out Christianity at that time. The effort had

begun some years prior with the stoning of Stephen. Acts 7:59 The High Priest, Annas in this Josephus account would be a son of the original, Annas the Elder, from the time of Jesus. The apple does not fall far from the tree.

From *The Antiquities*; “Ananias” (Annas) “the High Priest took advantage of the death of the Roman governor Festus. He assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the Law, he delivered them to be stoned.”

The younger Annas would not have been able to pull-off this sham tribunal and the executions except by the temporary confusion and power vacuum resulting from the unexpected death, from natural causes, of Festus the Roman attaché. So here Josephus, a Roman sympathetic historian, gives us the first of his independent references for the existence of Jesus. Josephus has two mentions of Jesus in separate historical works. These are significant because he was “a disinterested witness.” He was a Jewish man who converted to Roman thinking, likely because of the extermination effort, and became a historian. Josephus was not Christian but was simply reporting historical facts. His second comment is a more famous passage which has stood up to a lot of academic scrutiny as there were likely words that had been later inserted by Christian copyists. So, I have removed what the legitimate historical critics say are the suspicious words. Below is the famous passage from the *Testimonium Flavianum* with the suspect parts removed (best historical guess) leaving what is most likely the original Josephus text.

“Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man that wrought surprising feats, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.”

Christians are still not extinct 2000 years later. In fact, there has been a huge growth in Christianity just as Jesus predicted in His Mystery Kingdom parables, covered ahead. The significant point is, the historical reference to Jesus establishing His existence at the appropriate time and place. Jesus, of course, never needed any copyists' hopeful assistance to establish His legitimacy as The Messiah. Such legitimate historical references do tend to invalidate the dim yet durable hypothesis that Jesus was merely a nicely fabricated fable, as historically ignorant and dismissive skeptics have long suggested. Again, ignorance is not a badge of honor and it is appropriate not to display it as such. Further, it is better not to display any badge or label for people to see; “to be seen of men.” Just, have faith in God. God knows how Christianity, science, and, history all agree even if we do not have every single piece of that retained today. We have plenty thanks to the gospels. Proverbs 3:5

The Pharisees' Traditions of the Fathers (Talmud)

The Pharisees developed a huge body of oral laws; The Traditions of the Fathers (Fathers is interchangeable with Elders in this), later known as the Talmud. This was to add overwhelming complexity to the Mosaic Law. This also allowed them to maintain their political relevance against the more powerful Sadducees. These additional laws were kept in secret and not Divinely inspired. This created a system too complex for ordinary Jews to keep up with. Jesus criticized their secretive process and motives (Matthew 23:2-4). The Pharisees' adherence to these laws ensured their prestigious social position and they spent their entire lives studying and memorizing these laws. It seems clear that the Tradition Laws or Talmud, was intended to safeguard Pharisee power without challenging the Sadducees. The Talmud, was eventually written down and it consists of about 6,200 pages written in Aramaic, often quoting the Hebrew Bible. The Pharisees prided themselves on memorizing it, but their motivation was seemingly to assert superiority over the working-class Jews and to assure their social position and incomes.

So, the Pharisees are the only experts in their secret Tradition Laws and they considered themselves idealists of Jewish culture, aiming for spiritual purity. Unlike Sadducees or Zealots, they rejected compromise with the Romans or military rebellion. Their extreme focus on the technicalities of the Jewish Law allowed them to reverse the intent of the Mosaic Law. Jesus emphasized God-righteousness over human self-righteousness, which the Pharisees wallowed in. (Matthew 21:42-44). The Pharisees' self-righteousness and secret laws alienated them from Jesus' teachings. Yet, despite their flaws, some Pharisees were devout. They believed in the Resurrection of the dead, the

existence of angles and some could even heal the sick or cast out demons through faith in God. However, many of them seemed bound to their careers and their lifestyles, leading to them to recklessly reject Jesus' Messiahship.

The Sadducees

They were priests and the highest-ranking religious authorities. They had descended from Hasmoneans, AKA Maccabees from the second century BC. They were solidly entrenched in power. They functioned as self-appointed kapos, in the central temple complex and its controlled that huge amount of income. At the top of the social, economic, and political pecking order, they were pragmatic, compromising with the Romans to maintain power. Most of the Sanhedrin were Sadducees who rejected such Jewish staples as the Resurrection of the dead and the existence of angels—odd because Angels are mentioned more than 100 times in the OT. The Sadducees opposed Jesus, correctly perceiving that His teachings were a threat to their power. Despite their rivalries, the Pharisees and Sadducees will later unite to ram through Jesus' Roman death decree and leading to the Divine judgment, the consequential destruction of Israel in AD 70. Matthew 21:42-44, Luke 19:42-44

The Scribes (Soferim) The Soferim were Jewish scholars who served as copyists, interpreters, and teachers of both the Written Law (Torah) and oral traditions. While primarily known for their meticulous preservation of sacred texts, they also played roles as legal experts and educators. Their authority was derived from extensive training and expertise rather than the more popular system, family lineage. Many were aligned with Pharisaic teachings but some served within Sadducean circles, focusing primarily on written Torah interpretation rather than oral traditions.

The Jewish Zealots The Zealots emerged as a nationalist movement in first-century Judea, advocating armed resistance against Roman rule. Their influence culminated in the Jewish revolts of AD 66-135. The first major uprising ended with Rome's destruction of Jerusalem, the Second Temple, and about half of the Jewish population in AD 70

The Essenes The Essenes represented a distinct Jewish sect known for their strict religious observance and communal lifestyle. While many lived in settlements like Qumran near the Dead Sea, others maintained a presence in various towns. Their practices included ritual purity, communal property sharing, and intensive study of sacred texts. The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered at Qumran in the 1940's, provided the historical insights into their beliefs and practices, including their apocalyptic worldview and messianic expectations.

The Herodians The Herodians were a Jewish political faction advocating superficial support of the Herodian dynasty and its pro-Roman policies. Their influence extended through both political and religious spheres, as evidenced by their alliance with certain Pharisaic groups against Jesus, particularly in Galilee. Mark 3:6, 12:13 Their position reflected the complex political dynamics between Jewish autonomy and Roman authority in first-century Judea. Their feeble assuagement of Rome proved invalid and ill-omened. It was never of any benefit to Israel.

Political-Religious Context Jesus's ministry occurred within a complex political and religious landscape. His execution under Roman authority, with the charge "King of the Jews", mirrored both Roman concerns about political dissent and tensions within the Jewish religious leadership. The intersection of religious authority and political power created multiple points of conflict with Jesus's teaching and ministry.

Requirements for the Messiah

The OT contains eighteen specific prophecies regarding the Messiah, all of which were fulfilled in The Gospels. However, let us focus on two other prophecies that outline the requirements for the Messiah. Jesus openly declared Himself to be the Jewish Messiah foretold in Scripture. The term "Christ" is not just a name but a title—it is the anglicized Greek translation of "Messiah." Thus, when we refer to Jesus as "The Christ," that is an accurate and appropriate use of the term. However, those words should not be used as a curse or in a casual, disrespectful manner. Teach yourself to use the Lord's name with respect—or not at all—and you will not be offending Him. While you may not immediately notice any difference, I promise that in the long run, you will be better off for it.

The two key requirements for the Messiah: One requirement said that the Messiah had to be a descendant of King David (Jeremiah 23:5), and the other was that He must have Divine appointment (Isaiah 7:14). Both of these requirements are fulfilled in the announcement of Jesus as The Christ, The Messiah.

Divine Appointment and Davidic Ancestry

Luke, telling the story by interviewing others, writes of fulfillment of the requirements through Mary's experience. Luke 1:26-38. The angel Gabriel appears to Mary to deliver the news that she will bear a Divine child: "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most-High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David." The throne of His father David refers to kingship over Israel. This passage confirms that Jesus is a descendant of King David, fulfilling one of the requirements or Messianic prophecies. Next, the genealogies will allow us to see that the Davidic lineage comes through Mary's side of the family, and that Joseph could not have been Jesus' biological father.

The Genealogies

When I first encountered the two lengthy genealogies of Jesus, I was completely baffled. Who were all these people, and why did it matter? What was the purpose of these lists? However, as I delved deeper, I realized that it actually makes sense. The two genealogies of Jesus have been preserved solely in The Gospels, and without these records, they would have been lost to history. So, it seems that God wanted us to retain the fact that Jesus' lineage comes through Mary's side of the family. These genealogies appear early in the New Testament, with Matthew providing the genealogy of Joseph and Luke offering the critical genealogy of Mary.

Matthew's Genealogy: Joseph's Lineage

Matthew's genealogy traces Joseph's family history, listing forty-two generations. At first glance, this might seem like an ordinary record, but it reveals something critical: if Jesus had been the biological son of Joseph, He could not have been the Messiah; One name in particular, Jeconiah (aka Coniah), stands out. Jeconiah was an early king of Judah (597 BCE) if only briefly. According to the prophet Jeremiah, Jeconiah committed evil deeds against his people, leading to Jeremiah pronouncing a curse on him such that: no descendant of Jeconiah could sit on the throne of David and rule over Judah (Jeremiah 22:24-30). Since Joseph is a direct descendant of Jeconiah, he could not be the biological father of the Messiah. This shows the necessity of lineages in Jesus' birth.

Luke's Genealogy: Mary's Lineage

Luke's genealogy traces Mary's lineage, showing that she is a direct descendant of King David. This is significant because Jewish culture traditionally does not include women's lineages in genealogical records. However, the Bible specified that the Messiah must be a direct decedent of King David, without stating that this lineage had to come through the father. In fact, Genesis 3:15 suggests that the Messiah would come through the "seed" of a woman. It is clear to me that God intended for this information to be included for us to see, challenging the status quo of Jewish customs at the time—just as Jesus Himself often did. Jesus implied in parable that He did not come to simply patch up the existing Pharisaic traditions. Luke 5:36-39

Jesus is connected to all four of the Jewish covenants of the OT. In this passage, the angel Gabriel not only affirms Jesus' Davidic ancestry but also confirms His Divine appointment—as an angel, of course, must be sent by God.

A Side Note

The concept of the "pre-existence of Christ." is worth mentioning. This is a significant theological point, and it is mentioned in The Gospels, particularly in John 1:1-18 and 17:5. While the explanation can be complex, a simpler understanding can be seen by merely substituting "Jesus" for "Word" in John 1:1, which makes the concept clearer. Although this introductory text does not delve deeply into every aspect of The Gospels, my intent is to keep this text light and engaging for new Christians to read. There is plenty more to explore in The Gospels and I am confident that what you learn here will convince you of the legitimacy of Jesus as The Son of God.

Political Instability Creeps into Israel

At this historical time, all the Jews were intensely sensitive to and greatly resented Rome's predatory influence, in the undermining the Jewish Theocracy with financial temptations. This issue becomes the unforeseen engine of political instability, transforming Zealots from fringe group to dominate political force in the thirty plus years after Jesus' ministry. In AD 66, these Zealots will have gained enough political clout to lead rebellions against Rome, setting in motion a series of events that ultimately doom Israel and most of the Jewish people at that time. It seems that Rome naively did not appreciate the depth of anguish they were creating in the weakening the Jewish Theocracy with financial temptations. They completely failed to grasp the extent of Jewish fatalism in that. This led to a reduction in Jewish internal political stability. The theme of internal Jewish stability is depicted in the modern-day portrayal of Jewish life in *Fiddler on the Roof*. Despite widespread anxiety about war with Rome, Zealots coerced Israel into tragic rebellion. In the three Jewish-Roman wars, Israel was decisively defeated. Disengagement is not an option, and civil wars of rebellion do not lend themselves to half measures. So thus, Rome was obliged to act, for the first time in AD 70 and they did so with devastating force, destroying Israel, the Great Temple, and about half of the Jewish population. As The Son of God, Jesus possessed prescient understanding of all human history, so He knew that the Roman Empire would convert to Christianity in AD 312, founding the Holy Roman Catholic Church in Rome which remains a potent force for Christianity to this day.

The working-class Jews had a difficult life with conflicting influences fraying the edges of the traditionally sturdy fabric of Jewish society. Most of the rank-and-file Jews were being extorted and mistreated by Rome and their own religious Kapos—ordinary Jews who had gone to work for Rome collecting income taxes or tolls on Roman roads. The result was Jewish society under tremendous paradoxical strain, with conflicting and counterproductive notions making life extremely difficult for the common Jews of this era and hence the rise of Zealot militarism.

The Sadducees of the central Temple complex were quick to recognize the threat posed by Jesus' radical message of equality. They saw their privileged status as under siege. They were smarting from the loss of political and religious authority they had enjoyed when they held sway as both royalty and High Priests. Their exploitation of the working poor through financial extortion, put them at odds with Jesus. The wealthier classes were less affected, the common Jews bore the brunt of their unfair practices. The Sadducees perverted Judaism as their instrument and their armor, thus twisting it into a tool for protection and control. Jesus was resolutely opposed to abuse of power.

The Pharisees' refusal to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah was rooted in His rejection of their oral Tradition Laws. A slight concession on His part may have appeased them and kept the peace, but Jesus was firm in upholding the authority of God's law above man's law. His refusal to compromise was central to His mission and led to the cross. Jesus' commitment to God's law was absolute, regardless of the personal cost. Jesus demands that we trust Him and He would never countenance any compromise regarding the authority of God, hang—or crucify the consequences.

In the early ministry of Jesus, both the Pharisees and the Sadducees do not suspect that he is The Son of God. They are likely thinking He was just another crazy local Messianic wannabee. So, they are not too interested in His opinion. They soon become self-religiously and politically entrenched in their position. The Pharisees were also quick to criticize Jesus, particularly when His Disciples did not adhere to their Tradition Laws. These laws, though man-made, were considered by the Pharisees as equal in authority to God's commandments—a position Jesus firmly rejected. The Pharisees were well aware that their own Pharisee ancestors had fabricated their Tradition Laws, but they conveniently ignored this fact to maintain their personal power and secure their guaranteed-for-life incomes. Naturally, they were not pleased when Jesus exposed this glaring truth. In the example below, the Pharisees criticize Jesus because His Disciples did not wash their hands before eating—a breach of the Tradition Laws. His Disciples were simply picking grain tops and working the kernels loose in the palm of their hand and snacking on them as they walked along, an act acceptable for the hungry in Jewish culture.

In this Gospel story, it is worth noting that these Pharisees and teachers of the Law came from Jerusalem, about 80 miles away, to criticize Jesus. This reveals their determination to find something to use against Him, as they frequently attempted throughout The Gospels. However, Jesus, is always too wise for them. This time, He points out the obvious truth they were missing: It is not external rituals like handwashing that make a person clean in God's eyes, but rather the cleanness of the heart, much less visible and more important than hand washing. The Pharisees,

blinded by their self-righteousness and vested interests missed this vital point. Eventually, they realize they cannot entrap Jesus through debate, so they conspired to have Him executed—a plan they ultimately succeeded in carrying out, although in accordance with God's timing and perhaps a little Divine help from Jesus. Matthew 15:1-20

Both Jewish religious authorities seem cartoonish by contemporary standards, but you would not have wanted to run afoul of them in their time. They were greedy, treacherous, vindictive, self-righteous, and deadly dangerous to ordinary Jews. They normally had no difficulty getting any Jew that they chose executed for trumped-up reasons. Jesus was simply too smart and too tough of a nut for them to crack. Jesus had to volunteer for execution and He did so to pay for our sins. This is an improbably gracious God, I would say.

In the above failed attempt to trip-up Jesus with a Tradition Law, we also see the historical origin of contemporary nefarious statecraft. With that, the state is officially sponsoring corruption and one cannot generate support for delusion indefinitely. Of course, the more time that greed has in which to establish a foothold, the more conspicuous the perpetrators are seen. Communism, "The Master Race" and Jim Crow confirmed that power-lust remains invalid and corrupt to this day. Many historical examples like this have been pointed out. When power is pursued for its own sake, it definitely leads to corruption.

All throughout The Gospels, the Pharisees fail to keep in mind that their Tradition Laws did not have the same authority as God's Law. Their behavior was akin to people practicing extreme prejudice, hiding behind self-deception to profit from the lie. Interesting, the Pharisees tolerate the Sadducees, who did not accept their Tradition Laws either, far more than they accepted Jesus. This double standard shows that their real issue with Jesus was not theological but political—Jesus' challenge to their authority was a threat to their life style, status, and incomes.

Jesus stood for the Mosaic Law over the Tradition of the Elders, which made Him politically dangerous to the religious leaders. Later, the High Priest would rationalize Jesus' execution by saying it was better for one man to die than for the Romans to destroy all the cities, John 11:49–50. Notice he declares a false binary choice. This was also an unwitting reference to Jesus' sacrificial death, through which all mankind could receive Eternal Life.

Jesus' death on the cross was an act of Grace for all people, especially those who have been wronged or victimized. His resurrection is ultimate proof that no one is beyond the hand of the Father. Though human judges convicted and executed Jesus, The Father overturns their verdict with His resurrection and brings glory to all people who accept Jesus. It is because of Jesus, authenticated as the Son, that we all have the gift of Eternal Life and Jesus affirms that this gift is available to *all who believe in Him*. Romans 6:23 and Ephesians 2:7-9

John the Baptist

John the Baptist is about six months older than Jesus. (Luke 1:36) He is born to Elizabeth, a cousin of Mary's, and Zacharias, a priest. John, second cousin to Jesus, also came into the world with Divine appointment. An angel announced John's birth to Zacharias before he was conceived, choosing the name, John and declaring that he would be the herald, or the announcer, of The Christ (Luke 1:5-25). This makes John the last OT prophet, and Jesus—only about three months younger—marks the beginning of the New Testament.

John is a stunning historical visionary and prophet from an early age. He was born at a time when Israel had experienced a 400-year dry spell for prophets. John ended Israel's prophetic silence. He was an extremely popular preacher, attracting large crowds to hear his message of repentance. He lived an ascetic life, devoted to preparing the people of Israel for the coming of Jesus. His message of repentance urged people to return to God, and he baptized them as a sign of their commitment. John's message can be summarized as: "Repent, for the King is coming, and He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit or with the fire of judgment." Although Israel rejected Jesus as The Messiah, John's message was universally received and was fulfilled in his lifetime, within God's timing of course. John and Jesus grew up at the same time, although not actually meeting until the Baptism of Jesus.

The Baptism of Jesus

One day, as John is baptizing the crowds in the Jordan River, Jesus appears. This is the first meeting between the two cousins. Jesus requests John to baptize Him, to set an example and he does. (Matthew 3:13-17). The next day, Jesus shows up again at the Jordan river and John publicly announces Him as the Messiah; “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Point of Order; Of all the gospel characters it is only John the Baptist and Jesus Himself who intrinsically realize that Jesus is here to save humanity from sin, not just to liberate Israel from Rome. Even Jesus' Disciples do not understand His mission until after His resurrection. Like all the Jews, they were thinking that the Messiah's role would be to free Israel from Roman oppression (Luke 24:21).

Jesus is setting an example and associating Himself with John's revivalist message of ‘returning to God.’ This marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry and serves as His announcing of Himself to Israel. At His baptism, Jesus receives an extraordinary anointing of the Holy Spirit, who descends upon Jesus in the form of a dove, symbolizing the complete Spirit of God being bestowed upon Jesus as opposed to the partial measure that ordinary believers receive when they believe. (Acts 2:38, Ephesians 1:13-14) The Father speaks, declaring, “This is my Son, in whom I am well pleased.” It is likely that only those chosen by God could hear the Father's voice clearly, while others likely perceive it as distant thunder or similar, as seen in John 12:28-30. This discretion in revealing Jesus' divinity is a pattern in the life of Jesus and it requires a leap of faith to believe in Him. Notice that the whole Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are present at Jesus' baptism. It is a moment of profound significance.

Baptism and the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is given to Jesus at His baptism, but John's baptisms were not the same as the Christian baptisms which will later be established by Jesus. Christian baptism, associated with receiving a partial measure of the Holy Spirit, began after Jesus' Resurrection. Those baptized by John before that, could have been re-baptized with Christian baptism later, although baptism itself is not necessary to receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to indwell us the moment we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. (1 Corinthians 12:13) Baptism is an outward sign of submission to Christ and a willingness to live according to God's will. While it is closely associated with receiving the Holy Spirit, it is not baptism, but accepting Jesus as Lord that grants anyone a measure of the Spirit. When Jesus receives the complete Spirit of God at His baptism, He embodies two of the three persons of God—the Son and the Holy Spirit—making Him an unimaginably powerful and sanctified being. John the Baptist confirms this in John 3:34, “For He is sent by God. He speaks God's words, for God gives Him the Spirit without limit.”

Note on the word Saint

The term “saint” has two meanings depending on context. In general, saint is any believer or church member. Yet, in Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, Saint is a title reserved for those who have devoted their lives to God's service and performed extraordinary deeds that ordinary people could not. These individuals are canonized posthumously meaning they have been proven to have met very strict requirements. In this text, the term saint is used in its broader, biblical sense, meaning simply “believers.” or church members.

After the Baptism

After His baptism, Jesus is led by The Holy Spirit into the wilderness where He is tempted. Meanwhile, John had completed his mission of announcing Jesus to Israel and He gets imprisoned for publicly condemning Herod's illegal marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife. Jesus, accompanied by His first five Disciples—Peter, John, Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael—plus some family members, trek north through Samaria into Galilee. These first Disciples were likely chosen from among John the Baptist's followers. John had faithfully fulfilled his Divine appointment to prepare the Jews to accept Jesus and the coming Messianic kingdom.

The temptation of Christ used to be a perplexing concept for me. Why would the Devil even attempt to sway Jesus from His earthly mission if Jesus is indeed The Son of God? Would God allow His own Son to be overpowered by such temptations? Surprising to me, the answer is yes. Because the essence of sin, redemption, and our acceptance of redemption must all be voluntary. Free will is intrinsic to human existence, even though there are likely times we might prefer to overlook the inconvenient fact. Jesus had to rely on His own moral authority to resist the Devil. There are three main avenues of temptation: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and pride. Jesus faced temptations in each of these areas respectively, with every one of them offering a subtle shortcut around the cross.

These temptations were designed to entice Jesus into achieving Messiahship in a way that would be acceptable to the Jews, all while bypassing His upcoming crucifixion death. Yet, Jesus resists each temptation using Scripture, showing us that we, too, can overcome our own temptations when we immerse ourselves in Scripture. The Devil's deceptions were transparent to Jesus and they should be to us. Jesus had to come up with personal moral authority to repel the Devil. All three temptations were deceptions of course, the most common demonic ploy, and He saw straight through them. I encourage you to revisit this story in your Bible. It is found in Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13, and briefly mentioned in Mark 1:12-13.

The first temptation, appeals to the lust of the flesh. It is suggested that Jesus turn stones into loaves of bread. Jesus refuses to use His Divine power to satisfy His personal hunger, just as He later refuses to save Himself from the cross. The underlying suggestion in this temptation was for Jesus to focus on feeding the stomach, the physical rather than the spiritual. If Jesus had provided food for Himself, that would satisfy His hunger, however, Jesus was not on Earth to provide physical security. There is no security and there was never intended to be any security in this world, except by the Word of God. Jesus did not come to earth to change human circumstances by offering endless food provisions; His mission was to introduce the state of Grace, a transformative and essential aspect of Christian faith. The Devil's first temptation is a ploy to distract Jesus from His mission, but Jesus remains steadfast, focusing on spiritual redemption rather than earthly security.

The second temptation is for Jesus to throw Himself down from the top of the temple, expecting that God will save Him. This is an appeal to spectacle over substance, suggesting that Jesus can win the people's favor through a miraculous public display. It is easy to imagine that if Jesus had transformed Himself into a superhero-like figure, flying around, and burning up all the Romans with a huge show of power—surely the Jews would have believed in Him. Right? But that is merely a trick, inconsistent with His actual mission: to offer Grace and Eternal Life through faith in God to all people on earth. Satan well knows that people are much more attracted to the spectacular rather than the Divine, so he often crafts his deceptions to be outwardly appealing. Also, faith must never be a test or a challenge to God; it must be grounded in trust and common sense, qualities that seem increasingly rare today. Have you noticed?

The third temptation appeals to pride and to overlook coexistence with evil. The Devil offered Jesus dominion over the physical world in exchange for worship, tempting Him with the physical rather than the spiritual. But Jesus, a spiritual being saw right through the offer. Being a worldly king might have convinced the Jews of His Messiahship, but it would have been yet another trick to avoid the cross. Although the Devil never explicitly says these temptations are shortcuts around the cross, it is clear enough. That was their clandestine purpose. This final temptation was the Devil's last attempt and when it fails, he was 'out of there'—banished from the presence of Jesus. Also any temptation must be something that the person being tempted is capable of performing in the first place. So, after fasting for forty days, Jesus was genuinely tempted to turn stones into bread. You have likely never faced such a temptation because it is beyond your capability, but the temptations you have faced are always within your ability to perform them, aren't they? Evil is drawn to the morally lax, the easier to gain a foothold and then recruit them. But no matter how powerful the temptation, God will always give you the strength to resist. 1 Corinthians 10:13 reminds us; "God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear."

Next, we see John the Baptist's transition from a support element in Jesus' earthly OP to "damaged asset" when as mentioned above, he is imprisoned by Herod Antipas—who was a son of the late Herod The Great. John had boldly confronted the king, declaring, "You have no right to your brother's wife," (Mark 6:18). John's arrest here may have also been caused, in part, by Herod's seemingly organic paranoia (he may have suffered from untreated Syphilis). Also, he could have feared that John's immense street creditability might incite a rebellion—a theory suggested by the historian Josephus, but not recorded in the bible. If I were in John's position, suddenly thrown in jail, I might have considered taking a sabbatical. But John remained steadfast, continuing to turn people to Jesus. He even converted many of his Roman guards to Jesus during his imprisonment.

A Few Helpful Gospel Terms

The Son of Man

“The Son of Man” is an OT term used in Daniel 7:13-14 to describe the Messiah, who will hold authority in the End Times forward. Jesus chose this term to refer to Himself subtly and reveal His messiahship without creating controversy. I like the way the title both hints at and conceals His Divine identity. He was The Son of God, recognized as such by demons who dwell in the spiritual realm (Luke 4:41, many more), but He kept a low profile. His miracles— healing the sick, restoring sight, were personal acts—significant but not designed to draw undue attention. Jesus could have easily performed grand supernatural feats that would have won over the masses, but doing so would have lessened the leap of faith required to believe in Him. Faith in God requires a certain leap of faith, both then and now. I think that Jesus ensured that the size of that leap remained a space-time constant ($\lambda c d m$). His title, Son of Man, reflects His humble approach, emphasizing His humanity while subtly confirming His Divinity.

God's Only Begotten Son

The phrase “God's only begotten Son” refers to Jesus' unique relationship with God the Father. “Begotten” is an older term that means to bring into existence through reproduction. While we cannot fully comprehend how God brought Jesus into existence, it is enough to know that He did it and it was for our benefit. Jesus' physical existence on Earth began with the Virgin Mary, who provided the X chromosome, while the Spirit of God provided the Y chromosome (I assume). The specific technicalities of this Divine process are less important than the fact that God did it and it was done so we all could have salvation.

Verily

The word “verily,” often encountered in The Gospels, simply means truly. The Cambridge Dictionary defines it in part as; in a completely honest way. When you see a phrase like “Verily, I say unto you,” verily is used for emphasis, and means; Truly. It is an Elizabethan or Shakespearean term—from the original translation of the King James Bible—and it just means; truly. Do not let that throw you off. It is just a way of underscoring the truth of what follows.

The Lamb of God

This title for Jesus is first used by John the Baptist, who calls Him “The Lamb of God” the second time he sees Him, at the Jordan river. John 1:29. This name refers to Jesus as the perfect sacrifice, like the lambs that Jews offer at Temple for the forgiveness of sins. Restating, John the Baptist is the only other person besides Jesus to intrinsically recognized that Jesus' mission was not to deliver the Jews from Roman rule but to redeem humanity from sin. Jesus is the sinless one, the ultimate offering to God, fulfilling the Mosaic system of sacrifices being used at that time. When the Jews reject Jesus as the Messiah, that leaves the door open for us non-Jews to receive salvation. The title Lamb of God is used sparingly in the OT and The Gospels but it appears twenty-seven times in the book of Revelation, underscoring its significance relative to the subject.

My Time Has Not Yet Come

Jesus often uses the phrase “My time has not yet come” referring to the timing of His Crucifixion and death. In one instance, at the wedding in Cana, He says, “My hour has not yet come,” referring to the beginning of His public ministry and miracles. Typically, when Jesus speaks of His time, He is referring to His Crucifixion. This phrase also highlights the careful timing of His mission.

Lifted Up

The term “lifted up” usually refers to Jesus' Crucifixion, where He is literally lifted up on the cross (John 3:14-15). Jesus uses this phrase several times. One time He was referring to His Ascension into heaven (John 12:32). Jesus gets lifted up three times: His Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension. There may be additional symbolic meaning in this, but at the very least His lifting up represents a stable turning point in Jesus' earthly life. A fixed location from where both a backsight and foresight reading are taken. Calvary, in this case.

Going Up to or Coming Down from...

These expressions refer to changes in elevation rather than compass directions. In Israel, where elevation differences are common due to the country's mountainous terrain, such terms were part of everyday language. For example, one might go “up to” or come “down from” the Temple in Jerusalem because the Temple is located on a

little hill (Mount Moriah). These expressions did not carry over into modern times but were common in Jesus' time merely reflecting local geography.

The Bride and the Bridegroom

John the Baptist is the first to use the analogy of the bride and bridegroom in John 3:27-29, and Jesus expands on it by referring to the Church He was founding as His bride and Himself as the bridegroom. This potent symbolism emphasizes the deep, sanctified relationship between Jesus and His Church, likening that relationship to a marriage where the bride and bridegroom belong together.

To Be Seen of Men: A Self-Deception

Jesus uses the phrase “to be seen of men” three times (Matthew 6:1, 6:5; 23:5) to describe the Pharisees, whom He likens to stage actors. From the Greek word “hypokrites,” we get our word hypocrite, which in Greek means actors who are pretending to be something they are not, acceptable in performance art but not in real life. The Pharisees engage in public displays of piety—prayer, fasting, and tithing—solely to gain the admiration of onlookers. Jesus makes it clear that such behavior earns one no Divine reward because it is self-righteous rather than God-righteous. True rewards come from obedience to God, not from trying to appear holy to others. In our culture, being seen of men might manifest as striving to appear successful, talented, or cool in the eyes of others, which can be a form of self-deception. Pride and the desire to impress others are pervasive forms of self-deception that can corrupt anyone's motives. Such obsession with outward appearances reflects worldly values, not God's.

Repent

Repentance is one of the two key directives Jesus gives us, the other is to have faith or trust in God. Repentance means changing your mind about behaviors that God views as sinful, even if we see it as acceptable. While it might seem easier to repent of “big” sins, like murder, repentance also involves turning away from many “small” sins, such as criticizing others, harboring vengeful thoughts, or indulging in envy. Jesus calls us to change our minds about what we see as okay and to strive to become more Christ-like. True repentance is a lifelong process, requiring much ongoing effort and practice. With time and effort, it does become less of an inconvenience and more of a natural part of our spiritual life.

Next, Jesus heads north to Galilee with His first five Disciples and some family members, a journey of about fifty to seventy-five miles, depending on their start-point. They likely walked along dirt footpaths, even if Roman roads were available. Dirt paths are smoother and easier to walk on than the cobbled roads. Using a Roman road could incur taxes, but it also offered the benefit of fewer bandits. The distance of this hike is too great to cover in a single day, so people would typically take about three days. Along the way, He stops in Cana, where He performs His first public miracle—turning water into wine at a wedding, at His mother's request. He did this miracle quietly, telling His mother, “My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4). He was referring to the beginning of His public ministry and public miracles. Typically, when He said, “My time has not yet come,” he was referring to the time of His Crucifixion. This story of turning water into high-quality wine has always delighted me. I imagine an outdoor celebration with people in simple wedding attire of the day, sitting in small groups, enjoying the sunshine, food, wine and thoroughly pleased to be celebrating. I have always wished I could join them and witness Jesus in this rare, joyful earthly moment.

The climate of Israel today is much like southern California's, although during Jesus' time, the land was more forested and temperate. Peak summer temperatures were likely 6-8°F cooler than in 2023. Trees helped keep the area cooler in summer and conserved the water table. Today, Israel's groundwater is pumped out to near depletion level and the sun bakes the arid, deforested land. The country is now forced to desalinate seawater at great expense. Today Israel desalinates about 75% of their potable water. The climate has become harsher due to increased population and severe desertification, as population growth has necessitated more farmland. Global warming also plays a small role. The Bible provides some clues about the historical climate: During King Solomon's reign (around 970-931 BC), large quantities of lumber were available for building (Haggai 1:8, 2 Chronicles 2:9). Also, John 18:18 mentions Peter warming himself by a fire during Jesus' tribunal, which took place during Passover, April and late into night. This confirms meteorology data that Israel was cooler at night and much warmer during the day, as it still is today. However, today the land is no longer forested, with commercial farming and irrigation keeping this

arid land green. The Jordan River is only ankle-deep and the width of your driveway in summer and fall. So, there is no shipping or commercial fishing on it. Israel in Jesus' time was more temperate and pleasant, with rural areas producing wheat, barley, grapes, pomegranates, figs, olive oil, and sheep. Several nut trees were also cultivated. However, there were not the worldwide imported crops and industrial-scale farming operations that we commonly see when driving around Israel today.

After the wedding in Cana, they continue on to Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee. They will stay there and it will become Jesus' forward operating base, likely Peter's house, as Peter and his brother Andrew lived there (Mark 1:29). Today, you can see the foundation of Peter's house is beautifully preserved as an archaeological site. A squat, saucer-shaped Franciscan Catholic church hovers over the foundation, à la the mother ship from *Close Encounters of The Third Kind*. Capernaum was the largest of about ten or so small fishing villages that ringed the little freshwater Sea of Galilee. It was the only one of these towns located on the Via Maris, or Way of The Sea, a major trade route between Damascus and Egypt that had been used for thousands of years.

Next, they will return to Jerusalem for the first Passover of Jesus' public ministry, so by now it is late March or early April. At the Great Temple, Jesus performs the first of His two cleansings of Temple, forcibly driving out the swindling animal sellers and money changers, saying, "Make not my Father's house into a house of merchandise" (John 2:16). Jesus strongly opposes using religion for grifting, which some of the religious authorities wallow in. I bet He still does. This is the first of four Passovers mentioned, which is how we know that His public ministry lasted about three and a half years. We are only certain that His ministry was more than three and less than four years long. After this Passover, Jesus and His followers go out to the Jordan River to baptize people. This is the same type of revivalist baptism that John the Baptist performed nearby, aimed at raising "God-consciousness" and preparing the Jews to accept the Messiah. This is not Christian baptism, as Jesus had not established the Church and Grace yet through His Resurrection (Acts 2:38). Repeating, it is only through *belief in Jesus*, not baptism, that we first receive the Holy Spirit. Also, around this time, John the Baptist is arrested in Judea, prompting Jesus and His followers to move back up to the northern and more rural Capernaum where there is less Sanhedrin presence and control.

Jesus and The Samaritan Woman

Next is one of my favorite Jesus stories. It is found only in John 4:5-43. The lessons in this story are as relevant today as they were nearly 2,000 years ago. The way Jesus teaches in this story is delightfully shrewd and spontaneous. For clarity and historical context, we look at some background information before diving into the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Among the four Gospel writers, it is only John and Luke who specifically write for Samaritans or other Gentiles. It seems their Gospels were written with Gentiles—us, as the primary intended audience. This story takes place about a year into Jesus' public ministry. In it, we see Jesus teaching the Samaritans salvation and introducing His Disciples to concepts that were far ahead of their time sociologically. This story occurs in late spring, when the weather is warm but not unbearably hot. In midsummer, the heat can become unpleasantly scorching, and the scrublands turn even more brown and dusty. However, at the time of this story, it was the most pleasant time of the year in Israel. Jesus has left the Jerusalem area for two reasons: first, the imprisonment of His cousin, John the Baptist whose character Jesus openly admired (Matthew 11:7-11). Jesus, with His intrinsic knowledge, would have known that John would not survive this incarceration. The second reason was the success Jesus was having, as seen in the large numbers of people who believed in Him and were baptized by His Disciples, even more than by John the Baptist. The Jewish religious authorities were growing jealous because the ordinary Jews were delighted to see Jesus coming. He is healing everyone and teaching and casting out demons by previously unimaginable personal authority. The rank-and-file Jews recognize that this is at least Divine, if not Messianic. Jesus' common-sense approach is something the Pharisees are habitually missing and even disinterested in. They are openly and relentlessly exploiting the working-class Jews for money, special treatment, or anything else they can think of and this had gotten old. Also, Jesus may have left Judea at that time to avoid provoking the Pharisees over a trivial issue, like how many people his Disciples were baptizing. He will confront them another day concerning their religious grifting, humiliating them publicly (John 4:1-4) at His upcoming Sermon on The Mount.

Resentments and Disapproval Between Jews and Samaritans

Repeating, the origin of Samaritans is attributed to intermarriages between early Jews of the northern kingdom of Israel and Assyrian (Iranians) soldiers imported from several different countries, to resettle the area following the Assyrian conquest of 721 BC. About 180 years after this Assyrian “immigration”, the Jews of Jerusalem were rebuilding following the Babylonian destruction. The Samaritans who no longer saw themselves as foreign settlers because they had not been for eight or ten generations offered to help but were rebuffed, probably rudely. This raised deep resentment among Samaritans, who built their own temple on Mount Gerizim as they were unwelcome at the Jerusalem temple. Bad feelings escalated. The Samaritans adhered to many Jewish practices, such as offering sacrifices in the Mosaic tradition, observing certain Jewish feasts, and anticipating the coming of the Messiah.

The Samaritans held fast to their non-acceptance grudge and that morphed into the larger issue of where the proper place to worship should be—Mount Gerizim or Jerusalem. This dispute became a significant political and religious divide that persisted for hundreds of years. Although Samaritan culture closely resembled Jewish culture, intense resentment seethed on both sides. The Jews viewed the Samaritans as illegitimate primarily due to their alterations of the Torah, which included approximately six thousand differences between the Samaritan Torah and the Hebrew—Masoretic Text. Many of these changes were minor, but some, like the command to build an altar on Mount Gerizim, were seen as outright blasphemous by the Jews. These discrepancies deepened Jewish disapproval and reinforced the Jewish notion that the Samaritans were not true Israelites.

The Samaritan temple stood for about 200 years before being destroyed, likely by the Hasmonean Jewish leader John Hyrcanus in 128 BC, around 158 years before Jesus' time. Despite the Samaritan temple being long gone, the issue of worship location remained a sore point for the Samaritans, who continued to nurse their grudge against the Jews. The Jews continued to insist that the Jerusalem temple was the only legitimate place to worship. This was true in the Mosaic age, to the chagrin of the Samaritans who perplexingly chose to both ignore and take exception to that. Tension between the two groups festered for many generations into the time of Jesus.

The Lay of the Land and the Politics

Due to the geographical layout and mutual animosity between Jews and Samaritans, Jews traveling between Judea and Galilee often took a detour east across the Jordan River to avoid passing through Samaritan territory. Samaria was not part of Israel at the time but it separated Judea from Galilee, marking a sharp attitudinal divide, although mostly unnoticeable except to locals. Unlike many Jews, Jesus did not avoid Samaria. He was the Savior of all humanity and He used His journey through Samaria to directly confront some long-standing disapproval between Jews and Samaritans. As Jesus and His Disciples traveled northward through Samaria, they approach the city of Sychar. This is near Mount Gerizim and about 40 miles north of Jerusalem. John records that “Jacob's well was there” (John 4:6), that would be just outside the city.

The Samaritan city of Sychar was built nearly on top of the ruins of the former Jewish city of Shechem, which had been destroyed in the second century BC. The Jews never did rebuild Shechem. After the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom of Israel, the Samaritans founded Sychar. So, by the time of Jesus, Jacob's well predated the Assyrian conquest and it was an Israelite landmark long before the area became Samaritan territory. Today, the well exists in the eastern part of the culturally Palestinian city of Nablus, although it remains within Israel's borders. The well itself is situated on the grounds of a Christian Greek Orthodox monastery, which is outside of Jewish political interests, yet still in Israel. From the structure which recently encloses the well, Mount Gerizim is visible only about a mile away, where there is only a faint archeological trace of the ancient Samaritan temple remaining.

The Jewish Attitude Toward Women

The Jewish attitude toward women during this time was condescending, despite the OT promoting respect for women. Jewish society, like most ancient cultures, was overwhelmingly male-oriented. Jewish men were often raised with a strong sense of superiority, and it was customary for a Jewish man to start his day by thanking God that he was not a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. These three groups were publicly treated as if invisible by Jewish men, who would not speak to a woman in the street, not even their own wife or mother. However, Jesus ignored these societal norms when He addressed the Samaritan woman at the well with the simple request, “Give me to

drink.” This surprised her, as it broke both religious and gender barriers. In doing so, Jesus set an example for His Disciples, the Samaritans, and us today.

The Authority of Jesus at the Well

When Jesus' Disciples went into the city of Sychar to buy food (John 4:8), it was notable because Jews were not supposed to eat food prepared or touched by Samaritans. The Pharisees taught that consuming anything from Samaritans was akin to eating swine flesh. However, most Jews did not adhere to the Pharisees political pronouncements, evidenced by Jesus' disciples buying food in Sychar. Upon their return, they were likely surprised to find Jesus talking to a Samaritan (supposedly invisible) woman (John 4:27). Through this interaction, Jesus is showing us that all human differences are abolished in the Kingdom of God, whether Samaritan, Jew, Gentile, man, woman, slave, or free (Galatians 3:23-29).

The Messiah is Tired

When Jesus arrived at the well, He was tired from His journey (John 4:6). It was about noon, likely the second day of their journey. Jesus, walked everywhere, experiencing weariness and human conditions voluntarily, for our benefit. His voluntary humanity is akin to us volunteering to live in a Paleolithic context, attempting to teach spiritual concepts to a simpler, less advanced society and using only their limited language. Jesus, aware of the sociological landscape, was planning a significant challenge to the Jewish political status quo in Israel. As John the Baptist said, “He who comes from above is above all others; he who is from the Earth belongs to the Earth and uses earthly speech” (John 3:31). Delightfully preceptive for a man of 2000 years ago.

The Encounter

When Jesus asked the woman for a drink of water, she was astonished. “How is it that you, a Jew,” she asks, recognizing Him by His clothes and accent, “asks a drink of me, a Samaritan woman?” (John 4:9). Despite her surprise, she responds boldly for her time. Jesus immediately lifts the conversation to a higher level, engaging her interest by introducing spiritual matters, that He already knew were of interest to her. He said, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says to you, 'Give me to drink,' you would have asked of him, and he would have given you living water” (John 4:10). This must have piqued her interest, and she softens, addressed Him this time as; “Sir,” and asking how He could provide living water without a means to draw it from the well. She is thinking of physical water and challenged Him by asking if He was greater than their ancestor Jacob, who had dug the well.

Jesus, never speaks down to anyone, He explains that the water He offered was not ordinary but spiritual—“One can keep drinking of this water, and he will be thirsty again; but anyone who takes but a swallow of the water about which I'm speaking, will not ever thirst again.” He was speaking of the gift of Grace, suggesting that the spiritual water He offered would lead to Eternal Life. Still not fully grasping His meaning but intrigued, the woman urges Jesus to “give me this water.” Jesus then pointedly implies that she has sins to be forgiven by asking her to call her husband. When she replied that she has no husband, Jesus revealed His knowledge of her personal life, telling her that she has had five husbands and the man she was with was not her husband. This revelation shocked her, and she acknowledges Jesus as a Prophet (John 4:19).

An often-missed point of the Encounter

By recognizing Jesus as a Prophet, this woman hints at the Samaritan belief that the only Prophet after Moses would be the Messiah, based on Deuteronomy 18:15: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.” The woman had been testing the possibility that Jesus was the Messiah. Next, she slip-slides the conversation from her personal shortcomings to the longstanding dispute over the appropriate place to worship. She mentioned that their ancestors worshiped on Mount Gerizim, but the Jews claim that Jerusalem was the proper place of worship. Jesus defuses her point, responding by predicting a time when worship would not be tied to any physical location but would be spiritual. He contrasted Samaritan and Jewish worship, noting that true worship is based on knowledge, not just emotion. “You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). This is likely a reference to the altered Samaritan Torah, indicating that altering the Bible meant not truly knowing what one worshiped.

The woman, now convinced that Jesus was more than just a Prophet, hinted at the Samaritan belief in the coming Messiah. Jesus confirmed her suspicions, revealing Himself as the Messiah (John 4:25-26). The woman, overwhelmed, leaves her water jug, and runs back to the city, telling her story to whoever was handy. Her testimony was powerful enough to convince the townspeople to come and see Jesus for themselves. The Israelis thought that The Messiah was to be exclusively for the benefit of the Jews, but God, as is often the case, had His own bigger plan. Jesus' revelation and the woman's testimony led many more of the Samaritans to believe in Jesus over the next two days.

Additional Selected Events

As we continue in the story, note that I am skipping over some events for brevity. Over the next two years, Jesus will teach and perform miraculous healings, primarily in Galilee. On a visit to His hometown of Nazareth, He experiences His first rejection (Luke 4:16-30). In the synagogue, after reading from some Scripture, He challenges the prevailing belief that the Jews have an exclusive claim on getting into the Kingdom of God. This marks the beginning of His mission to redeem humanity from sin. However, the Jews of Nazareth were more interested in liberation from Rome. They likely thought, "If you are the Messiah, where's your army to defeat Rome?" And they doubted, reasoning; "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, the carpenter, whom we have known all his life? He cannot be the Messiah." The fact that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, fulfilling the prophecy in Micah 5:2, was generally not known, and He is not openly declaring it (Luke 2:11). By withholding His birth town information, He seems to be requiring a certain leap of faith to accept Him as the Messiah. It is possible that anyone considering publicly asking about His birthplace might have received a Divine nudge and forgot about it.

The reasoning of the locals, like that of the Pharisees, is flawed. They wrongly assume that the absence of an army disqualified Jesus as the Messiah. Next Jesus speaks of Gentiles who had faith in the OT, the widow Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian, cleansed by Elijah, the only Leper ever cured as far as we know. He implies that because the Jews reject Him, the Gentiles will have entrance into the Kingdom of God. This challenges the long-held belief that salvation is *exclusively* a Jewish advantage, causing the people's anger to erupt. He also suggested that entrance to the Kingdom of God is now based on faith, not nationality, implying that being Jewish alone is no longer sufficient. He did not say that outright, however His meaning is clear, and the people understand. This provokes flash anger and they jump up and mob Him, dragging Him out to the edge of a cliff, intending to throw Him off (Luke 4:28-30). But, at the edge of the cliff, it seems they were momentarily struck by a little Divine forgetfulness. Miraculously, He passes through the crowd and goes on His way, likely by Divinely blinding their eyes and minds to His presence. This type of passive defense, where He simply slips away from people intent on killing Him, recurs several times in The Gospels. It is a subtle miracle, ironically hidden in plain sight from those who refuse to recognize His Messiahship. At first, they cannot see that He is the Messiah, and then they cannot see Him at all—too good! A detail that the disciple John would write about with similar irony and which has charmed readers for generations. With this event, Jesus becomes a displaced person in that He no longer is welcome in His hometown.

Jesus then settles in Capernaum, likely at Peter's house, and begins to increase His first Disciples with four fishermen: Simon Peter, his brother Andrew, James, and John. This grows the number of His Disciples from five up to nine. He heals a demon-possessed man on the Sabbath, which the Pharisees criticize, as it violates one of their man-made laws (Luke 4:31-37, Mark 1:21-28). Yet, the crowds are astonished and irresistibly drawn to Jesus because He teaches by personal authority, not as their Scribes did. (Matthew 7:28-29). The Pharisees and Scribes usually taught by endlessly quoting lists of other rabbis and thus avoiding any personal responsibility for what they were teaching. They are threatened by Jesus's authority. By healing on the Sabbath, Jesus intentionally bypasses the Pharisees' authority, which is based on human traditions rather than God's law. This undermines Pharisee control over the people, and their hostile reaction here burns (exposes) their motives. Jesus emerges here as the authoritative, supernatural force that He is. Jesus is akin to a cosmic singularity—a force of unimaginable power, of course, Jesus' power is intelligently and purposefully directed, not by mere proximity.

Peter's house becomes Jesus' forward operating base. Although Scripture does not specify how often or how long they stayed there. It is likely they would retreat there to rest for a few days at a time. Some scholars believe that Jesus's mass healings at this point in The Gospels were intended to give a glimpse of the Kingdom of Heaven on

earth—a delightful thought, indeed. Next, Jesus embarks on His first tour of Galilee with His nine Disciples. He heals all manner of diseases among a vast number of people (Matthew 4:24-25). Word of His deeds has spread far, maybe about a hundred miles by now. Many more people come to see Him, bringing their sick and injured, and He heals them all. At this point, Jesus looks unstoppable, and the crowds, growing more convinced that He might be their Messiah, become increasingly enthusiastic, if not always polite (Luke 6:17-19). People push and elbow their way closer to Him, hoping to touch Him (Mark 3:10, Luke 6:19). Such behavior was common in excited crowds of this time and continues in some places, to this day.

Note: The concept of Messianic miracles was a source of great excitement during the time of Jesus, although the understanding surrounding it was based on Pharisaic opinion and not Divine Scripture. To clarify two key points: First, these miracles were indeed extraordinary, and although the Pharisees wrongly believed that only the Messiah could perform them, the Jewish people did not know that. Second, while one can place absolute trust in Divine Scripture, religious opinions, such as the Messianic miracles doctrine hold no such guarantee. These were merely the Pharisees' interpretations and had no basis in Scripture. The Pharisees, who devised the list of these miracles, were not prophets, which means even a false prophet might be able to perform such acts. This is something that is prophesied to occur during the Tribulation (Matthew 24:24-25). However, at the time of Jesus, no one was thinking along those lines, and Matthew's Gospel had not even been written yet. As a result, when Jesus performed one of these miracles, it caused an overwhelming rush of excitement. Likely any of us would be astonished to personally witness any of His miracles.

A further historical note: Elijah's cleansing of Naaman, the Syrian leper, took place 880 years earlier—long before the Pharisees developed the idea of Messianic miracles. By all accounts, the Pharisees created this concept to help the Jews identify their Messiah when He arrived. Jesus performed all three of these miracles, yet He never commented on the validity of the concept itself. While the Pharisee belief was that only the Messiah would be able to perform such acts, that is not the case and those unfortunates who live into the Tribulation may witness false prophets performing similar miracles to establish credibility. Matthew 24:24-25

Next, Jesus will heal a leper, a monumental act. Leprosy, is a disease caused by a mycobacterium which produces severe skin disfigurements and inadequate host immune response. There was no treatment prior to the 1940's. Leprosy at this time produced a prolonged, painful death. It was greatly feared, and not all understood. Lepers were outcasts, forced to announce their presence by shouting "Unclean, Unclean!" to avoid contact with the uninfected. Socially isolated and seen as cursed, lepers lived either solitary or amidst other Lepers, a life of misery. Yet, Jesus, defying this massive taboo of the time, touched the leper and instantly cured him. Mark 1:41-42 "Straight away the leprosy departed from him." This miraculous and immediate transformation is witnessed by many and triggers an immense outburst of excitement among the people. To the Jews, this is undeniable proof that Jesus is indeed God, the Messiah. Meanwhile, the Pharisees, still hoping Jesus would turn out to be just another messianic wannabe are stunned and extremely dismayed by this. Although they have not yet begun to openly challenge Him, their discomfort is palpable. Soon, however, their opposition will become clear as Jesus embarks on His second tour of Galilee, during which tensions will rise, leading to a whirlwind of events.

Next, at Peter's house, a paralyzed man is brought for Jesus to heal. The house is surrounded by a massive crowd, making it impossible for the man's friends, the litter-bearers, to get inside to see Jesus. So, they take their friend up to the roof. Many houses in the middle east at this time had an external stairway to the roof for enjoying the cool of the evening. They remove part of the roof, and lower the man down, as it turns out, right in front of Jesus. Seizing the moment to affirm His Messianic identity, Jesus says to the man; "Your sins are forgiven." This proclamation immediately triggers the Pharisees and Scribes present, to internal outrage thinking something like, 'Oh no you cannot, only God can forgive sins'. Which is true. This marks the first hostility Jesus receives in Galilee. Perceiving their thoughts, Jesus responds, "So you know The Son of Man has the power on Earth to forgive sins," and then to the paralyzed man He says; "Arise, take up thy bed and go to thy house." (Mark 2:10-11)—a bed in this context means a simple sleeping matt). The man immediately rises, takes up his bed, and walks away, prompting a powerful eruption of excitement among the witnesses. By healing the man physically, Jesus also demonstrated His Divine authority to forgive sins, even though that act of forgiving sins is not visible. The Pharisees, however, missed His

point entirely, likely thinking, "That's impossible." But of course, all things are possible for God, the Messiah. The Pharisees were probably confused, as they were expecting the Messiah to come from Bethlehem, not Nazareth, which they regarded as a poor and insignificant place. Notably, Jesus never advertised His birthplace, likely because He wanted people to accept Him as the Messiah through faith, rather than through his birth place or supernatural feats. Just as we must make the same leap of faith today to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. It seems He intended that same leap for the Jews and for everyone. I suspect that the size of that leap of faith is a space-time constant (λ_{cdm}) then, now, or in the future.

The following day, Jesus encounters a tax collector named Levi Matthew at a toll booth on a Roman road. He asked Matthew to come and follow Him. When Jesus calls Matthew, he immediately abandons his lucrative job, which he had to have purchased, likely with help from his family. Matthew would later write the magnificent Gospel according to Matthew. He is now counted among Jesus' Disciples, bringing the number of Jesus' Disciples up to ten. Later that day, Matthew hosts a dinner party for Jesus, attended only by only tax collectors and prostitutes, also excluded from Jewish society and the only Jews who would associate with a tax collector. The Pharisees, observing this, disapprove of the company, but Jesus responds with sharp sarcasm: "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice." Matthew 9:12-13. I think, this is the most revealing comment Jesus ever makes, emphasizing that compassion for those in need is far more pleasing to God, than ritual sacrifices. It is easier to give what you have in abundance, but true charity requires giving to those in need what is most needed. So, we should practice compassion towards those who need it and which people are often short on, as opposed to burning up farm animals which we have in excess. People are often short on compassion, but Jesus was not. He came to save the sinners, the 'us' of the world. I think that was a tremendous idea...oddly enough.

The next significant event mentioned in The Gospels is likely the second Passover of Jesus' public ministry, prompting a return to Jerusalem for its observance. At the temple, Jesus and His followers encounter a man who has been bedridden for thirty-eight years lying by the pool named Bethesda, located near the sheep gate (John 5:2). Many people sought healing at this pool, as it would mysteriously bubble up from time to time. According to John 5:3-5, the first person to enter the pool after it began to bubble could be healed of whatever ailment they had. This bedridden man had no one to assist him getting into the pool at the critical moment, so he has never been healed. You can imagine a stampede as soon as it started to bubble.

Jesus says to him, "Arise, take up thy bed and walk." The man is instantly healed. He picks up his matt, and walks away (John 5:8-9). When the Pharisees notice him, they do not ask how he got into the water first, but instead confront him for carrying his bed on the Sabbath. The Pharisees, overly fixated on their Tradition laws, completely miss the point of this miraculous healing. Jesus defends His actions by explaining that the Father is always working to bring about salvation, and the Son must do the same. This infuriates the Pharisees, who now resolve to have Jesus killed, accusing Him of blasphemy for claiming to be The Son of God. More likely Jesus' claim threatens their authority, which has been sputtering among the common Jews since Jesus and His miracles. If Jesus truly is the Messiah, that would be fatal to the Pharisees' power and render them completely obsolete. The masses are already disillusioned with the Pharisees' corrupt and self-aggrandizing practices. The Pharisees see their credibility dissolving in real-time and are frantic to reverse that. The Pharisees now become determined to discredit Jesus publicly and prove that He is not The Son of God, or to just have Him executed, whichever is more convenient, I assume.

Recognizing the danger, Jesus and His followers retreat to the relative safety of Galilee in the north. However, the Pharisees dispatch some of their Scribes and fellow Pharisees to shadow Jesus, hoping to catch or trip Him up in a misstep which they can use to discredit Him. From this point forward, it becomes increasingly difficult for Jesus to find any privacy. His outrageous popularity and the growing hostility from religious authorities ensure that crowds of thousands, sometimes swelling to over twenty thousand, follow Him wherever He goes. The word is out! These people, desperate for a better life flock, almost swarm, to see If this Jesus is indeed their long-awaited Messiah.

I now revisit the Sabbath controversy, where Jesus' Disciples, having not eaten in days, pick some wheat tops, rub the kernels loose in their hands, and snack on this as they walk, acceptable in Jewish culture. However, the Pharisees

quickly accuse them of breaking the Sabbath, claiming they are threshing grain. In response, Jesus offers a five-point defense, far more than these self-appointed religious kapos deserve. He declares that He, The Son of Man, is Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-8), emphasizing God's authority over human traditions. This confrontation further exposes the Pharisees as religious hypocrites, weakening their already shaky authority among the rank-and-file Jews, and making them even more determined to have Him executed.

Following this, Jesus performs yet another Sabbath healing—one of seven recorded Sabbath healings in The Gospels. This time, it occurs in the temple in Capernaum. A man with a withered hand is prominently seated by the Pharisees. Knowing that Jesus performs miracles, they bait Him asking, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” Jesus counters with a question of His own: “If you have one sheep that falls into a pit on the Sabbath, would you not lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep?” (Matthew 12:9-14). Stumped, the Pharisees remain silent. Jesus then restores the man's hand, prompting the Pharisees to storm out and strike up a conspiracy with some local Herodians to kill Him. They are focused on the perceived violation of their Tradition laws rather than the miracle itself, which they could never perform. Despite their efforts to project political sure-footedness, the Pharisees must recognize that they are losing ground with the rank-and-file Jews. There are now two conspiracies going on to kill Jesus; one back in Jerusalem and just today, another one here in Capernaum (Mark 3:6). His situation is becoming increasingly dangerous, yet, rather than lying low as I would have deemed prudent, Jesus continues with His deployment on earth, setting the stage for His eventual Crucifixion.

Next, Jesus will teach and continue to heal large crowds by the Sea of Galilee. After spending a night in prayer, He completes the selection of His twelve Disciples, renaming them ‘Apostles.’ Notably, there are twelve Apostles, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve thrones of judgment (Matthew 19:28-30). Next, is His Sermon on The Mount, which originally struck me as being more of a Sermon on the hillside. However, with further reading, I discovered that in the culture of that time, 'mount' could refer to any small elevation, even something as simple as a wooden step-box used for public speaking. The location of the sermon is a lovely grassy field, where today a church and monastery stand. It is a beautiful and peaceful place with a serene view, and many people visit here today to reread the Sermon. For me, this place was profoundly spiritual, as though the atmosphere had remained unchanged for two thousand years—it felt as if Jesus had just walked away few moments ago.

The Sermon on The Mount, recorded in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, drew thousands of listeners. Remarkably, despite the crowd of perhaps 20,000 or so, there are no historical records of anyone complaining about being unable to hear Jesus, suggesting that His voice carried remarkably well. There was often pushing and elbowing as people tried to get closer to Him, yet never a mention of people struggling to hear. To me, this seems like another unacknowledged miracle, akin to the mysterious way Jesus could walk away from hostile mobs' intent on killing Him. He often addressed large crowds of ten to twenty thousand without any sound system, and it seems that, Divinely, everyone could hear Him just fine. There is so much in the Sermon on The Mount that it is impossible to cover it all in an introductory text. We will only touch on a few of the key points which remain as earth-shaking today as they ever were.

Looking at the historical context here, after ninety-plus years of Roman military occupation in Israel, there was a widespread belief that the expected Messiah, as foretold in biblical prophecy, would arrive and overthrow Rome to finally set the Jews free. However, the Messiah's true mission was to free them from sin, not Roman rule—a detail that was not mentioned in the OT. People in distress and desperate need, often tend to see more of what they need to see rather than what is actually there, and this is likely what happened with the Jews of that time who were expecting rescue from Roman rule.

An example from my own life, where I was not seeing what I needed to see, I had struggled with the stories of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 and the conquests of Joshua's army in Joshua 11:11-12. The idea that entire populations, including innocent infants and young children, were wiped out was hard for me to reconcile with a loving God. I kept asking myself: Why should these little ones suffer such a terrible fate for the sins of their parents? This question became a major stumbling block in my faith, lingering in my heart for years. I reasoned that the children could have been taken into the homes of decent people, raised in love, and would never know their

biological parents or their previous lives. But then one morning, during a time of prayer, something extraordinary happened. I felt an outside force—perhaps the Spirit of God—interrupt my thoughts. I clearly heard a distinctive voice say, “The souls of the innocents were taken a moment before they died.” In that moment, I was granted new understanding. I realized that at the time of death, these children were in a state like a persistent vegetative state, with their souls already taken to safety by God.

The relief I felt was immense—but brief. Almost immediately doubt crowded in. I wondered if I had simply made this up to comfort myself. But then immediately came a second interruption to my consciousness, just as clear and with that same distinctive voice as the first time, I heard: “If you did make it up, how much wiser and more merciful is your Father in Heaven.” Wow! ...Double Wow. That was not my voice. Those were not my words. That language is different from the way I speak, and it felt like a loving nudge from a higher power saying, “Hey, listen up.”

This experience left me convinced that it was a Divine intervention meant to help me overcome this spiritual stumbling block. What struck me most was the loving and gentle tone of the communication. I had always feared that God would be angry with me for being weak, sinful, or just plain dumb—because that is how I often felt about myself. But this encounter showed me something entirely different. The astonishing kindness and civility of this message took my breath away then, and it still does when recall it to mind. Why would the one and only all-powerful God, creator of The Universe, love or even bother to care about someone as small and flawed as myself? Yet, He did. And that realization deepened my faith immeasurably which stays with me to this day.

Experience has taught me that climbing the ladder of faith does not necessarily get easier with each step, but it does get more rewarding. I now have experiential knowledge that 'God is love'—not just intellectual knowledge. This experience gave me a deeper understanding of that truth, one I doubt I would have grasped so fully without this personal intervention. I believe God grants similar experiences to anyone who seeks Him and needs clarity on their Christian journey. So do not worry—'He's got you, He's got you and, He's got your back'. All earthly matters are ridiculously trivial in to God, even though they may stump us sometimes.

I thank God for revealing Himself to me as a loving Father, and I do feel truly blessed by that revelation. I had always read that God is love (1 John 4:8), but I did not truly grasp it until this experience. I believe God has programmed us to love our children so that, in our limited human way, we can understand a fraction of what His love is like. We are also called to love one another—everyone, always—which is an incredibly high bar (John 13:34). But I am convinced that the same God who helped me will also help you navigate any Christian confusions you may have with loving, personal answers. He loves us all, including those awful people who we find absolutely appalling. He is and always will be there, ready to guide us. Just ask Him and trust Him.

In a similar way that you might cherish your childhood memories, I believe you will come to treasure your early Christian experiences, especially as you realize there really is a mighty and loving Father helping you through your spiritual adolescence. If you missed out on a nurturing relationship with your biological father, you will find in your Heavenly Father to be infinitely loving and wonderful. The Bible may not contain all there is to know, but it is the foundation. God will reveal what you need to know *if* you seek Him and trust Him. That is a super important '*if*' right there. Waiting for God's answer is not tragicomedy like “Waiting for Godot” Samuel Beckett. God is for-real, and He changes your eternal destiny in the blink of an eye when you accept Him as Lord and Savior.

Faith in Jesus: A Roman Centurion's Example

One of my favorite examples of faith in Jesus comes from a Roman Centurion, a Gentile officer in charge of about sixty up to one hundred soldiers, depending on how many were available. His story is told in Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10. This Centurion had a servant who was dear to him and gravely ill. Unable to approach Jesus himself, he requested local Jewish elders to ask Jesus for a healing, which they were happy to do since this Roman had been unusually benevolent to them.

However, as Jesus made His way to the Centurion's house, the officer began to feel unworthy. He sent another servant to convey a message: “Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof, but only speak a word,

and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man under authority, and if you “Say but the word and my servant shall be healed.” When Jesus heard this, He marveled at the Centurion’s great faith, and the servant was healed immediately.

This story is striking because here we have a non-Jew, a Roman officer recognizing Jesus’ Divine authority and trusting Him completely, while the Jewish religious authorities refuse to acknowledge His Divinity or to trust Him. Their refusal to accept Jesus as Messiah, despite the many miracles He has performed, is willful hard-heartedness that persists even up to today. This refusal contributed to centuries of Christian animosity towards Jews, although judging them is none of our Gentile business. God will handle His own business with His people, the Jews, in the Tribulation, which is also none of our business. As believers, we will not be in attendance for the Tribulation.

A Raising of the Dead at Nain

Soon after this event, perhaps the next day, comes one of my favorite Jesus miracles—Jesus’ first raising of the dead, considered a ‘Messianic miracle’ at the time. Surprisingly, this monumental event is recorded only in The Gospel of Luke (Luke 7:11-17) and not by the other Synoptics or John’s Gospel. The story is brief, only about 150 words and it is another powerful example of Luke’s reporting Jesus’ empathy and humanity for the week or suffering.

As Jesus and company approach the city of Nain, about twenty-five miles south of Capernaum, He encounters a funeral procession at the city gate. A widow is burying her only son, and the crowd is filled with sorrow. When Jesus sees her, His heart goes out to her, and He says; “Do not cry.” Then He touches the bier they were carrying the body on, and the bearers stand still. Jesus says, “Young man, I say to you, get up” Immediately, the dead man sits up and begins to speak. Jesus gives him back to his mother.

This miracle sends huge shockwaves throughout the community. Fear and awe grips the crowd and leads them to glorify God, proclaiming that a great prophet has arisen among us. That would surely have put the fear in me as well. This news absolutely explodes outward and spreads like chaparral fire in hot August wind, to the anxiety of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus goes from big news to red-hot news. This sets-off a huge Messianic buzz. Luke 7:17, Matthew 4:24-25

John the Baptist’s Uncertainty and Jesus’ Affirmation

By this time, John the Baptist had been in prison for several months. He is hearing from his Disciples visiting him that Israel is not officially accepting Jesus as the Messiah, despite the many public miracles. This confusion leads John to send some of his Disciples to ask Jesus directly if He is the Messiah or if they should expect someone else.

So, John’s Disciples find Jesus—follow the crowd I guess, and they ask Him the question. In response, Jesus performs many miracles, curing diseases, casting out evil spirits, and restoring sight to the blind. He then said to John’s messengers; Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: “The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor” (Luke 7:21-22). In essence, Jesus is affirming that, yes, He is indeed the Messiah, and they leave to go back and report it to John.

Jesus then praises John the Baptist, describing him as a steadfast man, a true prophet, and the forerunner of the Messiah, fulfilling the prophecy of Malachi 3:1: “I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me...” John the Baptist is the advanced guard, a vector for Jesus, preparing the way for Christ’s first advent—coming or arrival. Had the Kingdom been received, John would have fulfilled the role of Elijah. However, Jesus is rejected, so John does not complete this function.

Jesus also foretells here of Elijah’s return before His Second Coming (Mark 9:11-12, Malachi 4:5-6). Elijah will return to prepare the hearts of Israel before the Second Advent of Christ. This prescient knowledge of future events, includes the rejection of His Kingdom offer by the current Jews and the subsequent extending of the offer to all people. This shows us Jesus’ Divine foreknowledge; He knows way back then that His message will be extend beyond Israel to encompass all believers across time.

Now we skip ahead to the account of the woman who anoints Jesus' feet in Luke 7:36-50. Jesus is invited to dine at the house of a Pharisee, not out of genuine hospitality, but likely with an ulterior motive—to trick Him into a misstep which the Pharisees can use to discredit Him. This is evident because Jesus is not offered the foundational Jewish courtesies of the time. In that culture, the host must greet all guests with a kiss on the cheek and the invocation; “The Lord be with you.” If the host and guest were already friends, this greeting might be extended to a short exchanged of added warmth and well wishes. Also, a servant—preferably a Gentile—would bring water for all guests to wash their feet, as everyone had to remove their sandals upon entering a house. Also, while not obligatory, a generous host might also anoint the guest's head with a small amount of perfumed oil, providing a sense of refreshment. The first two gestures were non-negotiable, akin to diplomatic protocol in Jewish culture of the day. Yet, they are glaringly withheld, a major snub, and so Jesus simply takes His place at the table.

Then, an uninvited local woman enters the scene. The Scripture notes that she is “a sinner” (Luke 7:37). This term is used in the Bible to describe a prostitute. In those times, without a husband, children, or family to support her a woman in her situation might starve to death. In 1 Timothy 5:3-16: Paul originates guidelines for the care of widows in the church. Mosaic Law had long mandated care of widows, orphans, and foreigners. Anyway, I take this to indicate that gentile widows would have been destitute prior to the Church. The larger point, unmentioned, is that the cause of prostitution, both then and now, is largely driven by the desires of sinful men, whether as clients of prostitution or as child molesters.

This uninvited woman begins to wash Jesus' feet with her tears, dry them with her hair. She kisses His feet, and anoints them with expensive oil. The Pharisee is silently judgmental, thinking that if Jesus were truly a prophet or the Messiah, He would know that this woman is a sinner and would not allow her touch Him. The Pharisee's thoughts reveal his lack of forgiveness, from his facial expression likely disgust and or smugness. Jesus is aware of what the Pharisee is thinking and likely everyone could see his disapproval. So, Jesus shares a parable to enlighten. The parable shows that those who are forgiven much, love much, while those forgiven little, love little. Jesus' response here exemplifies a level of grace and wisdom beyond human.

Then, Jesus says to the woman, “Your sins are forgiven,” openly claiming His Divine authority. He adds, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Luke 7:48-50). This moment underscores Jesus' central message of grace: faith in God brings the forgiveness of sins, a foundational concept of His ministry. Unlike the healing of paralytics, where the visible cure attests to the invisible forgiveness. Here, Jesus states clearly that the woman's forgiveness of sins (salvation) is entirely based on her faith, not on her actions, the washing of His feet.

The Jewish authorities consistently miss this critical point. Faith in God, the most consistent theme of Jesus' public ministry, is a concept that requires continual attendance. Our busy lives often cause faith to slip down the priority list, as we are consumed with our plans and daily tasks. In contrast, the physical world requires no faith—jump off a roof, and you get hurt; stop working you stop getting paid. These are certainties of the material world, but faith in God is different. It is not something you can achieve, put in your pocket, and then move on from. Faith in God is a lifelong expedition that requires ongoing effort and refocusing. Cultivating faith in God diminishes self-indulgence and enhances spiritual awareness—an effort well worth making. That last bit from experience.

Jesus begins His second tour of Galilee, this time with His fully formed group of twelve Apostles and a large following of women—Scripture mentions that there were “many” women, some are named. Luke 8:3 Also, scripture mentions that these women provided for Him “from their substance”, meaning they were financially supporting Jesus and His ministry. This highlights an important reality: every ministry requires some financial backing, and it is our responsibility to contribute what we can. Those with greater resources can give more without hardship, but everyone should give enough so they notice the impact. Tithing could be one of those timeless principles, possibly linked to the parable of the householder found in Matthew 13:52. My guess on that, of course.

The Rejection of Jesus

The following day marks the pivotal moment—the official national rejection of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. During this day, He performs another Messianic miracle, casting a demon out of a man who is both blind and mute. After the exorcism, this man is healed. He can both see and speak. This public miracle is extraordinary, and the crowd is amazed, openly wondering if Jesus is “the Son of David?” A Jewish title for The Messiah.

When the Pharisees hear this, they jump right in declaring; “This man casts out demons only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons.” Their response seems immediate, demonstrating premeditation and suggesting they were all ‘locked and loaded’—prepared for such a moment. For more than a year now, the Pharisees have been looking for ways to discredit Jesus and it seems they were lying in wait anticipating yet another Messianic miracle and ready to seize upon the miracle to float their demon possession scam. They know full well that the crowd is thinking that Jesus must be The Messiah and their flimsy authority will not tolerate another hit from Jesus. Matthew 12:22-37. (my guess) This is the ‘unpardonable sin’ accusing The Holy Spirit, within Jesus, of being in league with the devil, Beelzebub. Even though rejecting Jesus as Messiah is a serious sin, that is not the unpardonable sin. This is.

The Pharisees’ demon possession accusation is obviously to manipulate this crowd, who were generally expected to accept what the religious leaders’ say. However, very many of the ordinary Jews were long skeptical of disingenuous Pharisaic declarations, knowing that they are openly self-serving and hypocritical. The claim of demonism is hugely egregious, especially given the undeniable good works and miracles that Jesus is performing. So, here the Pharisees are likely feeling pressured and compelled to act decisively to undermine Jesus if they are going to salvage any authority for themselves. If all the people abandon the Pharisees and follow Jesus, they are out of a job.

So, they play their hand with the “Beelzebub card,” and the crowd...is likely momentarily stunned to silence—my supposition. The Pharisees *will never explain* how they arrive at such an outrageous conclusion. They know that many of the Jews are recognizing Jesus is The Messiah and will not be easily swayed by any Pharisee pronouncement. Their accusation is fantastically jaw-dropping and it would have been plenty to cause momentary shock and confusion in the crowd. No one could have imagined this coming. Repeating, claiming Jesus is in league with the devil right here, is the unpardonable sin. They are forever separated from God and there is no repentance or forgiveness for them. Even though rejecting Jesus as messiah could be forgiven if requested earnestly.

It is not possible to imagine or explain how earth-shaking the Pharisee claim is and, again, *this is the National Sin* or the unpardonable sin prophesied in the OT (Leviticus 26:40-42, Jeremiah 3:11-18, Hosea 5:15). Most of the people do know better and should have immediately challenged the Pharisees’ claim, but they are likely momentarily speechless because of the incredible seriousness of the accusation. This is the most devastating event in Jesus’ earthly life up to this point and it must have been deeply distressing to Him. It seems that His mother and siblings received word of this and knew of His anguish. They must have been nearby to where He was preaching as they often were. He is likely preaching somewhere around Capernaum. Anyway, His Mom and siblings show up a little later today, during His telling of the Mystery Kingdom Parables, intending to take Him home for a break. However, considering His rejection, Jesus will dismiss all earthly values in favor of the spiritual, saying; “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” Matthew 12:49-50.

The rank-and-file Jews had long been inclined to allow the Pharisees to sway them. But the trust required for that kind of relationship has been in steady decline for some time prior to Jesus and precipitously falling of late. The common Jews feared the Pharisees’ authority to put a Jew ‘out of the temple,’ which is to excommunicate a Jew from contact with other Jews. So, the people dread more than respect the Pharisee authority. We can see in the history of the Kings of Israel; that when the king did what was right in the eyes of God, the people followed suit, and when the king did what was evil, the people also did evil. So, there is a long history of the Jews following Pharisees example and, right here, the Pharisees spend every last ounce of credibility they have with their demon possession accusation. This is colossal and unexpected. It must have made the Jewish crowd momentarily confused and hushed. Any hesitation would allow the Pharisees to claim victory-by-agreement in the case of their demon possession scam and that certainly seems like exactly what they are presuming upon. (Isaiah 6:9-10) My guess on the Jews reaction.

Knowing the thoughts of the Pharisees, Jesus responds with a defense: He points out the simple logic that if Satan casts out Satan, his kingdom is divided and will not stand. He reminds them that the gift of exorcism is recognized as a gift from the Spirit of God, never the Devil. So, the Pharisees have concocted something new, false, and non-biblical to try to discredit Him. His Messianic miracles validate His Messiahship, according to the Pharisees' own doctrine; "And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore, they will be your judges." (Matthew 12:27-28). All true, of course.

Notwithstanding there is a big 'but' right here; But both the Pharisees and the common Jews do not seem to be able to hear or understand what Jesus just said right here. The Pharisees are also selectively and conveniently overlooking the fact of His many other public miracles demonstrating Jesus' power over demons. Jesus is the only person to ever be able to command demons to come out of possessed people against their will. It was absolutely unheard of that anyone could command a demon against its will, and such power could only come from Divine authority, the Spirit, or Son of God. So, it must be God's intention that the crowd is momentarily stunned and not able to hear or to understanding Jesus' defense against the Beelzebul claim of the Pharisees', a colossal accusation. No one seems to be able to hear or understand what Jesus just said to demonstrate His innocents. There may have been some behind the scenes Divine help right here in setting up Jesus' crucifixion. Another of my guesses. Jesus could have been making sure that His death, for the forgiveness of sins, occurred when and how it was supposed to, according to The Father's plan. If a little Divine nudge was needed to keep the Father's plan on track, Jesus is more than capable of providing it. I am just stating what seems obvious and likely, I make no claim of Divine revelation.

Jesus pronounces judgment on "this generation of the Nation of Israel" (Matthew 12:30-31). Repeating, I think Jesus is making sure that He will be crucified on the Passover in a couple of weeks. I bet that He is also making sure that the Jews do not realize that the Pharisees just snookered them—at least until after His resurrection. Another guess. The rejection of Jesus by both the Pharisees and some of the common Jews was incredibly arrogant. I bet that God does not approve of human arrogant; Point of Order; it is never a good idea to challenge God. Full stop.

It surely seems likely that certain truths about His death and resurrection were intentionally veiled until the appointed time. Jesus' death and resurrection were necessary for the redemption of all humanity which allowed for the inclusion of Gentiles—us, in God's covenant (Romans 11:11-12). Thank you, Lord Jesus. and, after His resurrection, Jesus opens the minds of His disciples to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45-48).

The judgment will arrive in AD 70 with the destruction of the Nation of Israel, the Great Temple, and the death of about half of the Jewish population. Although this event is about three decades ahead, Jesus' reference to "this generation" likely encompasses those Jews living at the time and includes their children, who will also be in attendance for the judgment within their lifetime.

That judgment of AD 70 sets in motion the Jewish diaspora or scattering the Jewish people across the world for nearly 2,000 years, until the reestablishment of Israel in 1948. This long period of suffering and displacement was marked by persecution, fueled by the European condemnation of the Jews for the death of Jesus. The ethnoreligious slur "Christ Killers" became a justification for widespread hatred and genocide against the Jewish people, leading to the horrors of antisemitism.

Even today, the conflict in Israel seems unending, with little hope of resolution. This ongoing turmoil could be a precursor to the End Times, although that is just my speculation. Late in the Tribulation, Russia will invade Israel, foretold in Ezekiel 38:2-9. However, believers need not fear these events, as we will all be taken up to be with Jesus in the Rapture which occurs before the tribulation (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Jesus told us that the timing of the Rapture is known only to the Father, not the angels, not even the Son (Matthew 24:36, Mark 13:32). So, do not bother looking for hints in scripture that foretell when the Tribulation will occur. There are none.

In Jesus' time, His rejection causes Him to change His teaching method and to begin speaking exclusively in parables. Matthew 13:10-11 The Kingdom offer is postponed until the Tribulation when a future generation of Jews will recognize Jesus as the Messiah and mourn His Crucifixion (Zechariah 12:10). The rejection by the religious

authorities, was a painful and divisive part of Jesus' earthly journey. His rejection was necessary to advance God's ultimate plan of salvation highlighting His mission to transcend human institutions and reconcile humanity to God through His sacrificial love.

The Israel Veil: A Consequence Extended into Our Time

One consequence of the Divine judgment of Israel is a noticeable spiritual blindness that persists among the Jewish people to this day. I think that God has placed a partial veil over Israel so that they are prevented from recognizing Jesus as the Messiah or from seeing the truths of The Gospels. This veil, or partial blindness, is mentioned twice, Paul in Romans 11:7: "The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened..." and again in Romans 11:25: "Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." The Fulness of The Gentiles is The Rapture. So, I think that blindness in part has happened to Israel until The Rapture as a result of their rejection of Jesus.

This partial blindness affects the nation of Israel and all Jews everywhere, keeping them from seeing the truth of The Gospels and the New Testament. It is a striking reality—over eight million Jews in Israel, motivated and passionate, yet they are all unable to see that Jesus was and is the Messiah? I think this could only be explained by Divine intervention, if God has placed a veil over the minds of all Jews. There could be veils over any people and we would never know it. 'The fullness of the Gentiles' also refers to the evangelization of the Gentiles which Jesus started 2000 years ago and continues to this very day. I think The Rapture is the final element in the Fulness of the Gentiles. This has been on-going for the entire Church age—again, just my thought on that.

Paul also references this in 2 Corinthians 3:14-15: "But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains un-lifted, because only through Christ is it taken away." He further explains in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 that "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of The Gospel that displays the glory of Christ." While the last reference is universal, it does include Israel and it points out that a refusal to believe results in a hardened heart or a veil of spiritual blindness.

God's dealings with Israel's unbelief will reach climax during the Tribulation. Israel will play a central role in end-time events. The veil or partial blindness seems like part of the judgment upon Israel for their rejection of Jesus, a Divine consequence that spans the entire Church Age. While Scripture speaks of the veil, it does not explicitly state that the veil is part of the judgment, although it seems to me, that can reasonably be inferred. (Sorry, another guess.)

The Church Age itself is a pause in the 490 years prophesied upon Israel in Daniel 9:24-25, with the final seven years likely representing the Tribulation. During this time, many will be martyred for refusing to worship the beast or receive his mark (Revelation 13:1-18). Notably, OT and Tribulation believers will be resurrected together at the Second Coming, despite the (2000 years and counting) Church Age being inserted in between the OT and the Tribulation.

Returning to Jesus' story, after pronouncing the judgment upon Israel, the Scribes and Pharisees deceitfully ask Him for another sign, despite having already rejected the many signs He has performed. Jesus responds, "A wicked and adulterous"—contaminated with earthly values—"generation asks for a sign. But none will be given it except the sign of the Prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so The Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:39-40). His prescience knowledge again. This is a clear reference to His death, burial, and resurrection.

Next, He tells them what it will cost them for their accusing Him of being in league with the Devil, Beelzebub: "When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation" (Matthew 12:32). Which reflects the realpolitik-type reasoning of that generation, 2000 years before the term was coined. This illustrates the judgment of Israel. Despite maintaining their national identity under the occupation, Israel will face

devastating consequences three decades ahead; the destruction and loss of Jerusalem, the Great Temple, and about half of the Jewish people. The scattering (dysphoria) of the remaining Jews will last for nearly two millennia, AD70 until 1948. So, the final state of that generation is indeed worse than the first, this is the judgment for their rejecting Jesus by equating Him with the Devil, Beelzebub. (Matthew 12:32-37, Mark 3:29, Luke 12:10).

Thus, the corrupt Jewish leadership with their culture of greed was brought to desolation, a sobering reminder of the universal nature of human sinfulness. Greed at the expense of others is, of course, not unique to the Jews, but reflects the fallen nature of all humanity. As Pogo famously quipped, “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

Parables of The Mysteries of The Kingdom of Heaven

In defining the Kingdom of Heaven: the terms “Kingdom of Heaven” and “Kingdom of God” are interchangeable, referring to wherever God's reign and authority are manifest. The “Mystery Kingdom” encompasses the time between Christ's first and second comings, a period during which the King—Jesus—is not physically present on earth. The Parables of The Mystery Kingdom describe some conditions on earth during this time, giving us insight into the spiritual state of the world during the King's physical absence. These are two discrete items—the Mystery Kingdom is the time span and the Parables of The Mystery Kingdom are some conditions in that time. The two items are separate yet interconnected.

A parable is a simple story that uses familiar scenarios to illustrate deeper, often spiritual, truths. Straightforward, parables can carry esoteric meanings, echoing the adage “Keep It Stupid Simple” (KISS). Jesus' parables and in particular the parables of the Mystery Kingdom are unique in that they in that they reveal truth to believers while shrewdly concealing it from unbelievers—a dual function that is both strategic and profound (Luke 19:26-27). Jesus explained that those who genuinely seek spiritual truth in His parables will gain understanding, while those who dismiss them as superficial will lose even what little understanding they have. These dynamics underscore critical warnings: God does not approve of human arrogance and humility is required when seeking spiritual truths.

The Parables of the Mystery Kingdom are divided into two groups. The first group consists of five parables Jesus shared with the masses, while the second group are four parables He spoke privately to His Disciples in the house. This was on the same day and immediately following His rejection by the religious leaders. Jesus' rejection marks a pivotal shift in His teaching approach, where parables become His primary method of communication to the masses.

You can find these parables in Mark 4:3, Matthew 13:3-9, and Luke 8:5-8, although not every parable appears in all three Gospels. A Gospel Harmony is helpful to the chronology. The privacy of the second group of parables likely served to conceal His Messiahship from the Jewish public, aligning with what seems to be His post-rejection strategy. The fact that all these parables were delivered on the same day and immediately after His rejection, underscores their importance. Scholars interpret these parables as defining the spiritual conditions during the Mystery Kingdom, known as the Age of Grace or the Church Age—our time, the time between Christ's first and second comings.

Jesus is describing what the spiritual landscape would be like during this period, which He referred to as “The Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mark 4:11). This is not the Kingdom the Jews expected; instead, it is a new phase of God's Kingdom which will be marked by the physical absence of the King and an unfolding of previously unrevealed truths (Ephesians 3:4-5). This information, hidden even from the OT prophets, was given for the benefit of those who will live in the Church Age—which includes all of us today, of course.

In the first five parables, Jesus confirms the OT vision of God's Kingdom and introduces new insights relevant to our time. The first and third parables, in particular—the Sower and the Tares—are rich in detail, providing keys to understanding the other parables. Jesus' teaching from this point forward is predominantly in parables, but thankfully, The Gospels also record much of what He shared privately with His Disciples.

It was in Matthew 13:10-11 that we saw that Jesus began to teach exclusively in parables. It was on the day of His official rejection by the Pharisees. His Disciples asked Him. “why do you speak to them in parables?” He explains, “To

you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but unto them it has not been given.” His use of the term ‘Them’ here refers to the Jews who rejected Him, and to this very day, understanding of Jesus as the Messiah has not been granted unto ‘them’ who rejected Him. This certainly appears to me to be a Divinely ordained consequence, not coincidence.

The parables also delineate the historical transition from the OT or Mosaic Age, which concluded with Jesus' resurrection, to the Church Age or the Age of Grace, which began due to the Jewish rejection of His Messiahship. The current Church Age is not the anticipated Messianic Kingdom; instead, it serves as a temporary dispensation and replacement. The Messianic Kingdom, proclaimed by Jesus and John the Baptist as imminent, will be characterized by Christ's physical presence here on earth and His magnificent thousand-year reign—often termed the Millennial Kingdom.

Jesus' Intentionality:

Jesus never wasted words. Every parable, every statement was intentional. Before the first parable, He gives a significant hint: “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?” (Mark 4:13). This suggests that some of what he will say here, specifically it seems that the first and third parables hold keys to understanding the others. Jesus was aware that, after His rejection, His teachings were somewhat cryptic, but, here, He urged His listeners to pay close attention. He promised that those who took His words seriously would be given more understanding, while those who did not would lose what little understanding they had (Mark 4:24-25). This holds true to today; seek God sincerely and understanding will be revealed to you.

Parable of the Sower; There will be different preparations of the soil (personal circumstances). This reflects the spiritual reality within Christian churches. You will find representatives of all four subgroups—unbelievers who are there for appearances or acceptance, those overwhelmed by worldly concerns, individuals who initially accept The Gospel but lack depth of commitment, and true believers who actively bear fruit, saving souls into Eternal Life. The message is clear enough: to be fruitful, one must actively nurture their faith, which requires effort and dedication, as that goes against normal human inclinations.

Parable the Growing Seed; Here a seed sprouts to life from an internal force. Like the forces of physics, it is invisible to the naked eye. This represents the mystery of rebirth (also seen in John 3:5-8). The seed is the seed of The Gospel. In the case of a believer that seed has produced life. Lastly here, He mentions the harvest or souls to receive Eternal Life. He used that metaphor back at Jacob's well. John 4:37-41

Parable of the Tares; The sowing of The Gospel will be imitated by the sowing of false doctrine. There will be a side-by-side growth. The judgment at the end of this age will separate those to be admitted into God's Kingdom from those disqualified. Both sowings will demonstrate their quality, either fruitless or fruitful—which is saving souls into Eternal Life. I think the sowing by Satan means the appearance of fraudulent Christians likely selling salvation-by-works. However, they will not be getting their fundamentals from 'The Word of God' (the Bible). They will reintroduce fake salvation-by-works into Christianity in our time. You can easily see in the parable of the tares is the prediction of the false Christian religions that have appeared in recent times, all based on salvation-by-works, control, and money not the Bible or Jesus' Grace. Such false religions tend to taint true Christianity for the naïve.

Parable of the Mustard Seed; This describes how a tiny seed—among the smallest known in the ancient world, grows into a large shrub capable of sheltering birds in its branches. Jesus used this illustration to describe the kingdom of heaven's growth from humble beginnings to widespread influence. The Black Mustard plant, common in first-century Palestine, could indeed grow from a minute seed (about 1 millimeter) into a large spreading bush eight feet in height. This imagery would have resonated with Jesus' audience, who were familiar with the contrast between the seed's size and its eventual growth. The parable emphasizes the kingdom's miraculous expansion from seemingly insignificant origins—Jesus' small group of followers, into a vast spiritual community. The presence of birds finding shelter in its branches suggests the inclusive nature of God's kingdom, providing spiritual refuge for many peoples. This parable, like others in Matthew 13, offers encouragement that God's kingdom, though perhaps appearing small at times, will grow according to His purposes and provide spiritual shelter to all who seek it.

Parable of the Leaven; Here a woman puts leaven (yeast) into three measures of meal (dough). The woman is symbolic as 'the one who introduces false doctrine'. Revelation 2:20 and 17:1-6 Proverbial leaven is always a biblical symbol of sin and most often the sin of false teaching although it can also represent the inherent hypocrisy in false teaching. Recall Jesus' warning in the boat; "...beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy ..." Luke 12:1 In this parable, Leaven represents or false doctrine introduced into the Church (Galatians 5:9) in three different measures of bread dough. The dough is the Church in the modern age. Today the Christian Church is divided into three major parts; Protestantism including generic Christianity, Roman Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodoxy. All three have bits of false doctrine which tends to grow at the same rate as truth does, as in the side-by-side growth from the parable of the Tares.

After delivering the parable of the leaven, Jesus takes His Disciples aside and into the house, for a more private teaching. Mark:33-34. Here, He shares four additional parables, each offering deeper insights into the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Parable of the Hidden Treasure; This tells of a man who discovers treasure hidden in a field. With joy, he sells all his possessions to buy that field, securing the treasure for himself. This parable illustrates the supreme value of the kingdom of heaven. The hidden nature of the treasure suggests that the kingdom's worth may not be immediately apparent to all, but once discovered, its value far exceeds all earthly possessions. The man's wholehearted response - selling everything he owns - demonstrates the appropriate reaction to recognizing the kingdom's worth. Like the companion Parable of the Pearl of Great Price that follows it, this story emphasizes that the kingdom of heaven merits our complete devotion and commitment, even at great personal cost. The joy with which the man makes his sacrifice further highlights that discovering the kingdom's value leads not to reluctant obligation but to genuine delight in the exchange.

Parable of the Pearl of Great Price; This portrays a merchant searching for fine pearls who, upon discovering one of exceptional value, sells all his possessions to acquire it. Like its companion Parable of the Hidden Treasure, this story illustrates the surpassing worth of the kingdom of heaven. The merchant's expertise in pearls suggests that even those who are actively seeking truth and value will find nothing greater than the kingdom of heaven. His immediate willingness to exchange everything he owns for this single pearl demonstrates that the kingdom's worth far exceeds all other pursuits and possessions combined. The parable emphasizes that discovering the true value of God's kingdom should prompt a wholehearted response - one that considers no sacrifice too great considering what is gained. Together with the Hidden Treasure parable, this story teaches that whether one stumbles upon the kingdom unexpectedly or finds it after lengthy searching, its value demands and deserves our complete devotion.

A little side point; I see these two parables; The Hid treasure and the Pearl of Great price as representing two groups of people because both parables speak of the same thing, how much better the Kingdom of God is than anything we can imagine. Why would He use two parables to say the same thing? Such repetition occurs nowhere else in Scripture. Here is my thinking; The Hid treasure did not need seeking. It was simply, passively "found" I see this as symbolic of the Jews at the time of Jesus. Israel was referred to as God's "special treasure" in Exodus 19:5. When Jesus came to earth, the Jews were already in the land, in covenant relationship with God. So, I see the Treasure as representing the Jews. The gentiles, however, were far from God. They needed to be actively "sought" as in the pearl of Great Price. So, I see the pearl as symbolic of Gentiles and through His sacrifice, Jesus will gain both groups. If this was not symbolic of the two groups; Jews and Gentiles, why use two different parables referring to the Kingdom of Heaven being much better than anything we can imagine? Of course, these are just my thoughts on this. I make no claim of Devine revelation.

Parable of the Net; In this parable, the end of the age is likened to a net cast into the sea, gathering fish of many kinds. The sea symbolizes the world in the End Times (Revelation 13:1-8, 17:15). At the end of the age, there will be a final judgment, separating the righteous from the unrighteous (sheep from goats). The righteous will enter the Messianic Kingdom, while the unrighteous will be cast away, paralleling the judgment described in the Parable of The Tares (Luke 17:34-36)

Parable of the Householder; This parable suggests that in the age of Grace, there will be elements both old and new. Just as the householder brings out treasures new and old, some aspects of the Mosaic Age will carry over, while new elements will be introduced. Perhaps, tithing could be one of the things “old” from the Mosaic Age, although that is merely my speculation. It is important to keep in mind that guesses, no matter how much we like our own, should never be confused with Scripture.

Recap of The Parables of The Mysteries of The kingdom

Parable of the Sower; ----- There will be a sowing of The Gospel seed.

Parable of the growing seed; ----- The seed sown will spring to life.

Parable of the Tares; -----The Gospel sowing will be imitated by false religions.

Parable of the Mustard Seed; ----- -Christianity will grow to giant size.

Parable of the Leaven; ----- -Christianity is going to be spiked with false teaching.

Parables in private;

Parable of the Hid Treasure; ----- God will get a large group of Jewish Christians at the cost of Jesus' earthly life.

Parable of the Pearl of Great Price; --- -God will also gain Gentiles and again at the cost of Jesus' earthly life.

Parable of the Net; ----- . The Age will end with the judgment of the Gentiles. The Unrighteous will be cast away from the Kingdom and the righteous will be taken into the Kingdom.

Parable of the Householder; ----- -Some things are the same as in the Mosaic Age and other things are new.

Two Side Points;

First; A church's name alone does not determine its theological legitimacy. The key is to examine what a church actually teaches and practices. Most churches provide their core beliefs in easily accessible formats - through websites, welcome materials, or informational pamphlets often found in their lobbies. When exploring a church, consider these guidelines:

Review their statement of faith or "What We Believe" documentation

Ensure they teach the gospel of Jesus Christ based on sound biblical interpretation

Observe their approach to new visitors - genuine welcome without pressure

Notice how they handle financial matters - transparency is important

Watch for signs of healthy community involvement and service

Consider how comfortable you feel participating in their services and activities

A healthy church community should feel welcoming but not pressuring. You should naturally want to participate in church activities and feel aligned with their theological positions and ministry approaches. Be cautious of any religious organization that uses pressure recruitment tactics or requires financial commitments for advancement within the church.

Second; When evaluating a Church or religious organization, focus on their actual teachings, practices, and impact on members' lives. Look for transparency in their operations and teachings. Organizations that maintain multiple layers of secret doctrines or require substantial “contributions” for advancement warrant skepticism. A healthy religious community should be open about its beliefs and practices, with financial matters handled ethically and transparently for members, not necessarily publicly.

Back to the Gospels

The Crossing to the Other Side of the sea

After sharing the Mystery Kingdom parables, it is still the same day, likely afternoon, when Jesus suggests, “Let us go over to the other side of the lake” (the Sea of Galilee, Luke 8:22). So, His Disciples board a fishing boat, perhaps

Peter's again and Christianity's little Marine Expeditionary Force of one shove off and boldly sally forth into their destinies. Here they are embarking on what would become a defining moment in their lives and world history. The crossing is roughly six miles at the northern point of the lake, where they are likely crossing. Jesus, tired from the day's teaching, falls asleep in the stern as they set sail.

The Sea of Galilee is located about 680 feet below sea level in a rift valley surrounded by hills, it is notorious for sudden and violent storms. These squalls can whip up waves as high as fourteen feet. Straight away, a big storm blows in and it is standard practice to drop the sails and take to the oars. But even with four seasoned fishermen among them, His Disciples are terrified as their boat begins to swamp with water. Fearing for their lives, they wake Jesus, pleading for help. With a word, He stills both the wind and the sea, leaving His Disciples awestruck by His command over nature. This event not only demonstrates Jesus' authority over the physical world but also teaches His Disciples—and us—to bring our legitimate needs to Him. I bet that kicked off a strong esprit de corps in the boat.

The Encounter with the Demonized Men

Upon reaching the far shore, they make landfall in the region of the 'Gadarenes,' a place inhabited by pagan Gentiles who had intermarried with Assyrians for over six centuries. The area, deeply influenced by Greek culture following Alexander the Great's conquest and the later Roman rule, was a melting pot of languages and traditions. Greek, although no longer dominant, was still widely understood, especially among non-Jews. As Jesus and His Disciples disembark, they are confronted by two demonized men, one of whom is severely possessed and has terrorized the locals for years.

This man lived among the tombs, uncontrollable and violent, he has broken every chain that had been used to bind him. His cries echoed through the night as he cut himself with stones. When he sees Jesus, the demons within him cry out, "What do you want with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the appointed time?" (Matthew 8:29). This reference to the "appointed time" indicates the demons' awareness of their impending judgment. They also know who Jesus is and are terrified of His authority. The man reveals that his name is "Legion, for we are many" (Mark 5:9), suggesting that thousands of demons inhabit him. (a legion is normally be 6000)

On the same day that Jesus is accused by the Pharisees of being demon-possessed, He encounters the most demonized man in the Bible—yet the demons immediately recognize His divinity and fear His power (James 2:19). The demons beg Jesus not to send them into the abyss, a bottomless fire pit—perhaps the molten core of the earth and a place of confinement for demons as well as where Satan himself will be imprisoned during Jesus' millennial reign (Revelation 20:1-3). Instead, they request to be allowed to go into a nearby herd of pigs, about two thousand animals grazing nearby and a staple food in non-Jewish areas. Jesus permits it. The result indicated that pigs are more sensible creatures than men because they do not tolerate the demon possession at all. They immediately rush down a steep bank, into the lake and drown.

It is only natural to wonder what became of all the demons after the pigs drowned. Did they get sent to the abyss? Did they wander about, seeking new victims? Scripture does not provide all the details, leaving room for speculation. However, it is important not to get caught up in worrying about any "expanded stories" beyond what is revealed in Scripture. With Jesus present, we must trust that He handled the situation appropriately. God's wisdom and mercy far exceed our understanding and we should have faith that He would not allow harm to come to innocent people or leave such loose ends unsecured, especially as He let the demons loose. So, do not worry, something appropriate happened to those demons after the pigs drown.

Imagine the Disciples' surprise at the pig mass suicide. Also, the formerly demonized man is now in his right mind and begs to follow Jesus, but Jesus instructs him to stay and tell his people what great things God has done for him. In this Gentile region there are no jealous Pharisees lurking about to try to discredit or to trip up Jesus, so there is no need to tell this man to keep quiet about his cleansing from the demons. The man's testimony will lead many in the area to believe. This man becomes a powerful witness, spreading the news of his deliverance throughout the region (Mark 5:20). Jesus' intention has always been to include Gentiles in His mission and even though that is not fully realized until after His Resurrection, (Ephesians 3:5-12) it is already evident for us to see here.

With this piece of His mission complete, Jesus and His Disciples—Christianity's little Amphibious Advance Force re-boards their fishing boat and sets sail once again, having left behind a profound impact on the region they visited and taking with them the experiences that Jesus wanted them to have.

The Prevalence of Demonic Influence

It seems as if there were very many more demonized people around during Jesus' time. Doesn't it? I believe that God's grace has kept us in generally more demon-free conditions since His time. Isaiah 49:24-26 However, demonic influence still exists today. If you feel the need to experience the disturbing presence of demons for yourself, to verify demon existence, just visit the locked unit of a psychiatric hospital. That will usually creep out anyone sufficiently and you will not want any additional contact. Also notice that people who experience ghostly harassment on paranormal television shows seem like they are seldom Christians. What seems like excessive general demon possessions in Jesus' time could be just a contrast to our presence day situation where the Holy Spirit, indwells us believers and we far outnumber the Pagans. This presence of the Holy spirit is immensely more powerful than any of those lost or loitering demonic spirits. As Christians, we do not have to fear demonic possession, unless we invite that—a *super-important caveat* right there. Demons can still possess people today, but typically only by invitation or in rare cases by proximity. Also, all demons will be deposed at the second coming (Revelation 20:1-3). Restating this; there are no demon atheists—they are all believers in God and tremble at His power.

Jairus' Plea and a Woman's Faith

Jesus and His Disciples re-board the boat and sail back toward Capernaum. Likely it is the next morning by the time they arrive. A large crowd is already waiting for them. Among them is Jairus, a ruler of the local synagogue, who begs Jesus to come and heal his dying daughter. Jesus sets off toward Jairus' house, with the crowd pressing in around Him. Amidst the throng is a woman who has suffered from uncontrolled bleeding for twelve years. She believes and later explains her thinking, "If I just touch but His garment, I will be made whole." So, she contrives a brush contact touching His robe, and instantly, she feels the healing power flow into her body.

Jesus stops and asks, "Who touched my garments?" (Mark 5:30). Of course, He knows who touched Him, but He is giving her the opportunity to come forward. His Disciples, puzzled by the question, point out that very many people are touching Him, as usual in a crowded setting. But Jesus remains focused, looking for the one who had touched Him in faith. The woman, realizing she has been discovered, falls at His feet and confesses. First Jesus gently corrects her perception, saying, "Daughter, your faith has made you whole" (Mark 5:34). So, it was not the act of touching His garment that healed her, but her faith in God. If it were simply a matter of touching His clothes, very many people would be getting incidentally healed of everything just by brushing against Him. That would make Him like a biblical pinball machine; Bong, Bong, Bong. Of course, that never happens. Jesus' miracles are always intentional and faith-driven, not the result of any sort of automatic contact magic.

The Raising of Jairus' Daughter

As they continue-on toward Jairus' house, word comes that the daughter has died. Despite this, Jesus presses on. He brings only three of His Disciples and the girl's parents with Him to the house. At this point in His ministry, Jesus' miracles are no longer for the Jewish public or as a sign of His Messiahship, especially after His rejection by the religious leaders. Likely through Divine intervention, the crowd fails to notice Jesus and the small group slip away, similar to other times when hostile crowds suddenly became unable to see or harm Him. It seems to me that; He who spoke the Universe into existence, could easily mask the little group slipping away unnoticed.

Upon arriving at Jairus' house, Jesus reassures the parents, "Do not be afraid. Just have faith" (Mark 5:36). They do trust Him, so He raises up the girl from the dead—a Messianic miracle that underscores His power over life and death. He instructs the parents to give her something to eat and to keep the miracle private, to themselves. I think because His miracles are no longer to establish His Messiahship, after His rejection.

Healing of two Blind men and a Mute

As they leave Jairus' house, the crowd has caught up with them again, and two blind men follow Jesus, crying out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" So, these blind men can see that Jesus as the Messiah, a truth that the Pharisees do not seem to be able to see and refuse to acknowledge. Jesus and His Disciples return to Peter's house, where the blind men gain entry and ask Him for mercy. Jesus asks them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" (Matthew 9:28). They affirm their faith, and Jesus touches their eyes, restoring their sight.

Next Jesus and company leave the house and encounter a mute man possessed by a demon. After casting out the demon, the man speaks—a significant Messianic miracle. The crowd marvels, declaring that such wonders have never been seen in Israel, which is true. But the Pharisees, ever determined to undermine Jesus, are following close at hand, lying in wait all locked and loaded with a fabricated accusation; they accuse Him of casting out demons by the power of the devil; "By the prince of devils casteth he out Devils." Matthew 9:33-34. This is, of course, their blatant lie yet they have repeated it several times by now and it begins to sound plausible to some who are naive—a familiar tactic in the realm of contemporary politics. The Pharisees manipulate and deceive, faking out the simple-minded. However, such deceit only fools some of the people some of the time and truth will ultimately prevail.

Temptation of Retribution

I have often imagined what it would have been like if Jesus had performed a specific miracle at this moment—a dramatic one, maybe where He calls down fire from the sky to incinerate some of those deceitful Pharisees. How satisfying would a contravention have been right here; to see some of these lying religious hypocrites, who denied the Messiah to maintain their earthly power, get they deserved? Yet, Jesus does not even acknowledge their existence. He allows them to continue manipulating the free-willed Jewish people. Why is that? I suspect it is because Jesus did not want to reduce the leap of faith required to believe in Him. The size of that leap of faith was likely ordained by the Father before the foundation of the world—that foundation was laid down in the Late Heavy Bombardment of 3.8 to 4.1 billion years ago—a very long time before you were thinking about any of this. I think the nature and magnitude of that leap of faith is a constant (λ cdm) in the fabric of space-time, akin to Kierkegaard's a "Leap of Faith." Jesus consistently emphasized faith in God, and a spectacle like "fire from the sky" would have made it too easy for the Jews to believe in Him. Jesus desires faith, not mere astonishment so, He never performs such theatrical displays even as it would have been convincing. I must admit that I too am not immune to the allure of the spectacular over substance. Human frailty I assume.

Rejection in Nazareth

Next, Jesus and His Disciples return to His hometown of Nazareth. He teaches in the synagogue, but once again they reject Him. Having known Him since childhood, they cannot reconcile the idea that this familiar mild-mannered man could possibly be their expected grand military-Messiah. Perhaps they needed some extraordinary validation from... the Easter Bunny? Tragically, validation will come too late for most of them on what is to be the first Easter and in the form of His Resurrection. At least they do not try to kill Him this time.

Israel had been in a prophetic dry spell for four hundred years—the time between the Testaments, often termed "the 400 silent years." Jesus has performed numerous miracles within thirty-five miles of Nazareth, and they must have heard about it. Yet, they still refused to believe, and Jesus marveled at their unbelief. So, Jesus and His Disciples decamp from Nazareth for the last time.

The Nature of Unbelief

Unbelief is a powerful force, and when we encounter it in people, we can sense their vulnerability. It is only natural to want to help—to do something to shake them out of their unbelief. But unbelief is not just a metaphor, it is a demonic and destructive force that renders its victims spiritually impudent. There is nothing we can do about forces of physics and there is little we can do about willful unbelief, which is of human origin but is often exacerbated by the demonic. Willful unbelief is a deception which starts as a choice but becomes an unwitting commitment, with the victim typically unable to escape it. The irony is that by rejecting Jesus' reality, a person substitutes their own imaginary one, or worse Satan's deception. If you are not going with God's Word, whose word are you going with?

Jesus Sends Out the Seventy-Two Disciples

In Judea, soon after His second rejection in Nazareth, Jesus sends out seventy-two of His Disciples in pairs, as part of a mission specifically to the Jewish people. This large group is empowered by Him to perform miracles and to preach repentance of His rejection which reflects the urgency of His mission, because He knows that His time is getting short (Luke 10:1). He instructs them not to take anything with them and to avoid the Gentile regions, focusing instead on the “lost sheep of Israel.” They are to visit only those who welcome them, and to expect persecution. Jesus warns them that because the Pharisees called Him Beelzebub, they will likely face worse accusations—if the Pharisees can think of anything worse.

Jesus' directives here, suggest that He is not expecting widespread repentance among the Jews. He tells His Disciples that if they are brought before courts, the Spirit of God will give them the words they need. He also foretells that His message will cause division within Jewish families, emphasizing that the Jews must love God more than even their closest family. The acceptance of His Messiahship by any Jewish family member would create a rift in the Law-bound, tightly-knit Jewish family unit. Jesus emphasizes repentance of His rejection, not the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, Matthew 12:31-32, Luke 12:10 and Mark 3:28-29, which He restates is unforgivable. However, it seems to me that if any Jews do repent of rejecting Him, they could be eligible to enter the Kingdom of God, although they will not escape the coming judgment of 70 AD. Another of my guesses there. In giving the Jews numerous opportunities to repent, Jesus mirrors the mercy shown by God The Father in the OT during the time of Jeremiah. The contrast between Divine and human mercy is stark; while Jesus offers repeated chances for repentances, Roman rulers would likely have greeted rebellion by having those people ever-so-slowly carved up, maybe for fish bait and you-know good old Roman 'fun'.

The Death of John the Baptist

Meanwhile, John the Baptist, who has been imprisoned for about a year by now, is executed. Like his cousin Jesus, John probably rejected the Pharisees' Tradition Laws as insincere, Matthew 3:7. John with his Divine intrinsic knowledge, was the last OT prophet and the first Christian casualty of war, Jesus was the second. John's death foreshadows the fate awaiting Jesus. Herodias, who had been publicly rebuked by John, likely felt vindicated by John's death. She uses her daughter to manipulate Herod, who is likely drunk at a party and by means of alluring dancing into promising the girl anything she wants. On her mother's instruction, the girl asks for the head of John The Baptist. Herod, although shocked and sobered by the request, had to comply to save face (Mark 6:22-28). Thus, Herod is burnt (exposed) as a melodramatic poseur and two-dimensional cad, presided over by pride and public opinion. John's death profoundly saddens Jesus and marks the beginning of His withdrawal from public life.

His Disciples Return from Their Mission

After spending a few weeks preaching repentance, the seventy-two Disciples return and are debriefed by Jesus. He suggests that He and the twelve go out to the desert for a rest. This will be the start of His gradual withdrawal from society. Jesus and the twelve re-board the fishing boat again and set sail. John notes in 6:4, “Now the Passover feast of the Jews was at hand,” This is the third Passover mentioned which tells us that there is one year left before His Crucifixion because we know that Jesus was crucified on the Passover of the fourth year. Thank Luke for the chronology and John for the tip.

The crowd sees them sailing off and so they peruse them on foot along the coast, meeting them when they make landfall. Moved by compassion, Jesus spends the day healing the sick and teaching them (Matthew 14:13-21). As evening approaches, His Disciples become concerned because of a lack of food in the remote area. They suggest sending the crowd away so they can buy food in local small villages, but Jesus instructs them to feed the crowd themselves. They check and find only five loaves of bread and two fish, likely salted fish as was the custom, not fresh. Jesus miraculously multiplies this small amount to feed about five thousand people, which meant men, so not counting the women and children. The actual number was likely closer to eight or ten thousand because of the way they counted people back then. They routinely did not count any women or children. That method of counting people is not my idea, it is just the way they counted people back in ancient male-dominated societies.

After everyone is fed, they collect twelve baskets of leftovers. Jesus then tells His Disciples to return to the boat and sail back across the lake. He already knows what He will do next to strengthen their faith, walk on the water later

that night. The crowd, amazed by the multiplication of the food, wants Jesus to become their king, likely thinking of Him as a “magic meal ticket.” If He can multiply food, maybe He can deliver them from Rome. This misunderstanding of the Messiah's mission—seeking liberation from Rome rather than redemption from sin—was universal among the Jews of Jesus' time. Seeing their misplaced priorities, Jesus dismisses the crowd and retreats up a mountain to pray. This underscores the importance of seeking solitude to connect with The Father, a lesson for all of us; make time for prayer no matter the circumstances.

Jesus Walks on Water

Later that night, His Disciples are back aboard their boat, battling rough seas, when suddenly they spot Jesus, walking towards them. He is walking on the water! Terrified, they think they are seeing a ghost. But Jesus calls out to them and says; “It is I, do not be afraid” (Matthew 14:25-27). Peter, filled with enthusiasm, asks to join Him, and Jesus invites him to “come”. Peter steps out of the boat and walks on the water towards Jesus, but as the waves rise, fear overtakes him, and he begins to sink. Crying out for help, Jesus reaches out, grabs Peter's hand, and lifts him back onto the surface of the water again. Together, they climb over the gunwale and back into the boat. Jesus gently rebukes Peter, “O you of little faith.”

This miraculous event undoubtedly strengthened the faith of His Disciples, at least for the remainder of the excursion. Jesus' message is clear: faith and trust in God are paramount. This lesson is as relevant today as it was then. Usually, when faced with any urgent challenge, we just react instinctively, forgetting to rely on faith in God. The physical world demands its own attention, often pulling us away from our spiritual focus. This is likely part of God's design, reminding us that faith requires conscious, ongoing effort. Unlike science, where replicable results are achieved through consistent scientific method, faith is more of an art—unique, personal, and, for beginners, unpredictable. It is comforting to know God forgives us when we ask. It is like being able to hit the Delete key when our faith comes up short. We get unlimited do-overs. Faith requires an active, deliberate relationship with God.

The Bread of Life Discourse

After this, Jesus continues His ministry, healing the sick by touch as He travels. The next significant event occurs in the synagogue in Capernaum, where Jesus delivers the Bread of Life discourse, recorded only in John's Gospel (John 6:25-69). Among the crowd are many who had been recently miraculously fed. Still eager to make Jesus their king, they approach Him again. Jesus confronts them, saying, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to Eternal Life, which The Son of Man will give you” (John 6:26-27). It is much easier to see from our historical point of view, but His words wear just too cryptic for them in the moment, and they continue to view Him as a potential provider of physical sustenance rather than spiritual salvation.

The crowd asks what they must do to be accepted by God, and Jesus replies, “Believe in the one He has sent down to you. I am the bread of life” (John 6:28-48). Again, this is still too cryptic for them and they really want Jesus to be about free food and earthly security. Jesus must knock down those notions once and for all. So, Jesus says that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood to have Eternal Life. The literal interpretation of His words shocks many, and they abandon their plans to coerce Him into political kingship. Even His Disciples are unsettled, prompting Jesus to clarify, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is nothing at all. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (John 6:63). Paraphrased; The spirit animates the flesh and the flesh is but a hollow vessel. Remember; every single thing He said is true. Jesus emphasizes that spiritual sustenance is what matters, not just relief from physical needs.

The Pharisees try to trip up Jesus with a Tradition Law

Next, some Pharisees criticize Jesus' Disciples for not washing their hands before eating, using this as an opportunity to challenge Him. This was previously mentioned showing how the Pharisees selectively enforce or ignore Mosaic Laws to maintain their power and income. Despite their confident façade the Pharisees are squirming a bit lately, because they are finding it increasingly difficult to relabel their lust for power, the Hobbesian nightmare which they are quickening, as beneficial to Israel and to remain below the threshold of public humiliation. The Pharisees want to ensure that they do not recede into political irrelevance which seems to be their understandable anxiety. They surely seem headed towards political irrelevance as far as these locals are concerned.

Here we can see that the Jewish Tradition Laws are the historical origin of contemporary nefarious statecraft. Prior to this, there was often intrigue in a king's court, but with the Tradition of the Elders, the state is officially sponsoring corruption and one cannot generate support for delusion indefinitely. Of course, the more time that the devil's greed has in which to establish a foothold, the more conspicuous are the perpetrators. Communism, "The Master Race" and Jim Crow confirmed that power-lust remains invalid and corrupt to this day. Many historical examples have pointed that out; when power is pursued for its own sake, corruption is inevitable. Merely the fallen nature of humanity, I assume.

The Canaanite Woman's Faith

Next Jesus travels Northward to the Canaanite towns of Tyre and Sidon, right next to each other, likely seeking to lay low and teach His Disciples far from the Pharisees. However, word of His presence quickly spreads, and a large crowd gathers. A woman, identified as a Syrian-Phoenician, referring to both her political background and her Roman hometown, approaches Jesus, begging Him to cast a demon out of her daughter. Jesus initially responds that His mission is to the lost sheep of Israel and that it is not meant to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs. But the woman persists, saying even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table. Impressed by her faith, Jesus tells her, "O woman, great is your faith!" and her daughter is healed (Matthew 15:22-28, Mark 7:24-30).

This encounter once again highlights His recurring theme of faith and trust in God, which is central to Jesus' ministry. Faith, along with repentance, is the key to aligning one's life with God's will. Again, repentance involves changing one's mind about sin and striving to live according to the Ten Commandments. It is often initially inconvenient, but as one's faith deepens, living in accordance with God's commandments becomes more natural and conformable.

The Feeding of the Four Thousand

Jesus and His Disciples re-board the boat and sail back to the region of Decapolis, avoiding Jewish territories and authority. This is the area where He had driven a legion of demons out of a man and into a large herd of pigs. His reputation seems to have preceded Him, and a large crowd quickly forms up. They bring Him a deaf man with a speech impediment to be healed. Jesus takes the man aside to heal him, and immediately the man can hear and speak clearly. Jesus tells him to keep quiet about it, but the man is so overwhelmed that he quickly blabs it publicly. Likely there are at least a thousand people there and this crowd is just going to get larger over the next few days. So, not surprisingly Jesus cannot get away from this kind of notoriety. Many more come to see Him with their sick and injured and He heals them all over the next three days. So much for a low profile. The word is out again although they are far enough away from Jerusalem so that no Jealous Pharisees show up to harass Him.

This crowd, now numbering about four thousand (not counting women and children, of course) have not eaten. Jesus, moved by compassion, decides to feed them. They have only a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish, again. Jesus blesses the food and performs the miracle of multiplying food for a second time, feeding everyone. Afterward, they collect seven baskets of leftovers, demonstrating Jesus' power to provide abundantly.

Next, they re-board their boat, shove off, and set sail this time back towards Dalmanutha or Magadan, which is on the west side, the Jewish side of the sea and about five miles south of Capernaum. This is back into dangerous Jewish territory again. It would be about seven or eight miles across where they are angling west-south-westerly. When you watch a boat heading out on this little sea, you can easily see about where they are going to make landfall. Then it is only about a ten or twelve-mile walk-around and you can meet them, or even beat them to the other side—depending upon the wind, of course. It is likely that this simple method is how the crowds kept estimating where they would land and kept meeting them.

When they make landfall this time, they are met by some Pharisees again seeking a sign from Heaven. Jesus has already given them many signs and they have claimed that He is possessed by the king of demons. So, it seems probable that they are just looking for yet another opportunity to publicly restate their demon possession scam rather than wanting a validating sign from Heaven. So, continuing to stay ahead of these insincere men, Jesus gives them a brief lecture about how they predict the weather by reading the signs, but do not seem to be able to see the

signs of the times, His signs. He repeats what he said a few days ago; “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; and there shall be no sign given unto it, but the sign of Jonah.” Matthew 16:4 That is the raising of the dead and soon He will perform the most spectacular public raising of the dead (Lazarus) that the Jews will ever see until the End Times; the Witnesses.

They re-board the boat, and Christianity's little Fleet Marine Force-of-one again launches out and sets sail into their destinies. They incline to Port this time, northward. Jesus warns them to beware of the “leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees,” a symbolic reference to the inappropriate intentions in Pharisee teachings. But His Disciples initially misunderstand the leaven comment and think He is talking about bread. But Jesus clarifies, warning them against the corrupting influence of the religious leaders' because teachings, like yeast, can spread and infect a large batch. Soon, the dangerous yeast of the Pharisees will incite some Jewish opposition against Him.

They make landfall on the northern coast and walk about three miles further north-inland to Bethsaida. They are back in Jewish territory here, if only briefly. Jesus performs a symbolic two-step healing, restoring sight to a blind man. After that, they hike another twenty miles further north to Caesarea Philippi, which provides them a large buffer-zone into Gentile territory. It seems to me that Jesus is still trying to avoid the immediate distractions of the Pharisees so He can teach His Disciples in peace. Caesarea Philippi is a site rich in Greco-Roman history, with a large cliff and a spring flowing out from under ground by its base. Jesus uses this cliff as a backdrop for a symbolic teaching. He asks His Disciples for a Sit Rep: “Who do people say The Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13) His Disciples relay that people recognize Jesus as supernatural but do not yet see Him as the Messiah. Then He asks, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter immediately responds, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16)

Jesus blesses Peter, saying that this revelation did not come from human understanding but from The Father in Heaven. He then says to Peter, “You are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” (Matthew 16:18) The “gates of Hades” is a Jewish expression of the day which refers to the domain of the dead, implying that death itself will not prevail against Jesus' church. This marks the beginning of the Christian Church, which defines the Church Age which we are all still living in today.

A contemporary debate arises here about Jesus' intent: Did Jesus mean He would build His church on Peter (which also means rock) or was He referring to the realization that Peter just expressed—that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God? The Greek words used in the original text (Petros for Peter and Petra for rock) support the interpretation that Jesus was referring to Peter's declaration of faith as the foundation of the church, rather than Peter himself. This interpretation differs from Catholic doctrine, which views Peter himself as the first Pope and the foundation of the church. Such matters are opinion and do not affect what Jesus said or meant, believe what you like. We will not be punished for taking our best guess with a pure heart regarding what does or does not seem clear to us. Another guess, of course.

Continuing His teaching, Jesus gives His Disciples the authority to bind and to loose—to forbid and permit—this is authority the Pharisees had inappropriately assumed they could take upon themselves. Also, there is no indication in scripture that such authority could be passed on to successors, contrary to the Catholic tradition of apostolic succession. The authority Jesus grants them is a direct and personal empowerment of His Disciples, with no provision for it to be passed on to others. Anyone may think that it was, but that is not in the Bible, so Catholics just need to have faith about that. If apostolic succession was granted, that is fine with me, but it is not in the Bible.

Jesus then begins to prepare His Disciples for what is to come. He tells them plainly that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things, die, and then be raised from the dead. This is the first time He says this to them, but He will refer to it two more times. His Disciples understand what He is saying and Peter has an emotional and impulsive reaction, saying, “Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!” (Matthew 16:22) Jesus rebukes him sharply, saying, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” (Matthew 16:23)

This exchange highlights a critical lesson: God is infinitely more concerned with spiritual matters than with worldly concerns, even those as serious as death. Jesus sees His own impending crucifixion and death as “merely a human concern,” even though that seems like a great big deal to me. But here Jesus is emphasizing that spiritual priorities far outweigh earthly ones. This consideration should guide our own prayers and desires. So, align your requests with God’s will as appropriately as you can possibly manage. Then we can approach Him with confidence, knowing that He hears us and will provide what we need, if perhaps not always that we want. (1 John 5:14-15).

Jesus then tells His Disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.” (Matthew 16:24-25) Here, He reinforces that, worldly matters, like death, are of little importance compared to the spiritual imperatives like following Him. He also hints at the coming Transfiguration, where some of them will see Him in glory before they die (Matthew 16:28).

In your relationship with God, prioritize seeking His will, wisdom, and strength over worldly concerns. When you do, you often find that God blesses you with more than you asked for—but by then, worldly things matter far less to you. The key is to live contentedly with what you have on earth, trusting God. If you have needs, just ask Him.

After six days, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a mountain, where He is transfigured before them. His appearance becomes dazzling white, glowing, even His garments shone. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared alongside Him, also in radiant glory. Here, Moses represented the law, Elijah the prophets, and Jesus is the fulfillment of both the Law and the prophetic promises. Interestingly, only Luke records that the three discuss Jesus’ impending death (Luke 9:30-31). Peter, is excited, again maybe thinking the Kingdom of God is arriving and he suggested he build three tabernacles, one for each of the Spiritual figures. However, spiritual beings had no need of anything physical, in this case small wood jewelry-type boxes. Then a cloud envelops them, and they hear the Father’s voice say, “This is my beloved Son; Hear ye Him” (Luke 9:35). This command emphasizes the shift in emphasis to listening to Jesus in the new age—the Church age, the age of Grace. This direct, powerful, and personal message from your Heavenly Father is authoritative: Time to listen to Jesus and it still is today, 2000 years later.

When they get back down the mountain, they reemerge into the familiar world, where the Pharisees, having traveled from Jerusalem (about 80 miles) are waiting for them. They are all 'locked and loaded' again, this time with a boy they brought with them who is possessed by a non-verbal demon. They have challenged Jesus’ Disciples to cast it out. His Disciples have failed, an attempt by the Pharisees to discredit Jesus. But now that Jesus is here, He takes over and saying; “O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you?” (Mark 9:19). As the boy is brought to Him, the demon spots Jesus and recognizing Him, throws the boy into what looks like an epileptic seizure. Before a crowd can gather at this disturbance, Jesus quickly cast out the demon. Later, His Disciples ask why they had failed. Jesus two things, first their lack of faith was a problem. If His Disciples, after all they have witnessed, are still struggling to have enough faith, is it surprising that we all face the same challenge? Faith is a lifelong issue, requiring us to look to Christ rather than our overwhelming earthly problem. Second Jesus said that this type of demon, that is specifically a non-verbal one, require prayer to be cast out, not the usual technique which is a verbal command. So, Jesus publicly foils the Pharisees again by performing another huge 'Messianic miracle' and to which the Pharisees just skip over it and slink away. Do you think they would have made a big deal out of it if He had tried and failed?

Returning to Galilee, Jesus again tells His Disciples about His upcoming death and resurrection. They do not understand and are too frightened to ask for clarification (Matthew 17:22-23, Mark 9:31-32, Luke 9:44-45). Their confusion stems from the universal Jewish belief that the Messiah will overthrow Rome and liberate Israel. They still have no idea that Jesus' mission is about the forgiveness of sins and Eternal Life for all people. Repeating, only Jesus himself and John the Baptist intrinsically understand this. Jesus will not reveal His actual mission until after His Resurrection (Ephesians 3:4-6). By now, His Disciples are emotionally spent and confused, still clinging to their assumption that the Messiah’s mission is to liberate Israel from Rome. The chances of that happening seem vanishingly small and the Pharisees are becoming bolder and more confident that they will get Jesus executed. The reason that Jesus allows his Disciples to hold onto the misconception until after His death can only be seen as a

profound test of faith before His resurrection, and the unimaginable joyful surprise after His Resurrection. Why He handles it that way is His own business, but I am plenty grateful for the results.

Next His Disciples debate who among them will be the greatest in the Kingdom of God, a discussion that disappoints Jesus. He advises them to be more childlike. He emphasizes the importance of forgiveness, saying that if we expect God to forgive us our sins, we must forgive those who wrong us. Jesus exemplifies this by forgiving those who will crucify Him. This is not a condition for salvation but an instruction for living. Forgiving those who have wronged us no matter how unjustly is a difficult lesson of Christianity. Jesus demonstrated superior moral character by forgiving all the sin of the world with His death.

Next, they return to Jerusalem, likely for the Feast of Tabernacles—mid-October. Jesus teaches in the temple, and the Pharisees attempt to have Him arrested, but the guards, likely Divinely, cannot bring themselves to do it—another unacknowledged miracle that fuels the Pharisees' frustration (John 7:30-47). At this point in The Gospels, most scholars think that it is both the Pharisees and Sadducees collaborating, setting aside their political differences in conspiracy against Jesus. This unholy alliance will lead to the crucifixion of the Messiah and to Israel's destruction by Rome forty years ahead in 70 AD.

Still in Jerusalem for now, the Pharisees continue to try and trick Jesus. They present Him with a woman caught in the act of adultery, asking if she should be stoned. They already have stones in hand, eager for blood. If Jesus says 'stone her' He would be in conflict with Roman law, which reserves the death penalty for Roman authority. If He says not to stone her, He would be contradicting Moses' Law. They think He is on the horns of a dilemma, but Jesus, ever the master of all, including asymmetric warfare turned the situation on its head. He first delays, squatting down and writing something in the dirt with His finger—something that, unfortunately has never been revealed. Then, He stood and said, "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone" (John 8:7). This put the accusers in a bind, because Mosaic Law required the first stone to be thrown must to be thrown by the accuser, but only if he has not committed the same sin, in this case, specifically adultery. A moment later, one by one and starting with the older men, they drop their stones on the ground; plop, plop, plop, and skulk away. Interestingly, the man who was also involved in this adultery seems nowhere to be seen, at least he is not mentioned. Perhaps he is slinking away with the rest of the male dominated society? This exposes hypocrisy in those ancient male-dominated societies.

Later, in the temple, Jesus has another encounter with the Pharisees, who are trying to invalidate the messenger because they do not like His message. In response, they attempt to stone Him, but He simply walks through the crowd and slips away—again. He will not allow them to stone Him because He is planning His death for the Passover, six months ahead and for the forgiveness of sins. This subtle miracle where He likely blinds their eyes and minds to Him, allows Him to just walk away unnoticed. Jesus' low-profile miracles are deliberate to sidestep displays of force and encourage faith in God rather than the universal human assumption that hard power is king. It is not, God is.

Despite the danger to His life, Jesus remains in Jerusalem and restores the sight of a man born blind, using saliva—a substance considered unclean. This miracle enrages the Pharisees and Sadducees, who desperately try to discredit it. They interrogate the man who was born blind, twice and even question his parents. They find no deception. Unable to explain away the miracle or to arrest Jesus, they resort to their lame claim, saying that Jesus is demon-possessed. They have repeated this so often by now that a few of the Jews were wondering if there is any truth to it. The Pharisees and Sadducees, in their desperation, are leading the nation of Israel to reject Jesus as the Messiah. Yet, despite the Pharisees scam, most of the Jews do see through the scheme. So, Jesus eludes them once again here and slips away, but six months ahead, He will return to Jerusalem for His final Passover, where His mission will reach its culmination.

After this latest failed attempt to discredit Him fails, Jesus leaves the city but likely remains in Judea for a while. During this period, He answers His Disciples' question about prayer, sharing a parable that contemporary Christians find both comforting and insightful. This story, found in Luke 11:5-13, is a classic example of Luke's portrayal of Jesus' humanity. The parable describes a man who, faced with unexpected guests late at night, finds himself without bread to offer them. Desperate, he knocks on his neighbor's door, asking to borrow some. The neighbor is unwilling

to get up so late into the night for this trivial request, but the breadless man is persistent and eventually his knocking wears the neighbor down. He does receive the bread he needs.

Jesus uses this story to illustrate the nature of prayer, encouraging His followers to be persistent when asking their heavenly Father for what they need. He emphasizes that if earthly fathers, despite their flaws, know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask. This teaching reassures believers that God is not only willing but eager to provide, although they must seek Him with a trusting heart. Jesus' message is clear: in prayer, seek God's wisdom and His will, and all else will follow. Also note; earthly gifts are merely physical but spiritual gifts, empowered by the Holy Spirit, have eternal value.

A noteworthy point is that we may sometimes ask for things that are not truly beneficial, much like a child asking for something that they do not understand the dangers of. God, in His wisdom, may withhold what we ask for but will always provide something better suited to our needs if we trust Him. As Jesus said, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7). The key is to align our requests with God's will, trusting that He knows what is best. The Psalms remind us to stay close to God, and when we ask, we must believe that He will provide, in His time and in His way. So, again, just trust Him.

As Jesus continues His ministry in Judea, He casts out another demon, Luke 11:14-15. "And He was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the man spoke and the multitudes marveled." This is another "Messianic miracle" but this time, a more noticeable division emerges within the crowd. Some begin to question whether Jesus is in league with demons, casting doubt on His divinity. Despite these challenges, Jesus remains steadfast, teaching repentance and providing healings, including the remarkable healing of a woman, crippled for eighteen years which He performs in the Synagogue and on the sabbath, likely to challenge Pharisee law. The Pharisees, increasingly threatened by Jesus' attempt to seize Him, but He effortlessly eludes them again, I bet by confusing those trying to seize Him; it seems that they simply, momentarily forget what they were doing, effective, elusive, soft power. This repeated subtle miracle of Jesus walking away from men determined to harm him is right under the noses of the Pharisees and showcases Jesus' quiet yet potent authority.

As tension rises, Jesus decides to leave the region, heading toward the Jordan River, near where John the Baptist had ministered. He continues to teach there before moving on to Perea, further from the center of Judean power. Even as He travels, the Pharisees persist in their efforts to discredit Him. Jesus is teachings in parables which resonate deeply with the Jewish people, but the religious leaders remain intransigent, refusing to understand.

Next word comes that one of His followers is sick unto death. John in 11:1-44. The stricken man is named Lazarus and his sister's message asks Jesus to come and heal him. But Lazarus dies about the same time that Jesus gets the message, which of course Jesus would have known. Still, Jesus intentionally delays going for two more days. Then they walk to the town, Bethany, right next to Jerusalem, which takes another two days. So, by the time Jesus arrives, Lazarus has intentionally been dead for four days and this is specifically because being dead for even three days makes a resurrection impossible in Jewish theology of the day and He is making sure that the Pharisee get His point, the sign of Jonah. Resurrection is not possible on or after the third day in Jewish theology, except by God Himself and Jesus stalls around long enough to arrive on the fourth day which everyone knows is too late. It seems to me that this was an; 'in your face Pharisees' type of action by Jesus.

This Bethany crowd will become His last group of highly vocal enthusiasts who will accompany Him into Jerusalem in a few weeks for His last Passover, despite the Pharisee's making many public threats against anyone supporting Him. Jesus would likely be the most high-profile guest to have ever visited Bethany. In a small Jewish town like that, it would be well known to all that Lazarus and his sisters were friends of Jesus. So, when the sister sends for the famous Jesus to come and cure her sick brother you must know that everyone in that little Jewish town would have known all about it. But Lazarus dies almost immediately, which is four days before Jesus gets there. Now what? The gathering of friends and well-wishers waiting for Jesus would have kept growing as word of His impending arrival spreads. Jesus did not spend much time in Judea so the crowd was anxious to see Him and they would be in a tense expectant anticipation. They do not know what Jesus will do when He arrives but they surely intend to have eyes on

Him for that. So, the raising of Lazarus was a Jewish world-altering Messianic event. No one had ever even heard of such a thing. To the Jews, this is absolutely mind-blowing and positive public proof of Jesus' Messiahship.

Jesus arrives, on the fourth post mortem day. Lazarus' sister demonstrates that she does have the required faith in God so Jesus raises Lazarus up from the dead and He makes it look easy. There are likely two to three thousand people there by now and they exploded in a frenzy of Messianic excitement. Lazarus has been dead for four days! So, Jesus could only be God, The Messiah! When the religious authorities hear about the four-day post mortem resurrection, they are hugely distressed. This is the precise sign of Jonah He had promised and also, it is glaringly contrary to the Sadducee doctrine which denies any resurrection of the dead. This is the most stupendous Messianic miracle He has performed thus far. This boggles the Pharisee's and Sadducees' minds and certainly blows their demon possession scam as far as this crowd is concerned. The Pharisees and Sadducees are absolutely flabbergasted, Jesus must be The Messiah! Instead of admitting they were wrong, they will fall back on and redouble down on their lame claim of demon-possession, but they do not even dare to 'proclaim' it. In the current public mood, the Pharisees are being seen as the impostors by this Bethany crowd. Next Jesus and company likely go to Ephraim for a week or two to rest and prepare for the coming Passover ordeal.

So, they start out from Ephraim and head back towards Jerusalem for His last Passover. On the way, He performs the most gigantic Messianic miracle He will ever perform. This time He cures ten lepers in one act. These guys call out to Him from a 'leper-safe' distance asking for mercy and he tells them to go show themselves to the priests for authentication of the miracle. But they are not cured. There has been no miracle yet. Still, they turn around and head back towards the priests. This is where they demonstrate faith that they will be healed based on Jesus' say-so, which seems a sure thing to me by now. Nine of them were Jews and one was a Samaritan. Luke 17:11-19 It takes these guys a few hours or maybe half a day to realize they were cured, their skin lesions gone. When they do realize it, only one of them comes back and thanks Jesus, who notes that ten were cleansed, and the only one who comes back to thank Him is the foreigner (Samaritan). It is not known why none of the Jews thought to come back to thank Him, but you have to think that they were plenty thankful in their prayers ever afterward.

An often-overlooked aspect of Jesus's healing of the ten lepers reveals a deeper significance through its connection to Jewish law. When Jesus instructed the healed Lepers to show themselves to the priests, this initiated an extensive series of purification rituals prescribed in Leviticus 14:10-32. These ceremonies were required for each person cleansed of leprosy. It is a long, intricate, and time-consuming process, typically lasting eight to ten days or longer for each victim who has been cured.

The required rituals involved multiple offerings presented in a specific sequence: a trespass offering with a log of oil (approximately half a liter), a sin offering, a burnt offering, and a grain offering. Just the blood ritual alone within the trespass offering was remarkably complex, involving detailed procedures that the priests had to follow meticulously.

This miracle of the cleansing of 10 Lepers, recorded in Luke 17:11-19, occurred when He was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. While we know Jesus was well-versed in Jewish law and would have understood the extensive ceremonial requirements that His healing would have initiated, the Gospel accounts do not indicate whether the timing was intentional to make a long-lasting point to the Pharisees. Scholars have suggested that healing ten lepers so late in what He had to have known were the final few days of His earthly life, that would have created a lasting impression on the religious authorities. The required purification rituals would have continued well after the crucifixion. However, the biblical text does not explicitly address Jesus's motivations as to the timing of this miracle. So that part is just some biblical scholars' guess. I see their guess as reasonable and likely. Believe what you like.

The raising of Lazarus a few weeks ago, ignited a fervent certainty of Messiahship among the working-class Jews, especially in the Bethany area and these people become some of Jesus' most passionate followers in the last few days of His earthly life. The raising of Lazarus sets the stage for Jesus' final grand entry into Jerusalem accompanied by a throng of boisterous supporters, most of them from Bethany, and Bethphage, the town right next door, many of whom had witnessed Lazarus' resurrection. The Pharisees and Sadducees are alarmed by what seems like a runaway-type of event. They will intensify their plot to kill Jesus, but to no avail. As Jesus approaches Jerusalem for

His last Passover, He will gather popular momentum picking up Lazarus and his two sisters plus many of their friends and neighbors. Jesus continues on and the Pharisees and Sadducees are looking ridiculous by now.

The public enthusiasm of the Bethany crowd, fueled by the recent resurrection of Lazarus, spills over into Jerusalem, creating a huge wave of common support that the religious authorities struggle against but cannot contain or suppress. Despite their best efforts, the Pharisees cannot diminish the growing belief that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. As Jesus heads toward His final confrontation in Jerusalem, the tension between Him and the religious leaders will reach a boiling point, setting the stage for the culmination of His earthly ministry.

The next morning is the day of His triumphant entrance into Jerusalem. Jesus starts out the day by sending some of His Disciples a little way ahead to Bethphage. He instructs them to bring Him a donkey's colt that they will find tied to a tree there. If any locals ask why they are untying the colt, Jesus tells them to respond, "The Lord has need of it" (Matthew 21:1-3). Likely recognizing His Disciples, the people of Bethphage must have realized the colt was for Jesus—the Messiah, who has just performed the miraculous four-day post mortem resurrection of Lazarus. This realization would spark major excitement and a quickly gathering crowd, drawing more attention as His Disciples lead the colt away. Such excitement would have spread rapidly, with people running ahead, shouting, "Jesus is here!" Those who had been privately believing in Jesus are now drawn in and join the exuberant crowd. This troop from Bethphage soon joins forces with a crowd from Bethany only about a half mile ahead as they walk on. This explains the boisterous throng that seem to materialize seemingly spontaneously as Jesus approaches and then enters Jerusalem.

Coming from the direction of Bethphage, Jesus would most likely enter Jerusalem through The Golden Gate. According to Jewish theology, this is the gate through which the Messiah will enter Jerusalem in the end times—a subtle but powerful foreshadowing. As He rode into the city on the donkey's colt, He fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, the women would let out a celebratory ululation, while the men laid down their outer garments and palm branches ahead of Him for Him to pass over. Palm branches, were a symbol of Israel's independence, a real hot topic to the Jews, who were keenly anticipating their deliverance. The men shouted, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord," a traditional Jewish greeting for the Messiah, signaling their acceptance of Him as such. The Boisterous procession would have caused quite a stir in normally sedate Jerusalem. The common Jews and the religious leaders knew that any public disturbance would reliably attract unwelcome Roman attention (Luke 19:40).

However, the Romans strangely, perhaps Divinely, do not notice this particular commotion. The Jews, for their part, believe that the Messiah is finally here and that the Kingdom of God is about to be established now, freeing the Jews from Roman oppression and all earthly conditions (Luke 19:39-40). But, to their disappointment, Jesus will be crucified just a few days on, fulfilling God's plan to extend salvation to the Gentiles. We Gentiles, are the "pearl of great price" for which Jesus gave everything, allowing us to receive forgiveness of sins and Eternal Life in God's Kingdom simply for the asking. How wonderful is that? Of course, His crucifixion also paves the way for Israel's salvation during the Tribulation—as hinted at in the Parable of the Hidden Treasure. This is His purpose and His earthly mission: to save all people, both Jews and Gentiles.

While we can sympathize with the Jewish crowd's coming disappointment, we should also be deeply grateful that God's plan unfolded as it did. After His death on the cross, Jesus' resurrection will usher in the new condition of Grace on earth, offering forgiveness of sins and Eternal Life with God to all who accept Jesus. This is a magnificent and wonderfully generous Divine gift, especially if you are one of the many who have not lived a perfectly holy life so far. Grace is Jesus' gift, not a reward, for everyone. No one can take it away from anyone ever. Jesus' death and resurrection grants every single person on earth in the Church Age (Age of Grace) the right to forgiveness of sins and Eternal Life with God simply for the asking. How cool is that amazing Grace, especially in your particular case?

Meanwhile, the Pharisees, of course, hear this raucous disturbance of Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem in real-time, even though the Romans puzzlingly do not, and they decide that Lazarus must also die (John 12:10-11). That guy should not have come back from the dead to help Jesus steal our people. We will fix him. That may not have been their exact reasoning, but they are certainly behaving with such crudeness. Jesus heads straight to the

Great Temple, where the heart of the problem lies; institutional grifting infecting the worship of God, much the same as in false religions today. He performs His second cleansing of the temple, driving out the swindling animal sellers and money changers of the Sadducees (Mark 11:15-18). Then He teaches in the temple. The electrified crowd continues to grow becoming so wildly enthusiastic so that the Sadducees and Pharisees are unable to have Him seized publicly. They know that they, too, could be stoned by an angry mob if they push too far. So, the upheaval causes them to back off and lie low for a few days, but they do continue to plot Jesus' murder.

The Pharisees are masters of manipulation, much like today's partisan hacks. Even though almost everyone knew they were political charlatans, they still managed to get away with plenty of lies and hypocrisy. My grandfather used to say, "Stand up against political horse-feathers." He was referring to politics and the Wall street crash of '29 and he used a more colorful metaphor, but the point remains valid.

So, Jesus is untouchable as He makes a huge splash coming to Jerusalem, performing increasingly momentous Messianic miracles. After His ecstatic grand entrance comes His second cleansing of the temple—a move outrageously popular with the locals who have been being swindled by the Sadducees for very many generations, literally hundreds of years. Jesus will soon withdraw quietly. His death on the Passover will occur without a public disturbance. The Jews will all be at home celebrating The Passover, unaware that He has been crucified until the next day, too late to intervene. The religious leaders will think they got away with it, especially because of Judas' unexpectedly help, which advances their timeline by a day (Matthew 26:3-5). But I think that the timing was actually Jesus' intercession to keep His death quiet and to avoid a grand public resurrection which would reduce the amount of faith required to believe in Him.

Faith in Jesus requires a leap of faith both then and now. The leaders of Israel could not make that leap of faith and thus they rejected Him as The Messiah. The penalty upon that generation of Israel was severe, and I think it will be just as severe for those among us today who refuse the grace of God. Judgment is a dreaded subject to people who prefer not to think about the responsibility that comes with rejecting Jesus. However, this responsibility is now a personal sword of Damocles for anyone who knows better and remains an unbeliever. Yet, for those of us who do accept Jesus, we get to cash-in on the many wonderful promises of God. You will really like that part; See a listing at the end of this text.

Jesus has just entered Jerusalem triumphantly and still has a few days left to Him. He continues to teach in the temple, and since the Pharisees cannot publicly seize Him, they try to trick Him with their usual techniques, again, but they fail, again. Finally, Jesus openly rebukes them in Matthew 23:1-36, condemning their hypocritical and burdensome tradition laws and pronouncing seven woes, which are miseries upon them. He again refers to "this generation," which is the temporal coordinate defining the Jewish nation who are now under judgment.

Last Hours

The Disciples prepare for His final Passover meal, known to Christians as the Last Supper. Judas has already made the Faustian bargain to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Perhaps Judas was hoping to force Jesus to publicly reveal His Divine power, or maybe he was disillusioned when he realized that Jesus' kingdom was spiritual, not physical. While we can only speculate as to his motives, what we do know is that Judas committed the betrayal. It was Judas who selected the strike-point for the ambush as the Garden of Gethsemane, after the Passover meal. There, Jesus is arrested by a large hostile mob acting on the authority of the High Priest and the Sanhedrin. It seems they are determined to ensure that Jesus will not escape them this time. Yet, from the very start, Jesus demonstrates that He is in control. He boldly steps forward and asks the mob, "Who are you looking for?" They respond, "Jesus of Nazareth," to which He clearly responds; "I am he." At that moment, the crowd looking for Him were all knocked down to the ground and likely momentarily disoriented (John 18:4-6). It must have been an awkward, silent moment as they realized none of the Disciples were knocked down. Still, no one is injured and so they just pick themselves up and dust themselves off. That would be about a hundred people who were just knocked down by His words. Surprisingly they dismiss the bizarre 'coincident' and resumed their grim task. I am unsure how they could have missed the Divine hint, writ large and right in their face—one that would have surely sent me running for home. Anyway, Judas steps forward and gives Jesus the kiss on the cheek, signaling that He is the one to

arrest, although this signal is unnecessary as Jesus had just publicly identified Himself. It seems to me that Jesus is giving Judas a last chance to repent, but he does not take the hint. So, Jesus is arrested and taken to a little sham trial, first before Annas, the Roman deposed High Priest, and then He is bound and sent to Caiaphas, the Roman-appointed High Priest, for the prearranged pronouncement of the death sentence (John 18:24).

As it turns out, Caiaphas and associates were 'locked and loaded' with an impromptu kangaroo court to condemn Jesus to death. In doing so, they violate more than a dozen of their own Tradition Laws—the very laws they are accusing Jesus of breaking—but they do not care. They have finally captured the elusive Messiah and are in an absolute frenzy to see Him executed so they abandon even the pretense of propriety. Their next step is to bring Jesus before the local king, Pilate, for an official Roman tribunal to secure the death sentence they crave. They were planning to use Judas as a witness against Him, but Judas has slipped away and inconveniently committed suicide, leaving them at a loss. It seems "The best-laid schemes of mice and men often go awry" John Steinbeck. With their plot unraveling they look like a Keystone Cops-esque bumbling mob of blood-thirsty amateurs. But they are too frantic to care; they must act tonight, as all the Jews are at home preparing to celebrate the Passover and thus unavailable to publicly intervene on Jesus' behalf—a real and dangerous possibility for them. So, devoid of any feasibility assessment or plan, they just hustle Jesus off to see Pilate. They will simply wing it, armed only with their urgency, and that is exactly what they do, dooming the Jewish nation.

Pilate, as it turns out, is not eager to appease a Jewish mob's overly obvious blood lust. Pilate likely would not appreciate a little Jewish mob trying to push him into doing anything, in this case condemning someone seemingly without proof. Pilate sees that the mob is upset about something having to do with Jewish matters, not Roman. To Pilate, who belonged to the Roman Equestrian order—a lower birth rank of nobility—this Jewish mob must have seemed ridiculous and unsophisticated. Pilate hails from central Italy and is likely educated in the grand, polished stone institutions of the empire's home base. He probably views Judea as a Jewish backwater. With the arrogance typical of imperial hubris of the time, Pilate likely considers these emotional, mud-hut-dwelling Jews inherently inferior to Romans, and he seems in no hurry to grant them an easy victory. So, the Pharisee sponsored tribunal quickly hits a renaissances snag (John 18:28-38). Pilate recognizes that the charge of sedition against Rome is trumped up, and he seems unwilling to be so easily manipulated. Amid the mob's ranting, Pilate must have received a lucky piece of information: someone likely mentioned that Jesus was "of Galilee." Wait a moment, that is not Pilate's jurisdiction but under Herod Antipas—the same Herod who had John the Baptist executed about a year earlier, and whose father, Herod the Great, had tried to kill Jesus when He was an infant. Although they likely did not know that Jesus as an infant had escaped Herod's purge. They do know that Herod's authority is higher than Pilate's in matters affecting the Roman province of Judea. Conveniently for Pilate, Herod is right there in Jerusalem, visiting. So, Pilate, probably cheerfully, transfers what he likely sees as an early morning Jewish inconvenience off to see Herod. Given Pilate's well-documented arrogance, it is likely that he viewed The Son of God as nothing more than an early morning Jewish nuisance—an attitude that reveals the depth of depravity in this situation. My guess on Herod's attitude, of course.

Herod and Pilate

So, Jesus is sent to see Herod who has heard much about Jesus over the last two years and is happy to finally meet Him. Luke 23:8 Herod questions Jesus at length and Jesus responds only with; "My Kingdom is not of this world." John 18:36 In this moment, Jesus appears nearly fey—a term from the Old English; *fæge*, meaning someone visibly fated to die soon. Much like someone in the final stages of a fatal illness often acceptances death. Jesus' demeanor here is one of anticipating and accepting His approaching death. It seems that with Jesus' quiet acceptance of what is to come, He is making a strategic en passant move in a Divine chess game, one in which the Father will soon reclaim the gambit pawn. Herod, likely expected a more spirited exchange and it seems he was disappointed by Jesus' calm and reserved demeanor. Declaring Jesus innocent, Herod bounces Him back to Pilate, leaving Pilate to deal with what is becoming a more troublesome situation. (Luke 23:8) The little Pharisee Mob is still in his courtyard demanding Jesus' blood.

Pilate, again faced with Jesus, must have felt frustration. While he is sitting in the judgment seat, his wife sends him, (a note) warning him, "Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream

because of Him” (Matthew 27:19). The salient feature here is that both Pilate and his wife seem to have the same premonition; a sense that this situation will not end well, although they were likely thinking more about lunch, not the destruction of their little Jewish kingdom thirty some years ahead. Aware that the chief priests had handed Jesus over out of envy, Pilate, does not want to be seen as easily manipulated. So, he tries various tactics to avoid sentencing Jesus to death (Mark 15:10; Matthew 27:18) However, tactical agility never informs strategic insight and Pilate merely offers to release one of two criminals, Barabbas, guilty of sedition against Rome or Jesus, charged with but not guilty of sedition against Rome. I bet he was surprised that the mob chooses Barabbas to be free and Jesus to die. In doing so they manage to shout Pilate down, high-risk behavior for the mob as Pilate is well-known to be mercurial and has the authority to have them all slaughtered at his whim. So, here we see the amount of energy behind ramming through Jesus' death sentence was recklessly high for the Pharisees and little Jewish mob. Finally, Pilate has had enough of this Jewish disturbance to his day, so he publicly washes his hands, a symbol of not being responsible in the matter and this is where he says his famous line; “I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man, it is your responsibility.” Matthew 27:24-25 The little mob shouts back; “His blood be upon us and our children.” That part about their children was likely momentary hyperbole and I repeat; *it is never a good idea to challenge God*. Full Stop.

Thus, the fate of Israel with its drunkenly staggering, greedy and corrupt religious leadership was sealed. Jesus had called the Pharisees “Children of Hell” Matthew 23:15 because they had; “taken away the key of knowledge” Luke 11:52. Judgment upon Israel is coming in AD70 but the Pharisees never see that coming. They are focusing on getting Jesus executed and they see Pilate acquiescing to their demands for Jesus' blood. The Pharisees are likely thinking their goal is within sight. But they *never see the judgment coming*. Like Ulysses, they will be blown unimaginably far off course—in AD70 with the destruction of Israel.

Remarkably, the little mob manages to overpower Pilate's authority through sheer force of enthusiasm, and perhaps with a bit of unseen Divine assistance when someone comments; “You are not Ceaser's friend if you free this man.” John 19:12 Even the remotest possibility of something that serious getting back to Ceaser's ear is risky extortion for the little Pharisees mob. That would surely penetrate Pilate's consciousness and provide him with a jarring bit of pause. Up to this point, Pilate has been uncharacteristically reluctant to sentence what he likely realizes is this innocent man to death. The ‘Ceaser's friend’ comment likely pushes him over that line. This seals the fate of Israel and this time it is the rank-and-file Jews who *never see the judgment coming*, a moment ago it was the Pharisees. So, Israel is both complicate and oblivious to the impending judgment. I bet the Pharisees mistook Pilate's acquiescence as a victory for mob enthusiasm.

Crucifixion and Death

Next Jesus is whipped, routine prior to Crucifixion, even though Pilate thought Him innocent. John 18:10-12 This kind of whipping is called ‘scourging’ and it is a particularly vicious Roman procedure. A lot of skin and muscle tissue is lashed off the back in this procedure. The purpose is not to kill the victim but to make them suffer as much as possible. “Man is the cruelest animal.” Nietzsche. The Romans delighted in all such brutalities and they have huge experience at this. Next, Jesus is forced to carry the cross beam that would become His Crucifixion beam through the streets and up a hill to the place of crucifixion. Likely the uprights for the crosses were mounted semi-permanently in the ground and new victims get their own cross-member. The nails would likely be driven in through the backs of the hands or maybe the wrists and perhaps the cross members are retrieved and recycled for use on other condemned men. If not, in a few months there would be a lot of discarded cross members piling up at the site. A historical guess there, because Jerusalem is a Jewish city so any used cross members would be ‘unclean’ to the Jews and they would not scavenge such wood. But we just do not know for sure, there are only scant references for these technical crucifixion points in the historical literature. I assume everyone writing at that historical time knew well what a common crucifixion looked like, even if some of the details have been lost today.

However, Jesus' personal ordeal is well documented in The Gospels. He is nailed to the cross beam and put up on the upright. Likely His feet were nailed to the upright. An ironic sign is placed above Him; INRI, a Latin abbreviation for “King of the Jews” written *currente calamo*, it is supposedly a mocking accusation but ironically, He was and is King of all. There are two criminals under Roman law also being crucified with Jesus. The Romans crucified a lot of

Jews during their occupation of Israel and I bet they never considered the mechanism of second or third-order kinetics linked to their punitive governing techniques—like the rapid dissemination of Christianity across the Roman empire, bolstered by Luke's chronicling of his and Paul's missionary journeys. One of the two criminals asks Jesus to remember him when He comes into His Kingdom, demonstrating faith in God. Jesus says to him; “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:43 So, this man is granted Eternal Life with God in Heaven at the very end of his earthly life because he had faith or trust in God. Faith in the physical world is force-fed to us constantly. The physical world will kick you in your face routinely if you let your guard down. Faith in God is far rarer and more precious. We must work at that with great dedication. We drift back to faith in the physical world without realizing it, on autopilot. We must forcibly drag ourselves back to faith or trust in God, often kicking and screaming over the objections of our 'rational' self. This is according to the plan of God which must be sufficient reason because truly I do not know why He created us to be so preoccupied in this extremely distracting physical world, I only know that he did.

Death and Resurrection

Jesus dies on the cross in about six hours. There are accompanying dramatic signs, including an earthquake documented as far away as Nicaea—670 miles from Jerusalem. His body is placed in a donated tomb, and Jewish leaders convince Pilate to post guards to prevent His followers from stealing the body and claiming He had risen. On the third day, Jesus is resurrected which is witnessed by only a few, as God intended. Had there been thousands of witnesses, the leap of faith required to believe would be smaller. Faith in god is, I assume, a constant in space-time ($\lambda c d m$) requiring the same amount of faith to believe in Him then, now, or in the future. Again, a favorite guess.

At first, even His Disciples do not believe in the Resurrection. Despite all they have seen and heard from Him, they are too overwhelmed by grief and confusion to remember what Jesus had told them. Their experience, no doubt, caused them to expect Him to be dead, not resurrected, even though He had foretold His death and resurrection. When some of the women first discovered the empty tomb and shared the news, His Disciples were slow to accept it. This reflects the societal view that women are not considered to be credible witnesses. Yet, His Disciples eventually see Jesus and believed. During the forty days between His Resurrection and Ascension, Jesus appears to them eleven times, spending time with them, eating with them, and giving them the Great Commission to preach the Word of God to all the world. Finally, He is extracted (His ascension) to Heaven, completing His earthly mission.

Conclusion

I have condensed and trimmed this story as much as I possibly can and there is very much more to explore in The Gospels and the New Testament. This is not the end of Jesus' story on earth, but just the beginning and His Divine mission continues.

Key Lessons; Understanding Urgency

The Gospels and the New Testament offer critical insights that highlight the urgency of the message for today, especially in the context of End Time events that can unfold stunningly quickly even within our lifetimes.

The Pharisees' Three Critical Errors

The Pharisees made three huge blunders that have long-lasting consequences for the Nation of Israel. I consider them the three “arrogant blunders,” but you may certainly create another term that resonates better with you.

The First Arrogant Blunder: The Tradition of the Elders. The Pharisees concocted and introduced the oral Tradition of the Elders laws without any scriptural backing. It was supposedly intended to prevent another captivity of Israel, as the seventy years spent under the Babylonians which was prophesied in Jeremiah 25:9-12. However, this tradition quickly become a tool for Pharisee empowerment and self-enrichment. By establishing these laws in secret, they ensured that only they could interpret and enforce them, creating a system that exclusively favored themselves while overwhelmingly burdening the common people with many thousands of new laws. This manipulation was obvious, and many Jews saw through it to the underlying hypocrisy. The Pharisees even fabricated a yarn claiming these laws were of Divine origin, but that was hundreds of years after the fact. That claim was met with nearly universal disbelief and resentment. Their actions were not in line with Divine prophecy, as only true prophets can

speak for God. The Tradition of the Elders became a symbol of corruption and self-aggrandizement, not righteousness, as Jesus pointed out during His Sermon on The Mount.

The Second Arrogant Blunder: The Messianic Miracles. The Pharisees established the concept of Messianic miracles, declaring that only the Messiah can perform certain difficult miracles. This was a baseless claim, designed to grant them Scriptural authority without Scriptural backing. Jesus was the only person to perform these miracles, although one was also performed by Elijah. So, again, the Messianic miracles are not rooted in Divine scripture and it was just another falsehood perpetuated by the Pharisees to maintain earthly power and income. In the End Times, false prophets may perform similar miracles, but believers should not be deceived by such displays. The idea that these miracles were exclusive to the Messiah is just another Pharisaic blunder, their second of three such arrogant blunders, which are really self-serving deceptions.

The Third Arrogant Blunder: The Rejection Jesus as the Messiah. The most egregious error of the Pharisees is their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. Specifically, it is their method of rejecting Him by accusing Him of being in league with the Devil, Beelzebub. Repeating, this is the unpardonable sin. No repentance is possible for this. This is the most serious of the three blunders that were all driven by their short-sighted desire to maintain political power and income. They led the entire Jewish nation to reject Jesus, despite a huge amount of evidence that He was the promised Messiah. Their rejection leads the Nation of Israel to destruction which lasts for nearly two millennia—AD 70 to 1948. The legacy of Pharisaic Judaism was posturing with self-serving “blunders”—scams really, which have enduring consequences, including the still ongoing spiritual blindness of most of the Jews to the truth of Jesus Christ as The Messiah. The approaching Tribulation will be a time of great consequence for the Jews, but, restating this, believers in Christ will not experience the Tribulation as we will all be Raptured before that unfolds.

The Assurance of Rapture and the Millennial Kingdom; Believers in Jesus Christ may rest assured that they will not experience the Tribulation or the Second Coming as earth-bound creatures. The Rapture will occur before these events, and those of us who are Raptured will receive glorified bodies in the Millennial Kingdom. This includes all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, who have accepted Jesus throughout history. This gift of Divinely glorified bodies is a testament to God’s generosity and Grace.

Religion, Faith, and Reaching God; Religion often represents humanity's attempt to reach God, but there is only one way to connect with Him: through faith. Hebrews 11:6 states, “But without faith, it is impossible to please Him.” God desires our trust and belief in Him. Obstacles to faith, such as pride or ignorance, can prevent individuals from coming to God. Still, salvation is Divinely available to all who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, regardless of their past or present circumstances.

Some may mistakenly believe that living a morally upright life is sufficient to be accepted by God, but this ignores His instructions. To be saved, one must believe that Jesus came to Earth as a man, died for our sins, and rose from the dead. This simple truth is the cornerstone of Christian faith, and there is *no alternative route to salvation*. To understand God's word, one should read the Bible, particularly The New Testament. The 1611 King James Version of the Bible, is known as the 'Authorized Version' and it serves as a reliable foundation for modern translations. Among these, I like; The Message, The New Living Translation (NLT), and The English Standard Version (ESV). These are again noted for their clarity and accessibility. There are many more. Studying the entire Bible is required for a full understanding, but anyone can always start with The Gospels, and repeating this, I like a *Harmony of The Gospels*.

Additionally, God's guidance can be discerned through prayer and a bit of intuition. When we follow His instructions, especially those we find challenging, we experience spiritual growth. If you seek confirmation about the Bible or any Christian confusion, pray about it. God will provide you with clear answers, although maybe not immediately. Be patient, Jesus assured us that those who seek will find, and this promise has been proven true very many times.

In essence, faith in God and trust in His word are paramount. He is a loving and attentive God who responds to our sincere questions, guiding us toward truth and spiritual growth. The concept of 'faith in God' or 'trust in God' is

central to the teachings of Jesus. He spoke more about faith than any other topic. To better understand this, let us look at some biblical examples of faith in God.

Starting with Adam and Eve, God instructed them not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, warning they would die if they disobeyed. When they did eat from the tree, they were expelled from Eden and eventually died, the consequences of their lack of faith in God's word. This story underscores the importance of trusting that what God says is true and we should act as accordingly as we can possibly manage.

Noah is another example of faith. When God commanded him to build an ark—a massive boat—he did it and it took him 120 years to complete, all while likely enduring the mockery of his neighbors. Noah did not even live anywhere near the water. I imagine the neighborhood children chanting, calling him crazy. Yet, Noah persisted, trusting in God's command despite any ridicule. This faith was rewarded when the flood came, and Noah's obedience saved him and his family.

Similarly, Abraham displayed great faith when God told him to leave his homeland, Ur. Without hesitation, he packed up and went, not knowing where he was going. His faith was richly rewarded, and he became the father of many nations.

These OT examples highlight the significance of faith—or the lack thereof—in our relationship with God. Faith is what He desires from us, and through Jesus, it is now easier than ever to accept and trust in God's word. However, we all fall short of the standards Jesus set when He walked the earth. Recognizing our shortcomings allows us a glimpse of Jesus as the Son of god.

Also note Ephesians 1:4-5 states; “He has chosen us to be in Him before the foundation of the world.” To create a metaphor out of Ephesians 1:4-5; When we accept Jesus, we walk through a kind of 'door of belief' and it is only after we pass through it that anyone would be able to see a surprise message over the inside of that door. This illustration is an often-used symbolic one. So, the message would read;

***All those who come through were selected
before the foundation of the World.***

It is possible that there is some semi-veiled Heavenly information which we do not know about in our human form. The 'foundation of the World', likely equates to the Late Heavy Bombardment 3.8 to 4.1 billion years ago. That is a real long time before we were born or thinking about any of this. As a believer, you will start to see things you cannot now see; like how you have always been included in those to be saved into Eternal Life, but you just could not see it. Perhaps because you must walk through that door first. Also, you must walk through voluntarily and then you will be blessed. As dreadful and petty as we all are compared to Jesus, God has and will always love us. How about that for an improbably good and loving God? While we are on the subject, God's offer of Eternal Life, if you do not accept it, is off the table, voided at your death or the Second Coming, whichever comes first. So, delay enough and you too will surely and tragically miss it. As believers, we start to see how we have always been included in those to be saved into Eternal Life, but that understanding comes only after we start exercising faith in god—well worth the effort.

To receive help from God, faith must come first. This is like learning any new skill—it takes practice. Think of it like learning to play a musical instrument. You may never reach perfection, but with practice, you improve. The difference with faith in God is that the rewards grow exponentially as your faith deepens. That is unlike the small rewards of mastering an instrument, the rewards of faith are vast and life-changing. Here is a key point; it is not about how skilled or talented you are, but how *sincere* you are. Matthew 5:8 reminds us, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” You cannot fool God with superficial efforts; He knows your heart. But He will never fail to help anyone who sincerely seeks Him and understands some basic “rules of the road” for living in faith.

Faith in God is for all of us believers in this Church Age, but it requires us to pursue it and a bit of practice. While Grace is freely given to all who ask, faith requires some effort on our part. It is a gift that grows as we use it and ask for more. God wants all of us to succeed in having faith in Him, and with your sincere desire and a bit practice, this is entirely achievable. Consider the story of Peter walking on water. He was able to do so as long as he focused on Jesus, but when he became distracted by the dangerous looking waves, he began to sink. This reminds us not to be distracted by earthly concerns, which are trivial to God. Jesus easily fed thousands with just a few loaves of bread and a couple fish, yet His Disciples quickly forgot His power when faced with the same challenge a few weeks later. We must remember what God has done for us and trust that He can and will handle any obstacle we face.

God rewards faith, but be prudent in what you ask for. Do not make material wealth your goal, as this can lead to idolatry, which blocks your relationship with God. Attitude is important. God may use an earthly setback to teach us a spiritual lesson. So, if you experience a failure or hardship, do not think God has abandoned you. Instead, trust Him and you will benefit greatly. Jeremiah 29:13 says, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." God is not a vending machine. We must seek Him sincerely. *Sincerity is the key to any two-way communication with God.*

Faith in God is a birthright available to everyone in the Church Age, rather like Grace. But Grace is freely given for the asking—a two-part critical asset package. Ask and you receive the whole package; forgiveness of sins and admission into the Kingdom of Heaven, *valid for eternity*. But Faith requires some focus on our part. But God wants you to succeed in developing faith, your chances are much better than of you becoming a concert pianist.

It is important to be conservative about what you request. Asking for material wealth, like gold bars, will likely not yield the results you would like and could even have negative consequences. In essence, it is never wise to ask God to make you rich, but he likes you to ask Him for more faith. There are examples, such as in Acts 5:1-11, where inappropriate attitudes toward money led to severe consequences. It is about your attitude: while God is not against some earthly prosperity, making that your primary goal is problematic. This pursuit of material wealth usually leads to idolatry, often committed in ignorance. Many people do not realize that such attitudes obstruct their relationship with God and hinder communication with Him. Instead, it is more helpful to focus on maintaining a proper relationship with God and seek His wisdom through the Holy Spirit rather than asking for money. Later He will likely grant you some earthly prosperity, after you are wise enough to not be so enamored of it.

As an illustration, imagine this; If your driver's manual had been tampered with so that before you ever saw it, every place it had said "steering wheel," it now said "rearview mirror," if you were from 2000 years in the past and did not know the difference, you would find it nearly impossible to drive using that as your guide. Many of us live our lives with similarly misleading information. Faith in God is something that needs daily renewal through prayer. Faith is not something you can stockpile like freeze-dried mountaineering food. Faith is a gift of God that grows only when you use it and ask Him for more. It really is just that simple.

Earlier, I mentioned that God is not overly concerned with earthly things. His own earthly death was seen by Jesus as "merely a human concern" (Matthew 16:23, Mark 8:33). While we might see our own death as important, God sees earthly matters differently. Getting help from God is not like mastering an arcade game where you can memorize the rules thoroughly and then win big. Some earthly riches might come, but they should never be your goal. Success in seeking God's help lies in sincerity, dedication, and the willingness to grow in faith. The good news is that it is not as difficult as it might seem. Read on.

First, you must develop faith in God before you can receive help from Him, but there is good news in that your faith does not need to be perfect to start with. Just come as you are, ask for more faith, and God will hear you. Developing faith in God is akin to the scientific method in part because it is better to start with what has proven to be true and build on that, rather than using guesses or wishful thinking about what might be true. So, do not approach this like it is a tense dive off the high board; it is more like stepping into a jacuzzi—it is meant to be pleasant and enjoyable, just stay alert. Do not fall asleep in a jacuzzi, right? I encourage you to pick one little area of

your life to start practicing faith in, even if that feels contrary to your natural instincts. With a bit of time and practice, it gets easier, and the benefits are beyond anything you would likely imagine.

But first some important background information. You might be secretly thinking, “Come-on, just tell me how to get God to make me rich.” But it is key to understand that love, not money is the very fabric of God, Heaven, and space-time. You might wonder how something as intangible as love can wield real power in the brutal physical Universe, but it does, just as gravity and dark matter do—because it is God’s will. The more you learn and practice love—spiritual soft power—the closer you get to your true nature and to God. But we all have our dreadful human brain telling us we a little need more money and a little more land, a little more and a little more, until we reach the sea, I suppose. Then you will focus on spiritual matters. Right? Maybe. Your spirit is far greater than your earthly self—your brain. Developing faith in God helps you align with your spiritual self, which is what God desires of you.

To get help from God; start by practicing love and compassion toward others, even those who do not deserve it. None of us deserve God’s love, yet He gives it freely and to all, like the sunshine. Restating this huge Point of order; Jesus desires compassion, not sacrifice (Matthew 9:12-13, Mark 2:17). Before you pray or read Scripture, take a moment to think about how powerful and vast God is compared to your puny, weak, and greedy human self. Think about how incredible it is that the one and only Almighty God listens to our prayers, not because He must, but because He wants to. This is only possible because of Jesus’ sacrifice that He made for us, to make us acceptable to The father. So, when you pray, start by asking God to reveal His will for you and to grant you His Holy Spirit to guide you. Be persistent and bold in your prayers without doubt because God values sincerity and persistence (James 1:6-16). Also, never whine your requests to God. I bet He does not like that anymore than your parents did.

Have you noticed that it is often easier to pray for God’s will to be done for that uncle who has cancer, rather than for yourself? We may fear that God’s will for us might not align with our desires. Oops, then what? But know this: with God, it is never quantum-ominous. It is more like that “box of chocolates” *Forrest Gump*—whatever you get, it will be something good, something you will like. Also, God will never ask you to do the impossible. He may challenge you, but you will see that it is within your ability, especially with His help. Restating, spiritual growth occurs when you do something God asks of you, and especially if you do not want to do it. Prayer is not about reciting memorized words; it is about a sincere, personal conversation with *The Supreme Being* (Matthew 6:7). Ask God for His Holy Spirit so you can recognize His will for you. All your earthly life becomes so much better when you are aligned with God’s will.

The more you expect God to answer your prayers, the more He will and Point of Order here; *never rush Him*. That is a huge red flag and a dead end for any communication with God. Your request might be inappropriate, especially if you are a new believer, but God does not punish us for ignorance. Trust that He will answer, often in ways you do not expect. Sometimes beginners overthink this, but God’s answers are simple and clear, never cloaked. As you recognize His answers, it becomes easier to expect more answers from Him. If your prayers are too earthly or trivial, He might just ignore them, so be mindful of what you ask for. For example, instead of saying, “Lord, help me make my mortgage payment,” you could say, “Lord, I’ve gotten myself into a bind, and I need some of Your wisdom to manage my finances better.” Trust that He will guide you, maybe through unexpected advice or resources. He is not going to magically top-up your checking account because that would not grant you any insight, responsibility, or wisdom. Be humble and concise in your prayers, showing faith in His incredibly higher wisdom.

Restating, God does not exist to fulfill our desires; we exist to fulfill His. When you align yourself with His will, you find success beyond your wildest dreams. So, incorporate this understanding into your belief system. Stick with God, and earthly issues like your mortgage will become trivial. Like the Jews in *Exodus* who cried out to God for help, approach Him with humility and faith. Ask daily for more faith and for guidance in knowing His will. Your life will improve, although there is usually a delay before He kicks in for you. Do not focus on the delay; trust that He is working on your behalf. God’s timing is perfect, and He reserves His better gifts for those who are willing to wait upon Him. I bet His very best gifts go to those who are willing to wait until we pass into spiritual form, in Heaven. His timing is different from ours, but expect that He will answer and He will. He knows about absolutely everything far better than we ever could.

God Knows All and He Will Help You

The idea that God knows all and will help you might seem too good to be true. However, the mind of God is so vast that it is beyond human comprehension. The concept that God knows everything—every detail of our lives and the entire Universe—is both challenging and fascinating. God is aware of every moment in time, every event across The Universe, not just on Earth but everywhere. It is mind-boggling to consider such infinite knowledge, especially if we struggle just to manage our little daily to-do list using notes taped to the computer monitor, the front door, or the steering wheel.

God's omniscience is not limited to here and now; He knows the past, the future, and everything in between. He is omnipresent, all-powerful, all-knowing, eternal, and unchanging. His attributes are numerous—up to twenty-three, according to some lists. For those who do not know God, it might seem like there is little or no spiritual significance to their lives. For all of us, believer or not, it is easy to get caught up in our earthly lives and overlook the spiritual.

Take, for example, the simple choice of what to wear today. God is likely not concerned whether I choose a t-shirt or a button-down shirt, even though He knows which one I will pick. While God is managing every aspect of The Universe, from the grandest to the most mundane, His focus is primarily on the spiritual realm. It is difficult to comprehend that this immense responsibility does not overwhelm Him—He is *the Supreme Being*, capable of handling it all without effort. How does that compare with your to-do list for today?

It is beyond human comprehension to fully grasp the extent of God's intellect and power. He manages not only our small corner of The Universe but everything that exists, even in galaxies unimaginably far away our own. There could be countless other more advanced life forms out there, and God knows all about them if they exist. It is naive to think little humans are the pinnacle of life or that any advanced civilization would be more than academically interested in our relatively primitive planet. But if they exist, God knows every detail in every one of their lives because He created them as well. That is a lot of stuff to keep track of.

In the face of such vastness, also remember that God is not just a distant, uninvolved clockmaker. He is actively running everything in real-time. This includes both spiritual and earthly matters, even when we mistakenly believe we are in control. It is easy to get lost in our daily to-do lists and think we are managing our lives on our own, but the truth is, God is always aware of and involved.

Jesus lived as a man, and He understands our struggles and experiences. He cares deeply about our spiritual well-being and is fully aware of our earthly needs because of His death and resurrection. Through His sacrifice, we are justified before God The Father—a state of righteousness that is quite beyond mere forgiveness. We are made pure, as though we had never sinned. How incredible is that? Trusting in Jesus allows us to walk a straight path, and through faith, and our needs will always be met.

It is easy to lose sight of this when we are caught up in the daily challenges of life. I often must remind myself that everything is in God's hands, and this requires constant practice. God created us with needs that only He can fulfill—the God-shaped hole—a concept beautifully explored in *Confessions* by Saint Augustine and *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis. This metaphor reflects humanity's deep longing for something greater than this world—a void that only God can fill. Yet, many people spend their lives pursuing superficial earthly things in a futile attempt to satisfy those needs—a universal and profoundly unsatisfying human folly. In the Kingdom of God, financial and earthly concerns are moot, meaningless, replaced by the ultimate fulfillment found in His presence. What a glorious reality is in store for believers.

Instead of praying solely for financial help, it is more constructive to trust God and seek His will for your life. If His will is that you lose your house, then you will lose it—but take heart, because we know His plan is always for our ultimate good. Consider that it is easier to ride the motorcycle of life in the direction it is already going rather than to sit facing backward, cursing that bike for not taking you where you want to go. Whatever God has planned, you can trust it will unfold as He intends. While He does not desire unnecessary suffering, God values our trust and faith

in Him above all earthly concerns. Trusting God can feel like a tricky pony to ride at first because we discover that we are not in control as we imagined—we never were. God is.

It may seem counterintuitive, but as Søren Kierkegaard famously said, 'Faith sees best in the dark.' We often convince ourselves that we are managing our own affairs, especially in the small, everyday matters. Yet, God is always at work, overseeing everything. When life does not go as planned, it may be His way of urging us to pause and reevaluate our approach. Sometimes, He allows us to face repeated failures—not to punish us, but to teach us to rely on Him rather than ourselves. This is a challenging lesson, but sometimes a vital step in the Christian journey.

As we grow spiritually, we learn to trust God more deeply. Over time, we begin to recognize that His ways are better than our own, even when they do not align with what we thought we needed. This journey requires patience and humility, but the rewards are immense. By asking God to reveal His will to us, we open ourselves up to His guidance and wisdom, which far surpasses any limited human understanding.

God does have a plan for your life, and it is never too late to start following it. It is natural to wonder how much better your life might have been if you had married a different person, gotten into a more preferred grad school or anything else. Such things were a seriously big deal at the time but how big are they now? While choices do shape us to some degree, the most decisive factor in our lives is when we begin to follow God. He is not distant or indifferent; He is actively orchestrating His plan for each of us. When we choose to cooperate with His plan, it unfolds more efficiently. Most importantly, it is never too late to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Do that before it is too late, or you will be separated from God for eternity, a catastrophically bad idea. The sooner we accept Jesus, the sooner we start aligning ourselves with God's plan and the better our lives become in ways that we may not be able see right now. Also, a side point here; if you discover that your time on Earth is going to end sooner than you expected, that is not a failure to accomplish all you wished. It is God's way of letting you know that you will receive your rewards sooner than you expected. Those rewards are beyond anything earthly that you have ever imagined.

Trust that God has good things planned for you, even if it feels like you are standing on the edge of a rapidly opening sinkhole. God sees your life in its entirety—from beginning to end—placing Him in the perfect position to know what is truly best for you. Not only is He infinitely wiser than we are, but He is also a loving and compassionate God, not angry or vengeful. While His goodness may seem too extraordinary to believe, it is absolutely true. Have faith, and remember that God's justice and fairness far surpass anything we experience on earth. His love and goodness are beyond human imagination. If we were to create a deity for our own benefit, we would never conceive of anything as glorious and wonderful as God.

Faith can help us find peace even when life has been overwhelming brutal. Through spiritual connection, we can discover forgiveness, renewed self-worth, and healing from past injustices. This healing extends to everyone, including survivors of human trafficking—an issue that deserves our attention and compassion. Those who harm others, especially children, will face severe consequences for their actions. Mark 9:42

Many survivors carry emotional burdens from their experiences—feelings pain that was never their fault. Early trauma can have lasting impacts, especially when compounded by substance use that is often forced upon them. When they find freedom, many feel that their past will always define them.

But there is hope for renewal. Through faith, survivors can find strength to overcome their pain. No matter how deep the hurt, no matter how complex the emotions they carry, healing is possible. Those who feel utterly broken can discover new purpose and joy. Anyone who seeks spiritual healing from God can find it, opening the door to rebuilding their lives.

This message of hope matters profoundly for trafficked survivors, who often feel forgotten by society. While some prefer not to acknowledge this difficult reality, others may try to distance themselves from past wrongdoing forced upon them, but spiritual relief and guidance remains available to all who sincerely seek God.

It may seem unlikely that the all-powerful Creator of the Universe would take a personal interest in you—knowing you, remembering you, and guiding you in this life and the next. But God is a being of unimaginable goodness. The more you come to know Him, the better it is for you. If we were in His position, would we show such generosity toward small, simple creatures? Personally, I do not plan to shower the mice in my backyard with endless food or help them renovate their burrows anytime soon. Yet, God does something far more remarkable: when you approach Jesus with a humble heart, He responds with a gentle, loving power that is filled with deep understanding. Give it a try. Even the smallest step of faith opens the door for the Holy Spirit to enter your life, and in that moment, you become a child of the Most-High God. You may not fully grasp it right away, but John 1:12 assures us that you now hold dual citizenship—both in this world and in God’s Kingdom. In your heavenly citizenship, allegiance to God’s Kingdom far surpasses any earthly obligations. You are now a foreigner here, an ambassador for God’s Kingdom. As Peter said...”as foreigners and exiles, abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul” (1 Peter 2:11). Your new heavenly citizenship requires constant checks of your ‘spiritual compass,’ helping you reject behaviors that would pull you away from God.

As your faith grows, allow it to unfold at a pace that feels right for you. What matters most is sincerity. God values genuine faith more than effort or talent. 2 Corinthians 1:12 emphasizes the importance of integrity and simplicity in our belief. We often live with a misplaced sense of pride, trying to appear wise and successful to others, even when we have more reason for humility. But when you speak to God, set all of that aside. Approach Him with humility. He knows you better than you know yourself, and you cannot bargain or manipulate your way into His love or good favor. All you need to do is accept Jesus and ask for His help. That is all. This simple, sincere act sparks a remarkable transformation. Even if you struggle with your faith at first, do not worry—God will remain by your side once you make that first earnest commitment. Stay humble, and He will guide you in ways you never imagined. You will soon begin to experience the incredible promises of God, promises that far exceed your expectations. These promises are real, and you will find that it is far better to live by God’s promises than by human expectations.

You might wonder ‘If this has always existed, why have I not known about it?’ Some Christians seem to be aware of this truth—‘does the government keep it hidden?’ No, not in free countries. In places like China or North Korea, it may be suppressed, but not here. C.S. Lewis, once an atheist, struggled with the same journey of faith. His path from skepticism to belief was beyond anything he could have imagined, and your journey may feel overwhelming now too. But remember, the journey is unique to each person. Will you give Jesus the opportunity to offer you the incredible gift of grace—complete forgiveness and eternal life with God in Heaven? This gift is available to everyone who accepts Jesus and that includes you.

Romans 3:21-24 makes it clear: ‘We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus, who justified us making us spiritually pure, as if we had never sinned. He did this through His sacrifice on the cross. This freed us from the penalty for our sins.’

Belief opens your eyes to a spiritual reality that was previously hidden from you. Just as physical death unveils the spiritual realm, faith unveils God’s presence. Walking through the ‘door of belief’ allows you to see life from a higher, spiritual perspective. You do not need a physical transformation at the subatomic level or need to perform extraordinary feats to experience the Divine. God will reveal Himself to you in an instant, granting you a new perspective as a believer. While non-believers live on a lower spiritual plane, believers get to see beyond the limitations of the physical world. It is like having much better seats at the game; you can see a lot more.

Ernest Lamb beautifully expresses it: ‘Believers have a new life, experiencing a bit of Heaven here on Earth, made possible by a new relationship with the Father.’ This transformation explains why, even in the toughest of times, believers continue to trust in God’s promises. The saying, ‘There are no atheists in foxholes,’ encapsulates this truth—when life presents massive challenges, faith becomes our source of strength and refuge.

Following Jesus sets you apart, and this can lead to being misunderstood or even rejected by nonbelievers. The values of a Christian often clash with those of the world. However, accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior grants you a new identity—an eternal one. While this may distance you from some non-believing acquaintances, it also opens the door for you to share Christ's love with them. Your old non-Christian friends might be surprised to see you show kindness and consideration towards them. Connect with people instead of correcting them. Rather than getting on a soapbox empathize, do not moralize. That is the Christian thing to do.

Following Jesus does not promise an easy life, but it does secure something far more valuable—eternal security in God's Kingdom. The Christian journey is not about seeking popularity or comfort. You may have to release old habits or relationships that hinder your spiritual growth, but the rewards are incomparable. Hebrews 11:6 reminds us that God 'is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.' Seek Him with sincerity, and He will reward you in ways you cannot yet imagine.

Have faith, and come just as you are. There is no need for special clothing or eloquent words to speak to God. He listens to people who are sincere and willing to hear what He has to say. He loved you even before you knew of His existence. While earthly life often fosters suspicion and mistrust, spiritual life is refreshingly different. Because insincere motives may be powerful, like gravity, but they cannot in any way affect your interdimensional spirit, which is of God and not of space-time. Our bodies are made of cosmic dust, water and, infused with a touch of Divine chemistry, but our spirits are of God, rooted in Heaven. Christians are not bound by space-time; we are connected to the eternal God. This is a glimpse of the spiritual life that awaits those who walk with Christ. You did catch that cool glimpse of the spiritual life right there, didn't you? It is right there, within reach.

In The Gospels, we witness Jesus' earthly life and His Messianic offer, which was tragically rejected by His own people. Yet, it is through Paul's preaching of The Gospel of Grace that God formed the 'Body' of believers or the Body of Christ, a metaphor for the Church. This was accomplished by Jesus' Grace, a Divine favor that you are just as entitled to as any other person on this planet. The Christian Church, or the Body of Christ, exists because of this incredible gift of Grace. Grace is undeserved Divine favor, freely given to anyone willing to accept it. It is as fundamental to our spiritual existence as gravity is to the physical existence—both are forces beyond our control. Grace is an essential asset, offering two invaluable benefits: complete forgiveness of all past sins and guaranteed entrance into Eternal Life in the Kingdom of God, valid for eternity. Who would turn down such an offer? This is the very reason Jesus came to Earth.

When you accept Jesus, God does not hold your past sins against you. In fact, at the time of your judgment, those sins will not even be mentioned—because they are canceled and gone through Jesus' sacrifice, simply because you accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; all sin is completely erased and forgotten. When you ask for God's forgiveness, you receive it, completely. This is the essence of Grace, and it usually feels awkward and humbling to receive such an immense gift when you know perfectly well that there is nothing you could ever do to deserve it. That is precisely why Jesus came to earth. Grace, which is for you and for *all people who ask God for it*. It is absolutely free for the asking. How cool is that?

We all start life as fallen creatures, ignorant and burdened by sin, with no way to redeem ourselves. But God, in His infinite love, wants us to be free of the guilt of our past sins. His Grace reaches down and saves us, simply because we believe in and accept Jesus as revealed in The Gospels. Grace is a Divine attribute, not a human one. As flawed, physical beings, we are entrapped by the limitations of space-time, the Second Law of Thermodynamics—the arrow of time that governs the physical world. After you have been a Christian for a while, you begin to understand how deeply personal Jesus' death on the cross is for you. Even though it happened nearly two thousand years ago, it was voluntary and it was for your benefit, personally. So that you would be able to believe in Him and be saved by the Grace of God. Divine coolness is incredibly superior to human.

Romans 6:14 tells us, "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under Law but under Grace." Grace is the connection between God and humanity, much like a string that holds a kite aloft. Without that string, the kite cannot fly. Similarly, it is gloriously better to soar into Heaven with God than to trudge into hell with the

condemned. You think? Sin severs the string, our connection to God, but His stable force of Grace allows us to reconnect and fly again. Even when we stumble, revisiting the comfort of familiar sins—those addictive and destructive habits. Grace is always here to restore our connection to God as many times as we need it. C. S. Lewis perceptively observed, “The safest road to hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turns.” It seems God knew that we would need many chances, and so He gives them to us. It is not like Casey at the Bat, who had only one last ‘at bat’. God offers us endless opportunities to repent, do the right thing, and be saved into Eternal Life with Him, even though we do not deserve it.

In Revelation 3:10, Jesus reassures the church of old Philadelphia in Asia Minor and all Christians that we will be kept from the Tribulation that will descend upon the Earth—possibly within the next few decades, although that is just a personal guess. What is certain is that all believers, living or dead, will be Raptured into His presence, as chronicled in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. Considering that; “Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up,” says James 4:10. Be humble before God, and He will be good to you. Have faith in Him and let go of any silly beliefs or dumb human notions. Such as; your moral failings will magically resolve themselves once you achieve financial security. It is most unlikely that financial security and moral integrity are positively correlated; in fact, the opposite is generally true. You become rich, you usually become more arrogant, not less. So, break free from the illusion of self-sufficiency and become a servant of God, as Jesus exemplified in The Gospels. Abandon the tyrannical rule of self, because greater freedom than you can imagine beckons you. Freedom that only comes from making that leap of faith. Spirit is the source of life. Moral failings are a common kind of self-deceptive theft, taking from life some of that which The Spirit had first lent us. John 6:63 reminds us, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is nothing at all.” Paraphrased; The spirit animates the flesh and the flesh is but a hollow vessel. Restating; Every word He spoke is absolute truth.

There is only one way to be saved, and I repeat this often because it is a central truth found throughout the Bible. Here are a few of my favorite verses that stat this clearly: Jesus Himself said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). To me, that could not be more straightforward. He also said, “I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved” (John 10:9). When Peter spoke to the Jewish elders about their rejection of Jesus, he boldly declared, “Jesus is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:11-12). I also appreciate the penetrating words of Jesus’ at His Sermon on the Mount: “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). I am incredibly grateful that I found the narrow gate—Jesus and His gift of grace—in this distracting physical world.

It is important to understand that Grace is a gift, not something that can be earn. Many false religions promote the idea that salvation and Heaven can be received through good works or by following specific rules. This is the most universal deception of false religions, and I urge you to be vigilant and proactive in rejecting it. Grace offers two life-changing gifts: forgiveness of sins and salvation into God’s Kingdom. Both are freely given, available to everyone, and valid for eternity. There is nothing anyone can do to earn them. False religions often suggest that by adhering to their practices, giving money, or recruiting others, you can secure your place in Heaven. But this is a manipulative lie that preys on the natural human instinct that everything of value must be earned. Jesus makes it clear that salvation is free. It begins in this life but is fulfilled in His eternal life. Wrap your head around that!

Ephesians 2:8-9 makes this explicit: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” While it feels natural to want to earn what you get, the most incredible truth of Christianity is that the greatest gift—salvation—is free. This can be hard for some people to accept because receiving such a monumental gift without earning it can stir feelings of guilt. False religions do intentionally exploit that feeling by offering a false path so people can “earn” their salvation through service or loyalty to them. This is a clever and sleaze psychological trick, designed to take advantage of our natural human superstition. False religions often disguise this deception with other attractive teachings, making it easy to overlook the primary trick: you cannot earn your salvation. It is freely given to all who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Why pay religious grifters for what you already have?

I am sure that some false religious leaders are upset by the revelation of this huge public deception, but all public deceptions need to be exposed. While I am just one among very many Christians to point this out, I do so with a sense of responsibility and purpose. Falsehoods like these must be called out, even if we face the hostility of those who profit from keeping them hidden. Just as we must expose public deceptions like Communism, "The Master Race," and Jim Crow, false hoods must be called out. The perpetrators will surely curse us for revealing them, especially since it interferes with their profit and retirement.

New Christian Doubts and Anxieties

Once you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, your salvation is secure for eternity—you cannot become "unsaved." This is a one-time event with everlasting benefits. Even if you stumble and fall back into sinful habits, your Eternal Life with God remains intact. Salvation is not something you need to ask for repeatedly; it is given once and forever. However, this assurance is not a license to sin. While your place in eternity is secure, there are divine rewards for living a righteous and faithful life. Strive to walk in goodness, knowing that God's grace sustains you even when you falter. Do not be misled by those who twist this truth for profit. Unfortunately, there are many who profit from spiritual deception, but the truth of God's Word stands firm—your salvation is a gift, it cannot be earned and it can never be revoked.

It is normal for new Christians to have doubts and anxieties. One common concern is the fear of not being "good enough" for God, something I call "adequacy doubt." This is especially common among high-achievers who are used to equating their worth with accomplishments. "What if God hasn't accepted me?" But here is the truth: God knows all your flaws, doubts, and shortcomings, and He loves and accepts you despite them. His acceptance is based on grace, not our worthiness. Thank you, Lord Jesus. No amount of earthly success, intelligence, or talent can make you adequate before God. Only faith in Him can do that. Instead of focusing on inadequacies, real or imagined, make trusting God your goal. His wisdom and mercy far surpass anything we can comprehend, and He forgives us completely. No shortcomings will ever disqualify you from His Kingdom.

Another common anxiety is what I refer to as; "the circular reasoning trap," where doubts spiral into confusion. You might question whether asking for blessings is selfish or if efforts to please God can be seen as potentially manipulative. Maybe by people, but not by God. These thoughts can lead to endless loops of doubt. But the truth is, God understands your heart and motivations. He knows your struggles and does not judge you for human missteps or fleeting thoughts. Trusting Him is the answer to breaking free from such doubts. Remember, circular reasoning is just a trick of the devil to plant seeds of doubt—do not let it take root. Instead, place your faith in God, and He will guide you lovingly, as promised in Psalms 32:8-9.

If you experience such doubts, just seek advice from a more experienced Christian. Many of them have likely faced similar doubts when they first started and can offer encouragement and wisdom. Asking for help, maybe at your Bible Study class, with a simple problem like this strengthens not just your faith but also the faith of those who talk with you about it. Even if it is a really tough question and you are both stumped and need to turn to a more senior Christian for answers, everyone still benefits. Sharing with other Christians results in the growing of faith for all.

Salvation is a gift that redeems both body and soul. While saving your soul is of eternal significance, the promise of resurrection also addresses the body. Before the Tribulation and Christ's Second Coming, all believers—living and dead—will receive glorified resurrection bodies far beyond our imagination. Jesus hinted at this in Matthew 22:30, saying we will be like the angels in heaven. Matthew 22:30 Mark 12:25 Also 1 Corinthians 2:9 declares, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, nor has the mind of man conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him." This promise assures us that our future in God's Kingdom is unimaginably glorious.

Maintaining your relationship with God is more about the intentions of your heart, more so than about your outward actions. As Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, it is not so much about what you do, but *why you do it*. God sees your motives with perfect CT scan clarity. We all fall short of His glory, but this awareness should drive us to rely on Jesus, who offers the grace we need. Faith in Him is the way to salvation, even if your faith starts small.

The Holy Spirit will guide you and help your faith to grow over time. God makes no mistakes in calling people to Him, and once you commit to Christ, your salvation is assured and spiritual growth will become evident to you more so than any doubts.

One mistake that puts a person in catastrophic spiritual danger is a deliberate, forceful rejection of Jesus. This creates a void in the soul that can become an entry point for demonic influence, metaphorically of course but the danger is very real. Those who openly reject God make themselves vulnerable to darkness and demonic torment. Demons seek spiritually unprotected people and demonic possession brings unimaginable misery. Deliverance from such torment requires exorcism by someone filled with the Spirit of God. Such danger underscores the seriousness and importance of trusting in Christ, who offers the ultimate protection through faith and The Holy Spirit.

Never challenge God by inviting darkness into your life. Instead, trust in His love, accept His grace, and rely on His guidance. Salvation secures your eternity, and no demonic force can snatch it away. Publicly rejecting God, as some boldly do, is both dangerous and unnecessary. Ron Reagan's infamous declaration as a "lifelong atheist not afraid of burning in hell" is an example of such arrogant folly. It is easy to separate church and state without being disrespectful to God.

Satan, the master counterfeiter, can tempt us with anything earthly, but under his influence, clarity is lost. History is filled with examples of those who were blind to their own evil—Stalin, Hitler, Idi Amin, Pol Pot, and many others. This demonstrates how completely Satan can control a person, though he cannot dominate everyone; otherwise, humanity would have long since perished. Free will on earth allows evil to sometimes prevail, but in Heaven free will exists without evil. That is my speculation, but it is a comforting thought, a place where our choices are good and our freedom is pure—Heaven is truly divine. Yes?

Human Frailties and Susceptibilities

Human vulnerabilities are deeply ingrained genetic traits passed down through generations. While they may have served a purpose in a more primitive times, they often prove unnecessary—and even harmful—in modern society. These inherited tendencies can drive human behaviors that damage our personal well-being and that of our planet.

Consider, for instance, the drive for procreation. If sex drive were significantly reduced, that could result in a more harmonious existence, reduce humanity's environmental footprint, and double many people's disposable income. Similarly, the genetic predisposition toward pride frequently incites conflict. People often prioritize being "right" over maintaining peace or happiness. History provides countless examples of this—disputes over resources or ideologies spiral into larger conflicts and wars, fueled by the instinctive desire to assert one's correctness. This fixation on being "right" often overshadows the values of cooperation, harmony, and even life itself.

Another profound human vulnerability is self-deception. Carl Jung famously explored this in *The Human Shadow*, A human tendency that often leads to regrettable actions carried out on autopilot. When we unconsciously deceive ourselves, we lose the ability to see the truth behind our motivations and actions. Cultivating mindfulness—the discipline of observing our thoughts and scrutinizing our intentions—helps to mitigate this. However, mindfulness requires significant effort, commitment and it is not a popular discipline in western culture.

History is riddled with examples of actions driven by instinctual greed and emotion rather than conscious decision-making. These primitive impulses often lead to destructive behaviors, violence, and wars. To break free from this cycle, we must embrace self-awareness and deliberate action. Only by confronting our personal destructive propensities can mankind hope to avoid repeating past mistakes. Our inherited flaws demand relentless vigilance while money, sex, and drugs hold more crowd appeal. A disheartening thought.

This darker side of human nature is often obscured by our own projections. Alan Watts insightfully observed, "Acts of violence towards others are always characteristic of people who project the devil in themselves upon the outside—upon somebody else—upon the scapegoat." Similarly, D.A. Carson, in wonderful book; *For the Love of God*, warns of humanity's tendency to rationalize moral drift: "We drift towards compromise and call it tolerance; we drift

toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.” Such common self-deceptions blind us to shifts in our attitudes, creating a veil of illusion between ourselves and reality.

Contrary to prevailing obsessions, there is no need to compete, fear, or hoard anything earthly. All material things are fleeting and ultimately superficial. Preparing for the future through spiritual growth and understanding is far more meaningful. As 1 Timothy 6:7 reminds us, “We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.” Trust in God, He is the enduring treasure that holds infinitely greater value.

The Mystery Kingdom

The Mystery Kingdom is the biblical age or time period, not to a physical place we are living in. This time period is also known as The Age of Grace or the Church Age. This Modern Age (my term) that we are living in can sometimes leave us with more questions than answers. Scripture offers guidance to direct our path, but people frequently and automatically fill in perceived gaps with speculation. The omissions may, in fact, be intentional, demanding that we practice faith over guesses. Faith is not a popular discipline, but we love to guess. Have you noticed?

Distinguishing between personal experience, biblical speculation, and scriptural facts is important to any serious student of the Bible. Speculation has led to doctrinal confusion and the emergence of religious offshoots. Super reverence for the Bible does not validate one’s biblical guesses. Nothing does. 2 Peter 1:20-21 reminds us, “Prophets speak for God, not men.” It is wise to hold loosely to interpretations and avoid investing too heavily in guesses, especially our own, which we tend to just love. Biblical guesses are not more valid because they are our own.

When biblical insights seem clear to you, they might be meant for personal growth rather than public debate. Disagreements over speculative interpretations often leads to discord rather than enlightenment. Mysteries in the Bible may be intentional, encouraging humanity to have faith. As believers, we should prioritize scriptural truths over personal interpretations and approach debates with caution. Beware of the “Angry Guesser,” who assume their guesses are facts. By focusing on the facts of Scripture, cultivating faith, and suppressing our human frailties, we can move toward a life of purpose, harmony, and spiritual fulfillment, preferable to being the most combative person in the bible study.

A Personal Classification for Biblical Guesses

This classification system is entirely my own approach, and certainly not a Christian doctrine. This is just the way I do it. I divide biblical guesses into four categories: *dumb guesses*, *regular guesses*, *insights*, and what I term “*damn lies*.”

1. Dumb Guesses

Defining Dumb Guesses, they are those ideas that are poorly conceived, lack scriptural support and/or go far beyond what is written in the text. They are easily dismissed as baseless or misguided, often driven by personal desires or biases but not by Scripture. I am sure we have all heard some of these.

It is natural to feel that God would agree with our personal guesses, and while that is not inherently sinful, it is something to handle with care. The real danger lies in becoming overly attached to guesses—our own or someone else’s. Ground your beliefs in the clear, unchanging truths of Scripture and approach speculation quietly, with humility or not at all.

An Example of a Dumb Guess; I have occasionally imagined that the tribulation may descend upon the earth in the next thirty to forty years. But that is just a fleeting gut feeling—there is no scriptural evidence to support it, so it is just a dumb guess and I urge you to dismiss any such daydream-type of unconscious thoughts. It was just nonsense visualization breaking the surface in an idle moment. Ignore such bunk and focus on biblical truth, keeping that as your anchor. Just because we have stray unconscious thoughts, that does not make them valid, even if we like some of them.

2. Regular Guesses

These are speculative interpretations based on indirect and/or circumstantial biblical evidence. While not definitive, they can be reasonable and they must arise from logical, thoughtful reflection. Throughout this text, I have made several regular guesses, clarifying that they are ‘my guess’ at the time. So, it is fine with me if you do not buy them.

I have speculated that Jesus intentionally avoided performing grand, supernatural spectacles to preserve the necessity and size of the leap of faith required to believe. I think that is why He never summoned fire from the sky to strike down some Pharisees or flew around like a divine superhero burning up all the Romans. While He undoubtedly had the power to do so, His miracles were more personal, designed to validate His Messiahship rather than dazzle the masses. Even His Resurrection—arguably the cornerstone of Christianity—was a relatively private event, witnessed by only a select few people present, not for everyone. Similarly, when The Father spoke at Jesus’ baptism, it was not a global broadcast but understood only by some, not everyone present. These patterns suggest, in my view, that God deliberately left room for faith, not making belief a matter of undeniable spectacle.

Regular guesses are harmless as long as we acknowledge they are guesses and refrain from trying to impose them on others. Faith should never be about coercion or forcing people to accept personal interpretations. That is the domain of false religions, not Christianity.

3. Insights

As I see insights, they occupy a middle ground between regular guesses and established biblical doctrine. These are interpretations that, while not universally recognized, do have some scriptural support. They often delve into nuanced or semi-hidden ideas that may not appear in the introductory level of Christian literature but may be discussed among senior pastors and theologians.

An example of an insight is that God has placed a psychological veil over the minds of the Jewish people, preventing them from recognizing Jesus as the Messiah because of the method they used to reject His messiahship, the unpardonable sin. This is supported by passages like Romans 11:25 and 2 Corinthians 3:14-16, which suggest divine blindness that will lift in due time. Insights like these while grounded in Scripture, may not be widely accepted.

4. Damn Lies

The term “damn lie” was popularized by President Harry S. Truman in 1952, referring to a harmful falsehood deliberately crafted to mislead or manipulate. I use the term similarly as a calculated lie designed to deceive, often for propaganda or malicious purposes. These lies are not innocent misunderstandings but intentional distortions meant to undermine truth and they exemplify deliberate deceit intended to sow discord. In Christian contexts, “damn lies” often promote false doctrine, consolidate power, and often smear opponents. This category represents the most destructive and unethical form of untruth—one rooted in demonic malice and manipulation.

The Judgments:

Significant Judgments in the Bible;

The Bible outlines several key judgments, typically ranging from five to seven, depending on interpretation. Below is an overview:

Judgment of Satan and His Fallen Angels;

This judgment has already occurred, marking Satan's rebellion and his defeat along with his fallen angels.

The Eden Judgments (Genesis 3);

After humanity’s fall, God pronounced judgments on Adam, Eve, the serpent, and the earth. These are past events that set the course of human history.

The Judgment of Christ for the Sins of the World;

This occurred nearly 2,000 years ago at the crucifixion, where Christ bore the penalty for humanity's sins, offering redemption to all who believe.

Believers' Self-Judgment;

Christians are encouraged to examine their lives regularly, confessing sins and aligning their actions with Scripture to maintain fellowship with God (1 Corinthians 11:31). This is an ongoing process.

The Judgment Seat of Christ (Bema Seat);

After the Rapture, believers will stand before Christ to be evaluated for their deeds (2 Corinthians 5:10). This is not a judgment for sin but for rewards. Faithful Old Testament believers will also receive their resurrection, although the timing of their judgment is less definitive.

Judgment of Living Jews and Gentiles;

This judgment occurs after Christ's return to determine which living individuals will enter the Messianic Kingdom (Matthew 25:31-46). Christ will separate the nations as a shepherd separates sheep from goats, distinguishing between those who demonstrated faith through their treatment of His people during the Tribulation and those who did not.

The Great White Throne Judgment;

The final judgment, described in Revelation 20:11-15, occurs after the Millennium. Those whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life will be cast into the Lake of Fire, and Satan's ultimate punishment will be carried out.

These judgments, past and future reveal God's justice and His plan for humanity. They underscore the importance of faith and obedience in aligning with His purposes.

God made Space-Time for us

Space-Time is where we are living for now. Stepping briefly into the intersection of theology and science, modern physics describes dimensions beyond the familiar four of space-time. As Christians, we can imagine that God, as the Creator, exists beyond the familiar four dimensions of length, width, height, and space-time. Our current understanding of space-time is limited—akin to Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, where our existence reflects only the shadow world, a small fraction of reality. Upon death, believers will likely transcend those limitations, experiencing existence beyond the "veil of humanity". God's design of the Universe likely includes mysteries that remain hidden to us for now, in our current form. This underscores our need for faith and trust in His perfect plan.

The End of the Age

The *End of the Age*, or *End Times* will mark the conclusion of the Church Age and ushers in profound, transformative events. While their exact timing is uncertain, they are central to Christian eschatology and faith.

The Rapture;

Believers will be taken up to be with Christ, their earthly bodies transformed into glorified resurrection bodies. Matthew 22:30 Also, the faithful who believe in Jesus and have already died will be resurrected here and they will also receive glorified resurrection bodies. The Rapture is the final element and the conclusion of the Fulfillment of The Gentiles which has been going on for the entire Church age. The Rapture is a promise of reward and transformation for us believers.

The Tribulation;

This seven-year period of suffering serves to deal with unfinished business between God and Israel. This time will also deal with some unbelievers. The Tribulation will begin with a temporary and deceptive peace between Israel and some of her neighbors. It will culminate in unimaginable chaos during the rise of the Antichrist.

The Second Coming and the Millennial Kingdom;

Jesus will return to earth to defeat evil and establish His thousand-year reign of peace and righteousness. During this time, He will fulfill promises made to Israel, creating a time of never-before-seen worldwide peace and harmony.

The Judgment of The Great White Throne;

At the end of the Millennium, unbelievers will face final judgment, while believers will enter eternity with God.

Tribulation and Post tribulation events

The seven-year Tribulation period marks a time of unprecedented suffering, beginning with a deceptive peace between Israel and her neighbors before a descent into chaos under the Antichrist's rise. This culminates in The Second Coming, when Christ returns to defeat evil and establish His millennial kingdom—a thousand-year reign of peace and righteousness when He will fulfill His promises to Israel. Finally, is the Great White Throne Judgment, where unbelievers face final judgment while believers enter eternal communion with God.

A Tribulation Side Point: One aspect of the Tribulation often overlooked is Israel's role in accepting Jesus as the Messiah. Just as Jewish leaders once led the nation to reject Him, scripture foretells of a time when Israel will proclaim Him as Savior. Jesus Himself declared, "*For I say to you, you shall not see Me henceforth until you shall say, 'Blessed is He who cometh in the name of the Lord'*" (Matthew 23:39). That phrase is a traditional Messianic greeting, and points to a future moment when Israel will recognize Jesus as messiah. Though it may seem improbable today, prophecy assures us this will occur during the final days of the Tribulation. Hosea 5:15 underscores this idea, as Christ's return is linked to Israel's plea for Him. When that moment comes, every prophecy will be fulfilled, and the Second Coming of Christ will mark the ultimate victory over the chaos that will have overwhelmed the world at that time.

A significant point of Jewish eschatology revolves around the construction of the Third Jewish Temple, which has not even stated construction as of this writing. The relocation of the U.S. embassy to West Jerusalem under President Trump, along with the official recognition of West Jerusalem as Israel's capital, seems to align closely with a hardline Zionist agenda. This move can be seen as a step towards the ultimate goal of removing the remaining Palestinians from Jerusalem and paving the way for construction of the Third Temple. When this Temple is being built, Israel will be even less concerned with international opinion than usual. The Third Temple is essential for the End Times prophecies to unfold. The Ark of the Covenant might yet to be discovered, maybe squirreled away deep in the Vatican or buried at Qumran. If so, that will galvanize Israel to action and trigger renewed urgency to construct their Third Temple.

On a more comforting note, there are many highly intelligent Christian scholars who dedicate themselves to intense biblical study. Some of their work offers powerful insights that can be both delightful and enlightening. Others produce more scholarly content, which might be less accessible for new Christians to read, but is still valuable. There is an abundance of high-quality biblical scholarship available today, both ongoing and published. For a good beginner's resource summary, consider *New Testament Commentary Survey* by D. A. Carson. The little book you are reading is equivalent to scratching the surface of a planetoid with your fingernail, leaving much more to see.

The Second Half of the tribulation

As the Tribulation progresses into its second half, known as the Great Tribulation, events will become increasingly dire (Matthew 24:15-31, Mark 13:14-27). This period follows the restoration of Israel to its ancestral land, and it will culminate in the Second Coming of the Messiah. Israel will experience a period of prosperity and growth (Deuteronomy 30:5). The second half, or The Great Tribulation will begin when the Antichrist breaks the seven-year peace treaty; halfway through its term, he will take control of the third Jewish Temple and declare himself to be 'God' in the Holy of Holies (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). As absurd as that sounds, this is prophesied, so it will occur. Once it happens, of course, it will be clear to all that he is the Antichrist, empowered by Satan and Biblical prophecy and the Great Tribulation is on.

One result of the Antichrist's actions will be the 'flight of Israel.' A significant portion of the Jewish population, known as the 'remnant', will flee to the mountains and find God's protection for 1260 days, the second half of the

Tribulation (Revelation 12:6). This remnant will initially not recognize Jesus as the Messiah, but will ultimately convert and accept His messiahship just before His Second Coming which occurs three and a half years after the remnant flees to desert. The Tribulation spans seven years, with the second three and a half years being the Great Tribulation. Many think the remnant will flee to Petra in Jordan, but that is not a biblical certainty.

During the 'flight of Israel,' Jesus warns of three significant challenges. First; there is the difficulty for those who are pregnant or who have nursing infants to carry, as the added responsibility and physical demands will hinder and slow their movement. Second; if it occurs in winter, the weather conditions will complicate overland travel and survival. There are no direct roads between Israel and Jordan and likely there will be no gasoline available in any case at this late stage of the Tribulation. So, it is probably shanks' mare for most of the fleeing Israelis. The third difficulty; if it occurs on the Sabbath; because there is no public transport on the Sabbath. All public transportation will likely be nonfunctional by this late stage in the Tribulation.

I have thought it conceivable that Israel could construct an emergency underground transit system—perhaps an automated train operating deep below the surface—easily done with modern tunneling equipment. They could activate it in times of national crises. Yet such a measure seems unlikely, because the Jews do not accept the teachings of The Gospels. So extremely costly preparations based on warnings in the Book of Revelations are unlikely. In Israel, trains and busses do not run on the Sabbath or Jewish holidays, even though essential services like electricity, telephones, and the Military continue.

As the second half of the Tribulation unfolds, the Antichrist will be allowed to cast a powerful delusion upon the world, establishing a global government hostile to both God and His chosen people (2 Thessalonians 2:9–12, Revelation 17:1–4). This era will mark an unprecedented rise in antisemitism, as Satan launches his last, best effort to destroy the Jewish people (Zechariah 12:2–3). I am reminded of a comment my grandmother made during The Six-Day War: *"It sure seems like the Jews can't catch a break, don't it?"*

This rise in antisemitism will have a sinister objective: Satan seeks to prevent the Jewish people from calling on Jesus to return, which is a necessary precursor to Christ's Second Coming. If Satan can destroy the Jewish people before they invite Jesus back, that would thwart the Divine plan and extend Satan's rule indefinitely. But Israel will survive.

This time will see of emergence of false messiahs and false prophets, who will perform miraculous signs designed to deceive (Matthew 24:24–25). I suspect some will perform the so-called "Messianic miracles" to bolster their claims of authority. Although these miracles hold no Messianic validity, the false messiahs of Scripture will likely exploit them to magnify public deception. The media, with its enthusiasm to amplify, could present these acts as proof of Divine validity. Yet, the concept of Messianic miracles originates from Pharisaic tradition, not biblical truth. Any performance of them indicates spiritual potency, not Divine validity.

The Second Coming

When the Second Coming occurs, it will be a universally visible event. Jesus will descend from heaven on the clouds with great power and glory. This will be witnessed by all humanity (Mark 13:26). In that moment; a profound lament will arise across the Earth, as many will realize it is now too late to accept Jesus' offer of grace (Matthew 24:28). With His appearance, the opportunity for salvation will be gone. Grace is off the table and no longer available—its era will have ended—and judgment begins. This explains the lament as those who have rejected Jesus face the realization of their lost opportunity.

Even as The Second Coming will occur at one specific location, it will be visible to everyone. Jesus said, *"Wherever the carcass is, there the vultures will gather"* (Matthew 24:28). This likely refers to the convergence of multiple signs and events that signal His return. Further, it seems "the carcass" may symbolize Israel, while "vultures" could represent Gentile armies or many other visible signs leading up to this moment. That is a popular guess on that.

It is thought by many that The Jewish remnant who flees, will find refuge at Petra, the ancient Nabataean capital in southern Jordan, also referred to as Bozrah in Hebrew. Repeating, that is just speculation. God's supernatural

provision will ensure that His people are protected and cared for just as He has prepared a place for believers in heaven (Revelation 12:6). While the Bible provides limited details, we can trust that God's plan will unfold perfectly, even when it surpasses human knowledge and understanding. (Proverbs 3:5-6; Isaiah 26:3-4).

The Millennial Kingdom

The Millennial or Messianic Kingdom refers to the thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ on Earth. What the first Adam lost—the last Adam, Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:45-47)—will reclaim. He will reign as the God-King from Jerusalem, fulfilling God's promises and establishing a time of unparalleled peace and righteousness. Having conquered sin and death, Jesus will rule gloriously, inviting all believers to share in the joy of His Kingdom.

This period, as described in Revelation 20:2-6, will fulfill the four unfulfilled Jewish covenants and demonstrate the culmination of God's promises to Israel. Jesus will sit on the throne of David (metaphorically) fulfilling the prophecy of His eternal kingship over Israel (Luke 1:32-33). This assures us of the physical return of Jesus to establish His Kingdom, a promise we can trust completely.

The Four Unfulfilled Jewish Covenants;

The Abrahamic Covenant

This established in Genesis 12:1-3, 13:15, and 17, contains God's promises to Abraham: to bless him and his descendants, make his name great, and form his progeny into a great nation. This covenant also guaranteed that Abraham's descendants would possess the specifically defined Promised Land. While Israel exists today, historically it has never fully occupied all the territory described in Genesis 15:18-21. Main stream theological tradition interprets this as indicating that parts of the covenant remain unfulfilled and will be realized in the future Millennial Kingdom. This Millennial Kingdom interpretation is particularly popular among dispensationalist and in some evangelical traditions.

The Land or Palestinian Covenant also known as the Deuteronomic Covenant;

Palestinian Covenant is a modern term for the Land Covenant. Sorry, I know that is three names for the same thing; Palestinian, Land, Deuteronomic 30:1-10 warned Israel that disobedience would result in dispersion among the nations, while also promising a future regathering. This pattern has occurred twice in history. The first dispersion was the Babylonian Captivity (586 BCE), followed by the return and rebuilding during the Persian period (538-444 BCE). The second dispersion began with the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, leading to the Jewish diaspora. A partial regathering began again with the establishment of modern Israel in 1948, although many Jewish people remain scattered worldwide. Theological interpretation of Deuteronomy 30:1-10 considers that a complete future regathering has been promised and anything promised will occur.

The Davidic Covenant:

The Davidic Covenant recorded in 2 Samuel 7:8-16, contains four perpetual promises: an eternal house (dynasty), an eternal throne, an eternal kingdom, and an eternal person. Jesus fulfills the promises of the eternal dynasty and the eternal person. Also, His lineage is from David (Matthew 1:1; Luke 1:32-33). So, while these aspects are fulfilled, the promises regarding the throne and kingdom await fulfillment when Jesus will reign as King from David's throne in Jerusalem, that will be during the Millennial Kingdom. This is the main traditional Christian interpretation of how these promises are/will be fulfilled.

The New Covenant:

This is prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and established through Jesus Christ. Note that Hebrews 8:8-13 is quoting Jeremiah 31:31-34 connecting the Old and the New) introducing the promise of salvation by grace. While this covenant currently offers salvation to all people, its specific promises to Israel as a nation are partially unfulfilled. Based on Romans 11:25-27, Israel's national salvation will occur during the End Times, when the Jewish people will recognize Jesus as their Messiah. So, this has both present and future fulfillment aspects.

The Tribulation is generally understood to precede the Messianic Kingdom. According to this interpretation, the seven-year period begins with the Rapture and concludes with Christ's Second Coming. This time serves dual

purposes: God's continued work with Israel and judgment upon those who have rejected Him. During this period, Scripture describes the rise of the Antichrist, who will establish a global government hostile to God. The final three-and-a-half years, termed the Great Tribulation, will be a time of intense persecution when The Antichrist will force the mark of the beast on many and will execute many refuseniks. (Revelation 13:16-17).

The Church (believers) will be removed before these events unfold. By the time of Christ's return, the Jewish people will be regathered (Deuteronomy 30:3; Mark 13:27), many will recognize Jesus as Messiah (Zechariah 12:10-14), and they will be restored to the Promised Land under His rule (Isaiah 40-66). While salvation through Christ is available to all people today, these passages suggest a future widespread recognition of Jesus among the Jewish people.

The Millennial Kingdom is described in Scripture as a thousand-year reign of Christ (Revelation 20:4-6), characterized by unprecedented peace and prosperity. Biblical prophecies portray this era as a time when creation itself is transformed, with death and illness greatly diminished (Isaiah 65:20). Jerusalem will serve as both the political and spiritual center of the world during this period. The prophets provide detailed descriptions of this era of divine rule and global harmony (Micah 4:2-4; Isaiah 32:17-18; 61:7; 40:1-2; 9:3-7; 11:1-10; Zechariah 8:3).

This theological framework understands these prophecies as requiring Jesus Christ's physical presence on Earth. While various interpretations of millennial prophecies exist within Christian theology, the core message remains: God will faithfully fulfill His promises according to His perfect timing (Proverbs 3:5-6; Psalm 37:4-5; Isaiah 26:3-

The four unfulfilled Jewish covenants awaiting full realization, with the Messianic Kingdom serving as the context for their fulfillment. According to premillennial eschatology, The Messianic Kingdom is the culmination of God's covenant promises to Israel. While biblical prophecies about the End Times, particularly in Daniel and Revelation, contain complex imagery which has provoked intense scholarly debate, the foundational message remains consistent: God will fulfill His covenant promises according to His timing. The complexity of prophetic details does not overshadow the core biblical instruction; trust in God's sovereign faithfulness (Psalm 37:4-5; Isaiah 46:10-11). Daniel himself acknowledged that some prophetic visions would remain 'sealed until the time of the end' (Daniel 12:9).

Living a Christ-Centered Life

Understanding the reality of Jesus and God's desire for your happiness and success—rooted in humility—can transform your life. As you deepen your relationship with Christ, you will see positive changes unfold. Keep Jesus at the center of your thoughts, bringing Him into every aspect of your daily life. Do not leave Him confined to the Bible on your desk. Faith must be lived out to have true meaning. Continuously pray for wisdom from the Holy Spirit and seek the fullness of His sevenfold ministry. Over time, you will notice things aligning in your favor. Remain joyful and patient, trusting in God's provision and timing. Faith, not fleeting human emotions, is the foundation of a life rooted in God's promises.

As blessings flow into your life, remember your highest calling: to share The Gospel. Jesus commanded, "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation*" (Mark 16:15). This global mission is God's plan—there is no Plan B. Christianity is an active faith, requiring both belief and action. James reminds us that "*faith without action is dead*" (James 2:26). Each day is a gift; use it meaningfully for God's Kingdom. Whether through church, mission groups, or your own initiatives, God will guide you as you do His will. Sharing The Gospel is the most important task anyone can undertake in this life, storing up eternal treasures in Heaven. (*Matthew 6:20; 1 Timothy 6:7*)

Preparing for Eternity

Life is short, and our days are numbered. We all leave our worldly possessions behind. Use your time wisely to build a legacy of faith and service. As Jim Elliott said, "*He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.*" Earthly possessions are temporary, Heavenly rewards are eternal. Serving God out of love is the ideal, but starting with a desire to store up rewards in Heaven is fine and leads to spiritual growth. God has a plan for your life—one better than any earthly dream you may have had. Trust Him to guide you on this path.

A personal relationship with Jesus is the key to accessing God. Jesus declared, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6). Believing in Jesus’ sacrifice and resurrection secures your place in the Book of Life. This belief should be lived out through consistent faith and practice. Scripture reminds us that names in the Book of Life remain significant through steadfast faithfulness. (*Daniel 12:1; John 1:12*) You don’t want your name in the Book of Live to become trivial because you became unfaithful.

Living Out Your Faith

Believing in Jesus is only the beginning; practicing your faith brings true freedom. Start small, like an apprentice learning a trade, and gradually move toward God. Though the journey may feel slow initially, it becomes easier as you grow in faith. Shedding the burdens of sin allows you to move more freely toward God’s purpose for your life. Pray for wisdom, trust God’s timing, and live with a heart set on His eternal promises.

Receiving Christ means recognizing Him as Savior and inviting Him into your life. It involves a shift in priorities which is a form of repentance. Trust that Christ will never ask more of you than you can handle. He knows your strengths and weaknesses better than anyone, and He will guide you lovingly and faithfully.

Jesus once told a man who wanted to bury his father before following Him, *“Let the dead bury their own dead”* (Matthew 8:22), underscoring the urgency of prioritizing salvation over worldly concerns. Sharing The Gospel is the most significant act you can perform in this life. It brings eternal joy and stores treasures in Heaven. Whether through small acts or bold initiatives, leading others to Christ pleases God immensely. If God is pleased with your motives and actions, your earthly life becomes much better.

Time is shorter than we often realize. None of us are getting out of this this alive, but those who live with faith in Christ will enjoy Eternal Life in Heaven. Earthly wealth and achievements are Mear shadows compared to what God has in store for those who love Him. If your life is centered on God’s will, it creates an eternal legacy. God already has a plan for your life, even though it does not align with the dreams we had as children; I wanted to be Winston Churchill and Flash Gordon at the same time—I liked that space uniform. I am here to tell you that God’s path is better, and it exists for you alone, if you ask Him and trust Him.

Faith in Christ transforms lives and secures eternity. Let this truth guide your decisions and inspire your actions. With Jesus as your foundation, you can live a life of purpose, joy, and fulfillment, knowing that your ultimate home is with Him in Heaven. Keep growing, keep trusting, and let your faith shine brightly for all to see.

There is a difference between God asking you to do something impossible or asking you to do something you would *really* rather not do, like giving up a bad habit. You must be willing to give up of what God wants you to give up in order to become what He desires for you to become.

Here is a cool spoiler alert: Obtaining Divine rewards is not like working a bad job. It is about having faith in God, which will fundamentally transform who you are. Do not allow any person or religion exploit you or ‘play’ you. Trust in God and His Word, not in false religion’s claims. Often, when God asks you to give up a habit, it is because it is sinful and harmful to others. Any pleasure or reward you have been receiving from that habit is spiritually inappropriate. It is always better to make your stand on God’s side of any spiritual divide—full stop. You do inherently know right from wrong. There is no room in the human heart for both God and sin. So, move slowly towards God, that is fine for now—just keep moving.

A note from my experience: Any communication you receive from God will be clear and in language you will understand. I used to worry about whether the little things that happened in life were signs of God’s displeasure or guidance, and whether He would truly care about such small details in the life of someone as insignificant as myself. I found much of that subject too confusing for years until I finally asked God for clarity, and to my surprise, I received clarity almost immediately. This stunned me and taught me that I should be the hero of my own life and not its victim—as Dickens’ David Copperfield advised. If you struggle to understand something about your faith, ask God for help. You may not get such an immediate answer as I did in that one case, but you will get the help you need.

Sometimes, God will even provide insight you were not expecting—this is a delightful experience, and one that many Christians share. While There is no guarantee that God will speak to you directly, He will reveal what He wants you to know, and you will never be disappointed in what He has to say to you, if you trust in Him.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8) In a more immediate sense, if you pursue purity of heart, you will see God’s work in your life more clearly. Being pure enhances spiritual perception and understanding. By focusing on God and His values, that will push aside earthly concerns, making room for God to grant you higher, more spiritually beneficial thoughts and values (James 1:17). Invite the Holy Spirit daily in your prayers to guide you in purity, faith, and to understand God’s will for your life and you will receive that guidance and more. Trust in the improbably good and loving God, and He will surely be good to you. Unlike humans, Jesus has an infinite supply of love, and He delights in sharing it. There is no need to wait on line. No cue for the loo.

We were all created by the same loving God, and each of us has real value to Him. The least significant person on earth has as much value to God as any earthly big-shot does. God loves us all and desires a personal relationship with each of us—really. We are here for a purpose that can only be fulfilled through a relationship with God. Trust in the God who created you in love. It is easy to trust Him because He is the one who made you because of love.

One way to define sin is knowing what you should do and then failing to do it (James 4:17). This is called omission, and it is a challenge to God. Restating this massive Point of Order: It is never a good idea to challenge God—not out of ignorance, as the unknowing; not out of arrogance, as Goliath; not out of foolhardiness, as the Pharisees—not at all, full stop. Unfortunately, many people do not realize when their behavior or thoughts are a challenge to God. So, push yourself to do the right thing, especially when you do not want to, then you will experience spiritual favor.

Keep this in mind: If you worship God, you become more Christ-like. If you worship money, you become more materialistic. We can all see the truth of that all around us in people who lie, cheat, and do anything to advance their earthly interests. It is okay to engage with earthly matters, but they should never dominate your life or lead you to dishonesty. You can make a good living, enjoy your job, and your life, and still be a faithful Christian pleasing to God. That surely seems like a good idea.

Embracing God’s Will and Growing Spiritually

Often the hardest things to let go of are the things holding us back from becoming who God wants us to be. To grow spiritually, you must be willing to release what God calls you to surrender, especially when you do not want to. If you find something about your faith confusing, ask God for help. While the answer may not always come immediately, it will come. Also, sometimes God provides insights you were not expecting and these moments are delightful and deeply affirming. Though we may not hear God’s voice audibly, He will reveal what He wants us to know—if you trust Him.

Pursuing Purity of Heart

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). Striving for purity of heart not only prepares you for eternity but also allows you to see God’s work in your life more clearly. Purity enhances spiritual perception and opens you to God’s higher purposes, pushing aside worldly distractions, well worth the effort. Daily invite the Holy Spirit into your life through prayer. Ask for guidance, clarity, and faith, and you will receive these—and more. Trust in God’s goodness, knowing His love for you is infinite. He is always available and eager to bless His children.

Trusting God’s Love and Purpose

Summarizing some of my favorite Bible points:

You are deeply loved by God.

Every person, no matter how seemingly insignificant, *has equal value* in His eyes. Every one of us.

You were created with a purpose.

This purpose can only be fulfilled through a relationship with God, who made you out of love. Sin is often defined as knowing the right thing to do and failing to do it. (*James 4:17*) This is called omission and it challenges God's authority. Whether out of ignorance, arrogance, or defiance, it is never prudent to challenge the One who created you. Push yourself to do what is right, even when it is hard. This is when real spiritual growth will occur.

In the end, it is not about perfection but more about direction. Keep moving toward God. Let Him transform your life, one step at a time. That, indeed, is a good way to handle life.

A Few Favorite Bible Quotes;

"When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in the Father, and you are in me, and I am in you." John 14:20 Accept Christ and your salvation is guaranteed by God. That was Jesus speaking.

"God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross." Colossians 2:13-14 His sacrifice was completely voluntary, for us.

"I have written this to you who believe in the name of The Son of God, so that you may know you have Eternal Life." 1 John 5:13 God loves you. He has adopted you and all believers into His personal family.

"Even before He made the world God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his personal family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do and it gave him great pleasure." Ephesians 1:4-5 Yes, God really does want you to come to Him through Christ.

"Do not worry about anything, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done." Philippians 4:6 As a Christian, your prayer is a higher, more privileged platform, guaranteeing God hears you.

"But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative -that is, the Holy Spirit- he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you." John 14:26 God gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask. The Holy Spirit will comfort and teach you.

"Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." Luke 11:23, Matthew 12:30 Acceptance of Jesus is an obligate binary choice, you cannot be uncommitted in the sight of God. Acquiescence to evil, because it does not threaten you at the moment, is the same evil in clandestine clothing. "...and then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for me." Martin Niemöller

"But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all wickedness." 1 John 1:9 When you back-slid and do something sinful again, God forgives you if you ask Him.

"And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near." Hebrews 10:25 Join a church and help it grow, which helps you to grow.

"So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." 2 Corinthians 4:18 Lord, please open our eyes to your spiritual realm.

"If God is for us, who can be against us?" Romans 8:31 "You are what the Word of God says you are. You can be what the Word of God says you can be. You can do what the Word of God says you can do." Dr. James Martin: Pastor Mt. Olivet Baptist. Accept Jesus and you are no longer defined by your weak humanity or your old sins but by who you are in God's eyes.

"For I am not ashamed of this good news about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes, to the Jew and also to the Gentile." Romans 1:16 The good news you have received should be shared, do not be timid, tell everyone.

“...and take the helmet of salvation and sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” Ephesians 6:17 Respond, do not react. Arm yourself against the evil of the world. Memorize some of your favorite Scripture.

“Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.” Psalm 119:105 When you become Christian, you become a little light of appropriateness for God in this dark and sinful world.

Living a Life Rooted in Trust and Selflessness

Think of the Bible not as a rule book but as a guide to living a life of trust and selflessness. It is a roadmap for navigating life’s complexities while fostering a deeper relationship with God. Life is about trusting Him and embracing unselfishness—an approach that, paradoxically, opens the door to a far more rewarding existence.

Our purpose is not to glorify ourselves but to reflect God’s love and character. It is far more important that people see God in a favorable light rather than us. Our earthly mission is also to help make God visible to the spiritually blind—the unknowing. Our actions often count more than our words, though words also have their place. Immanuel Kant’s *Argument from Morality* reminds us to; “act rationally in accordance with universal moral law.” A life lived in harmony with moral principles reflects God’s character and draws others toward Him.

Building a Relationship with God

As believers, we are guaranteed citizenship in God’s Kingdom. Life is about more than simply knowing facts about God; it is about knowing Him personally and intimately. While memorizing scripture is valuable, it should never replace a live relationship with God. Experiential knowledge—walking with God in daily life—is far more transformative than mere intellectual understanding of God.

Think of doing God’s work as investing in your heavenly bank account. As “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:18-19), we are called to guide others gently toward the light of eternal life. This is not about pressuring people or forcing faith upon them; it is about lovingly showing them the extraordinary gift God offers. Salvation is a gift, not a reward. When you receive a gift, you use it. If you are given a book, you read it. If you receive a hat, you wear it—unless it is just too ugly and unwearable! Likewise, the gift of salvation is meant to be shared. Sharing it is like fishing; sometimes you catch something, sometimes you do not, but you cannot force the fish to bite. Let The Gospel be your net, gently lifting people from the quicksand of worldly values into the light of life with God. Approach this work with humility and patience, trusting God to work in His own timing.

The Power of Love

Spiritual love—*agape*, is the only force strong enough to overcome the world’s autovectors—greed, hatred, and racism. Jesus’ life is living proof of this. Remember, life on Earth is a one-way journey with no do-overs. We do not set the rules; we only get to live by them. Beware of false religions that distort God’s truths for profit, leading people astray. Grace is available to everyone thanks to Jesus’ sacrifice. This grace allows us to start fresh, again and again. But it is not a license to continue in sinfulness. Strive each day to do your best for Jesus. Influence others for Him with patience and love. Repeating; connect with people instead of correcting them. Empathize rather than moralize. Always seek God’s guidance before looking for earthly solutions and He will lead you.

Eternal Rewards

If you help guide even one person into God’s Kingdom, you are fulfilling your purpose on earth. Helping two people brings even greater joy to God, placing you in a far more valuable spiritual position than simply following the masses who merely gather earthly wealth, often at the expense of others. Your role may seem small, but it is indispensable. Stay humble, remember God values sincerity over ability. As Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 1:12, even our talents are gifts from God, leaving no room for pride in what we did not create or what we do with His gifts.

Keep your focus on Heaven, not earthly success. Serve others by sharing the good news, regardless of their age or understanding. Earthly status holds no significance in God’s eyes. “For everyone will be salted with fire” (Mark 9:49),

a reminder of the judgment we all face. Paul's words in Ephesians 4:1-6 encourage us to live lives marked by humility, patience, and love, worthy of the calling we have received.

Eternity is at stake. For those who do not know God, hell is a grim reality. Your efforts to guide others toward salvation are invaluable. Redemption and grace must be freely accepted—they cannot be forced upon anyone. Consider those you help to save as your treasure stored up for you in Heaven, where they cannot be destroyed or stolen (Matthew 6:20). Exchange your remaining earthly time for eternal rewards. Jesus will guide you with His Word if you are willing and sincere.

Closing thought:

Having worked in ICU units for more than two decades and I have witnessed many people's final moments. Unbelievers often express palpable desperation, wanting to know the truth about God. This is when the simple "elevator pitch" can make a difference: *Accept Jesus as Lord, and you are saved. If you do not Him, you are all the way out.* It takes about eight seconds, about the same time as an elevator trip, Preparing people to accept Jesus before their time comes, is better than trying to explain it in their last-30 seconds of life—few get that opportunity.

A side point here; There are no heavenly ATMs in hell. Blessings and grace cannot be accessed from there.

What Jesus Did for Us;

I close with a recap: Jesus, the Son of God, became human to bear the punishment for humanity's sins. He was crucified, taking the penalty that was rightfully ours. Through His sacrifice, we are forgiven, justified, and reconciled with God the Father. This act of love offers us the gift of salvation and eternal life with Him.

Romans 5:9-10 reminds us, we are reconciled to the Father through Christ's death. Though He was divine, Jesus chose to suffer for our sins (Philippians 2:5-7; Hebrews 2:9). His grace justifies us and secures our eternal place with God. The cross is the ultimate expression of our personal worth to God—He thought we were worth dying for.

Final Thought

When our time comes for us to leave this world, may we do so without fear, stepping confidently into God's Kingdom to receive our rewards. As Dickens wrote in *David Copperfield*: *"It is a far, far better place I go to now than I have ever been before."*

Until we meet in Heaven, let us live faithfully, humbly, and with the love of Christ guiding us.