

but not recognizing in Jesus God's Teacher, even this opportunity to learn the most elemental facts about God's Kingdom would be taken away from them. And the parables accomplished this.

2. This is a sound psychological verity that can be demonstrated over and over again: the right UNDERSTANDING of one lesson puts the active, thinking listener in a position to grasp the next one. In fact, each lesson helps to explain and illustrate the other, and furnish a groundwork for all that follow. To this kind of person, education in the Kingdom's message becomes commonly easier and more enjoyable as he proceeds. But another student in the same class who did not learn the first and fundamental lesson will not only gain nothing from the more advanced lessons. He will be positively confused, rather than helped, by them and what he thought he possessed of the first lesson will make less and less sense to him. Jesus' axiom smacks of that shrewd businessman's observation: "Nothing succeeds like success or fails like failure," or perhaps, "It takes money to make money," or "The rich get richer, while the poor get poorer!" But it is true: even the simplest disciple who has accepted the fundamental lesson and has confessed to Jesus: "I know that you are a Teacher come from God, because no man can do these things except God be with him," is in an excellent position to move to the head of the class.
3. To those who have FAITH in Jesus and some understanding of His mission, the parables will provide more real information. Those who do not have so many wrong notions about what the Kingdom of God has to be can receive much from Jesus. Ideal preparation to receive the Kingdom, according to Jesus, is to take the attitude: "Whatever Jesus says, is right—whether I can understand it perfectly or not, whether it appeals to my prejudices or not, whether it has ever been preached in our church or not, whether Papa ever thought it or not—if Jesus said it, I believe it and that settles the matter!" But to those who have little faith, less knowledge and much prejudice against His ideas, even what shallow faith and limited grasp of the truth they thought they possessed will fade out. In fact, they really have no use for something that does not fit their preconceived schemes and categories into which all truth must fit or be discarded. They have little willingness to be taught by Him, no matter how good His credentials. They have little zeal for righteousness nor honesty enough to decide objectively about Jesus and His message on the basis

of the evidence. So, *he who has not* is no merely unfortunate "have-not" in the modern economic sense, hence, somehow to be excused for the accidental misfortune of being born in that class. Rather, the Lord bares their strictly personal, responsible choice: "THEY have shut THEIR eyes!" (Mt. 13:15) From that point on, their search for the wisdom of God is a pretense, because compromised:

A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain,  
But knowledge is easy for a man of understanding. (Prov. 14:6)  
The mind of him who has understanding seeks knowledge,  
But the mouths of fools feed on folly. (Prov. 15:14)

The entire picture of human reactions to Jesus of Nazareth may be summarized as follows:

He that corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse,  
And he that reproves a wicked man gets himself bruises.  
Reprove not a scoffer, lest he hate you:  
Reprove a wise man, and he will love you.  
Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser:  
Teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.  
The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom;  
And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.  
(Prov. 9:7-10)

TEACHABILITY is the key. What a man brings to the situation is so very critical. If he comes to Jesus with an open, honest mind ready to examine critically whatever Jesus has to say, but yet ready to think with the Lord, letting Him lead, because of what His miraculous credentials prove about His right to speak as He does, that man, says Jesus, is going to go home full and be ready for more of the same.

#### E. THE RECOLLECTION OF A PROPHECY BECAUSE OF A REPLAY OF PERVERSENESS (Mt. 13:13-15)

**13:13 Therefore speak I to them in parables. Therefore** (*dià toûto*) summarizes Jesus' total answer to the question: "Why parables?" (See outline before 13:11.) "I do it, *because they do not see.*" (Cf. Jn. 12:37-43; contrast Mt. 13:16) For people who could not see the supernatural authority implicit in Jesus' miracles, for those who felt no divine judgment in His pronouncements, for those who recognized

no fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in His ministry, in short, for those who saw no substantial reason to permit Jesus to tell anything God wanted them to know about the Kingdom, despite the sufficiency and persuasiveness of His credentials, for such, the door to God's Kingdom is rightly closed. (Jn. 6:36; Jer. 5:21-31)

Although Matthew writes: "I speak to them in parables, BECAUSE . . .," the other Synoptics introduce the seemingly scandalous expression: "For those outside everything is in parables, so THAT they may . . . not understand." (Mk. 4:11, 12; Lk. 8:10) How explain this difference?

1. In terms of form, Matthew's report summarizes the prophecy of Isaiah which he will shortly quote. Stated in the indicative mode, he describes the facts as they are without committing himself at this point on the question of purpose or result. Mark and Luke, on the other hand, since they do not plan to quote Isaiah, telescope their quotation of Jesus' words, so as to retain much of the form and meaning of the prophecy. By so doing, they only appear to have produced an impact different from that of Matthew when they agree that it was Jesus' declared purpose to adopt a special mode of teaching to conceal truth from the outsiders. (*hina* . . . *mè* . . . *mè*, Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:10b) This same sense, however, is implicit in Matthew's quotation of Isaiah 6:10. So Mark and Luke provide a neat condensation of Jesus' words without any loss of meaning, while Matthew's version quotes Him more fully.
2. In terms of sense, Matthew states the facts which called for Jesus' change of strategy: "I speak to them in parables, because, seeing they see not . . . neither do they understand." The construction by Mark and Luke (*hina* . . . *mè* and the subjunctive) indicates Jesus' purpose to keep the message private: "but for others outside everything is in parables, so that they may indeed see, but . . . not understand."

The harmonic result of these considerations is a paraphrase somewhat as follows: Jesus says, "My adoption of the mystery/parable strategy is occasioned by the fact that people, with every opportunity to understand, do not want to understand. My strategy is intended to keep things that way. They do not want to know? Fine, my method will let them have their way, because the presentation of my message in the form of unexplained mysteries guarantees that they will not understand!" So, rather than say with Edersheim (*Life*, I, 583ff)

that "the basis for the different effect on the unbelieving multitude and on the believing disciples was not objective, or caused by the substance or form of these Parables, but subjective, being caused by the different standpoint of the two classes of hearers toward the Kingdom of God," we should admit that the difference was both subjectively and objectively caused. How many of these parables, in fact, were easy to understand for even the closer, more attentive disciples? No, *the mysteries of the kingdom* were objectively genuine mysteries, i.e., unknown and unknowable to everyone, disciples and indifferent alike, until each individual decided to come to Jesus for explanations, or to disregard these dark sayings as completely unintelligible, unimportant and unworthy of further attention. Because of the barrier to understanding that most men had erected against Jesus' truth, He obliged them by erecting His own barrier between them and the truth itself. When anyone abandons his own barrier to get behind Jesus' barrier to know His truth, Jesus gladly reveals His secrets to him.

The fact that Jesus intentionally purposed to hide truth from people stuns the conscience of some, but must not be explained away as if He could not, nor should not, have done so. His historical situation demanded that He do it. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 583ff) has correctly noticed that the Lord is not simply beginning at this point to give primer lessons suited to little children. Nor is He hoping to recruit disciples by this method. Rather, He is driving adults to decide about truth already plainly taught them both in Christ's earlier teaching and in His mighty works. He knew that plain truth openly stated now would have served only to alienate any but those few genuinely committed to Him. Rather than drive them away permanently, He mercifully holds them at arm's length until the scandal of His humanness be eclipsed by the glorious vindication of His proper deity at the resurrection.

The very idea that a merciful God should play the game this way is so jolting to some that they eviscerate this bold purpose clause. They suggest with Bales (quoting McNeile, *Jesus The Ideal Teacher*, 126, italics his): ". . . in accordance with a well-known Hebraic idiom, the *result* is ironically described as a *purpose*." It is true that these debated words describe the inevitable result of Christian preaching, because when Jesus purposes a thing He produces results, especially these results! But anyone who argues that men's blindness to truth is a result of His method must admit that the Savior could

have foreseen this result. So, by His deliberate choice of the method purposely willed that result. Further, this surprise maneuver of Jesus harmonizes perfectly with God's plan to send upon men, who refuse to love the very truth that could have saved them, the full force of evil's delusion, so that they put their faith in what is false. Their condemnation is just, because they not only enjoy evil, but have no confidence in the truth. (Study 2 Th. 2:10-12.)

13:14 **Unto them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9, 10.** This noticeably unusual expression (*autois anapleroutai*), unlike the more usual statements for fulfillment of prophecy, seems to suggest a framework of truth the details of which perhaps many a situation could amply satisfy. (Cf. Jn. 12:40; Ac. 28:26, 27) For further illustrations of Matthew's varied use of "fulfilled prophecy," see the special study at pp. 81-86, Vol. I, "How Does Matthew Use the Prophecies?" In fact, Isaiah did not prophesy specifically regarding the contemporaries of Jesus, but regarding those of his own generation. Nor is the Lord affirming that that ancient prophet had accurately foreseen across 750 years the very reaction to Messiah's ministry here depicted as real. Although *this people* (13:15) is the same Hebrew nation, Isaiah was simply discussing another generation. Nevertheless, as the Master hastens to show, the prophet's words so well delineate a mentality of indifference, prejudice and moral perverseness that Isaiah's expressions may be used again to picture the identical negative reactions to Jesus. The result, then, of Jesus' preaching and His contemporaries' response was the tragic replay of a scene in the drama in which Isaiah and Israel had been the earlier protagonists.

Far from being bleak and foreboding to Jesus' disciple-evangelists, these words comfort bewildered men, stunned by Jesus' apparent lack of success. By citing Isaiah's generation, He reminds them that God's greatest prophets down through the ages have encountered the same spiritual insensitivity and the same lack of response. But, far from offering them merely more company in their misery, He lifts them into the same mighty work where God's finest prophets had toiled. If this text applies principally to Jesus' relation to His listeners, it finds application over and over again in the experience of His heralds. Any unsuccess they would encounter had already been foreseen and explained by the Lord of the harvest. It was already part of the common problem of God's greatest spokesmen, all part of the program, hence, nothing new or surprising.

**Hear . . . but never understand: why not?**

1. 13:15 **Because this people's heart is waxed gross** (*epachunthe* from *pachuno* whose literal meaning is "to make big, fat, solid, dense"; then by extension becomes: "to render obtuse, insensitive, stupid," Rocci, 1448; Arndt-Gingrich, 644, see the figurative meaning as "make impervious [orig. to water], make gross, dull"). They are insensitive to unwelcome truth, seek reality in unreality, and so become deaf, blind and stupid. **Their ears are dull of hearing:** bored with unwanted lessons, they listen unwillingly. What can you do with people whose *eyes they have closed* and whose mind is closed to evidence no matter how satisfying? This self-chosen blindness is the whole point of this entire section and the reason for Jesus' tactics. Lest the disciple become smug and complacent in his limited knowledge and understanding to the point he quit learning from the Lord, let him see that he is never beyond temptation. (Cf. Mk. 8:17, 18; Heb. 3:13)
2. Because people do not have God's Word abiding in them. (Jn. 6:38; Mt. 22:29)
3. They have no real love for God. (Jn. 6:42)
4. They aim for human praise, rather than God's. (Jn. 6:44)
5. They place ignorant hope on their superficial possession of divine revelations. (Jn. 6:45-47)
6. They are deceived. (1 Ti. 2:14; 2 Co. 11:3; 2 Ti. 3:13; Eph. 4:22; Jas. 1:13ff)
7. They are conceited. (Ro. 1:21, 22; 12:3, 16; 11:25; 1 Co. 3:18; 8:1, 2; 10:12; Rev. 3:18) They are proud of their human wisdom. (Mt. 16:22-23; Ac. 17:16-32)
8. They have no real love for truth: they just do not care about the difference between truth and falsehood. (2 Th. 2:10) They deliberately ignore facts in order to follow their own passions. (2 Pt. 3:3, 5, 8)
9. They measure themselves by themselves. (2 Co. 10:12)
10. They are unwilling to act on the ideas of another (Mt. 11:14, 15; Lk. 7:30ff)
11. They fear men. (Jn. 12:42; Mt. 10:24-33)
12. They trust themselves to be righteous. (Ro. 9:30—10:3; Lk. 7:30)
13. They seek truth in any other place than where it can be found. (Prov. 17:24; 15:14; 14:6; 1 Co. 1:18—2:16; 3:18f)
14. They lack stability. (2 Pet. 3:16; 2 Ti. 3:6, 7)
15. They hate exposure of their evil deeds. (Jn. 3:19-21)

And the list could continue to grow, but is it any wonder that people could *hear* Jesus, *but never understand* Him?

13:15 . . . **Lest haply they should . . . understand . . . and should turn again.** Lest haply, both in Greek (*mépote*) and Hebrew (*pén*), is a conjunction expressing the purpose to remove, prohibit or hinder something one fears or wishes removed, and is used following an action taken to avoid the thing feared. (Gesenius, *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, 678; Arndt-Gingrich, 521) But with what previous action in our present case is this apprehension connected? Who is taking steps to avoid the comprehension of God's message and the consequent repentance and salvation of the Israelites? We must understand Isaiah in order to understand Jesus' use made of his prophecy.

1. In Matthew's letter-perfect citation of the Septuagint translation, rather than the Hebrew as we have it today, it is the people whose mind has grown impervious, whose ears are bored with listening. It is the people who closed their eyes to what was being said, "*in order that they might not ever (= mépote, "lest haply") see . . . hear . . . and understand and repent, and I should heal them.*" The responsibility for any action taken to avoid or hinder comprehension of God's word rests squarely upon the people.
2. The Hebrew of the Masoretic text of Isa. 6:10 quotes God as commanding Isaiah to "make this people's heart fat, their ears heavy and shut their eyes," an action which would have effectively hindered their comprehension, their consequent repentance and God's healing. In this case the responsibility for everything is Isaiah's, hence, God's. Since Isaiah's mission thus conceived would seem to be an absurdity, because he would blind Israel by using the very preaching intended for their salvation, many see God's words as ironically stating as His purpose what He knew would be the tragically unavoidable result. But who can complain to the just Judge of earth that He should purposely close the doors to repentance against His people as a whole, while not precluding the possible salvation of individuals? Further, there is awesome psychological power to harden anyone who steels himself against the continued repetition of truth.

Whereas the current Hebrew text and the Septuagint represent apparently differing textual traditions and it is temporarily impossible to decide which objectively reproduces Isaiah's original, nevertheless

both readings express profound truth confirmed elsewhere on the question. (Hab. 1:5; Ac. 13:40, 41) It should be noticed that Mark's summarization (Mk. 4:11b, 12) agrees in concept with the Hebrew text by putting the emphasis on God's purpose to hinder their sight, repentance and healing. The harmonization of these two versions, i.e., the Hebrew as over against the Septuagint and Matthew, may be stated as follows: God foresaw and preannounced this self-hardening in evil that rendered men completely incorrigible, and purposely sent them a prophet to tell them truth again and again that would make them all the more determined to remain what they were. This self-induced guilt and God's judicial punishment are bound up together, because God created men's mind to work that way.

The goal, as Jesus sees it, of understanding God's revelations is not erudition for its own sake or the satisfying of an uncommitted curiosity, but repentance! Note that men must *turn again*, not "be converted" as in the King James Version, because the responsibility is fully theirs.

**And I should heal them** (*kai iasomai autois*). Juridically, they need forgiveness (cf. *afethè autois*, Mk. 4:12); psychologically, they need healing, because true sanity, health and normalcy can be found only in living in harmony with God, with His truth, in His universe, with His world and His people. (Cf. Ex. 15:26?; Dt. 28:60; Isa. 19:19-22; 30:26; 53:5; 57:14-21; Jer. 17:13, 14; 30:10-17; Prov. 3:7, 8, 16; 4:22; 12:18; 14:30; 15:13; Psalms 38:3, 7, 10, 17)

#### F. REJOICING IN POSSESSION AND THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF PRIVILEGE (Mt. 13:16, 17)

**13:16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears for they hear. Blessed:** the humblest disciple of Jesus who has experienced God's mercy at first-hand is better off, far happier (*makàrios*, see on Mt. 5:3), than anyone else who is a stranger to God, be he among the greatest scholars or sought-after philosophers. Because *your eyes* begins the Greek sentence, it is thrown into special relief, a fact that marks the contrasting results of Jesus' ministry. These men, in contrast to all the unreceptive who refused to be Jesus' disciples, actually experienced realities quite invisible to the unseeing people all around them, because their openness to Jesus as a Teacher let them see in Him the very revelation of God. Others looking at the



same Jesus see nothing but an itinerate rabbi who perhaps should go back to his carpenter-shop.

The situation is similar to a chess-game in progress between two expert players. Beside the table is standing a child who knows the names of the pieces and some of the most elementary moves, and, because of this beginning, is curious to see how the game will proceed. The experts will battle back and forth, thoroughly understanding every move and countermove. Even though the child is watching every play, he does not "see" what is really happening on the board. By contrast, the contestants see it all, experience it all.

**Blessed are your eyes because they see!** What a joy to Jesus to find someone who really is beginning to understand Him and His mission! (Note the contrasts in Mt. 11:25-27; Lk. 10:21-24.) It should now be no surprise that Peter should have confessed Jesus to be the Christ at Caesarea Philippi, because here is the solution to the problem of how God revealed that truth to Peter. Peter arrived at that conclusion, as did the others, because he had seeing eyes to perceive the obvious: God is doing His works and revealing His will by Jesus of Nazareth who must therefore be God's Anointed and Son. It is no marvel that Jesus should again pronounce Peter "blessed" on that occasion, because it is the logical outgrowth of this one.

13:17 For the combination *prophets and righteous men* see Mt. 10:41; 23:29. How *many prophets* longed to see Jesus at work! Not only Moses and Isaiah, but all the rest of those faithful servants of God "were looking and searching hard for this salvation . . . who tried to find out at what time and in what circumstances all this was to be expected." It had to be revealed to them that the predictions they made about Christ and His Kingdom were for the Christians, not for themselves. Even angels long to catch a glimpse of these very things! (Cf. 1 Pt. 1:10-12) It is not at all surprising to feel the yearning expressed by other voices out of the intertestamental Jewish literature, crying:

Blessed be they that shall be in those days,

In that they shall see the good fortune of Israel which God shall bring to pass in the gathering together of the tribes . . .

Blessed shall they be that shall be in those days,

In that they shall see the goodness of the Lord

which He shall perform for the generation that is to come,  
Under the rod of chastening of the Lord's anointed (sic,  
"Anointed"?)

. . . A good generation (living) in the fear of God  
in the days of mercy.

(Psalms of Solomon 17:50; 18:7ff)

In fact, during the period between the last of the great OT prophets and appearance of John the Baptist, the voice of God was silent. This silence was painful to the thoughtful Jew who felt abandoned in a hostile world. Contemplation of Israel's predicament in that tormented time drove him to seek answers to this chafing situation and to study all previous revelations to sieve from them the solution. This contemplation and these studies produced a body of literature practically unknown to most modern Christians, i.e., that apocalyptic literature included in what is known as the "Pseudepigraphical Writings." Whatever else may be said about or against these books, the fundamental issue in them is: "When and how will God's Messiah and His Kingdom right all these wrongs, establish righteousness, peace and blessing in our land?"

Before we leap to criticize these Jewish thinkers, let us recognize that THEIR question states precisely our own yearning! Some of their guesses were quite close; others were wide of the mark. If there be any similarity between certain declarations of Jesus or certain of His viewpoints of the Kingdom, and those of some of the apocalypticists, let it be underlined here that they were guessing; He was not. He was revealing the plans of God, whereas they were doing the best they could with the light they possessed, to ink in the details before the fact. Jesus is the fact. Now, in much the same way as they pondered the coming Messianic Kingdom, we speculate about the eternal Kingdom of Christ, how the Second Coming will be organized, the nature of the resurrection body, the geography of heaven and hell. And, if we are not careful, we will be unhappy with the very reality which these sincere, often mistaken, men longed to see and saw it not!

Further, how many *righteous men* down through all the ages of the Church would have rejoiced to be permitted to view even one movie of Jesus' ministry or hear one tape-recording of His voice! How much more to be there in person?

**But they saw them not,** however, not because of the stubborn,

self-induced blindness of those of Jesus' age who refused to see, but because they died centuries before His birth. Though well established by their faith, they did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not reach the goal. (Heb. 11:39, 40)

But if the Apostles and their contemporaries were privileged to witness the very events of which their predecessors could only dream and long to experience, and if the disciples could consider themselves blessed, because just five minutes with Jesus eclipses 5000 years of anticipation, what will they do about the fearful responsibility inherent in that joyous privilege? By reflection, how will the Church of Christ respond to the exceptional opportunity she has enjoyed to know not only the Law and the Prophets, not only John the Baptist, not only the Son of God on earth, not only the Apostles and their ministry, but she has been privileged to live through the very centuries that witnessed the fulfilments of many of Jesus' prophecies. She has personally experienced the execution of a major part of God's design for the Church described in the great Sermon in Parables. Can she see it all? Will she rise to the challenge of responsibility that such favor places upon her?

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Why did Jesus teach in parables? List His reasons.
2. State and explain the psychological principle behind Jesus' strategy as this is seen in His choice of the parabolic method by which He taught. Show how the parabolic method in itself proved to be a screening process by which Jesus divided the audience into two basic groups: those who followed Him out of selfish motives and had no intention of becoming His disciples; and those who, though often weak, wanted above all else to grow in His discipline and serve Him.
3. Define the word "mystery" as used by Jesus in this chapter. What are, then, "the mysteries of the kingdom"? List some of them.
4. Show why the disciples were justified in asking Jesus for an explanation of His practically exclusive use of the parabolic method in this particular sermon.
5. Explain how people who have eyes, ears and a mind can neither see, hear nor understand. What OT passage speaks of this

condition? What was there in this situation faced by Jesus that prompted Him to recognize in the situation itself a clear fulfilling of the ancient prophecy?

6. The OT passage cited by Jesus in reference to the obtuseness of the unbelieving of His generation is not quoted in the NT as you find it in your OT. How do you account for the different rendering Jesus gives of the passage? In what sense is the original author of that text to be understood? Is this difference significant? Was this difference created by Jesus, or did it exist before His time? If so, who made the change?
7. What did God expect of His people when He longed for them to "turn again"? What is involved in this turning?
8. What is the meaning of the allusion to prophets and righteous men who desired to see things observed by the Apostles?

## B. THE MULTIPLICITY AND JUSTIFICATION OF PARABLES

TEXT: 13:34, 35  
(Parallel: Mk. 4:33, 34)

34 All these things Jesus spake in parables unto the multitudes; and without a parable spake he nothing unto them: 35 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying,

I will open my mouth in parables;

I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Do you think Jesus preached this great sermon in parables with the express intent to fulfill the Old Testament prophecy (Psalm 78:2), or do you think that His preaching of this sermon resulted in its fulfilment? Or does this question even correctly state the case? What does Matthew mean by the word "fulfilled" here?
- b. When Matthew affirms that Jesus said nothing to the crowds without a parable, what are we to understand about Matthew's own insertion of Jesus' explanation of His strategy as well as the explanation of the Sower Parable immediately following the public narration of that parable? That is, did Jesus publicly explain the

Sower Parable? If so, how do we explain this present section (13:34)? If not, how do we justify Matthew's insertion of the explanation at that point, i.e., out of order? (13:10-23)

- c. From Matthew's assertion, "All this Jesus said to the crowds in parables . . ." and Mark's notice, "With many such parables he spoke the word to them," what should we conclude about the number of parables told that day, in relation to the actual number recorded by the Gospel writers? What would this conclusion reveal, then, about the accounts of the three Evangelists who report the event?
- d. When compared with the Hebrew original and the Septuagint Greek version of Psalm 78:2, it appears that Matthew has altered the citation. How would you explain and/or justify this?
- e. Since Jesus had already justified His own use of parables (13:10; 17), is not Matthew "gilding the lily" to add this additional justification? What is he really adding to what Jesus had already explained?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Using many similar illustrations, Jesus presented the entire foregoing message to the crowds. To the degree that people were able to hear it with understanding He succeeded in speaking the Word to them. In fact, He told them nothing except in a story form. However, He explained everything privately to His own disciples.

This approach fits the pattern pioneered by the prophet Asaph (Psalm 78:2) who began:

"I will speak to people, using parables.

I will declare things kept secret since the creation of the world."

## SUMMARY

The Evangelists recount only representative stories the Lord used to communicate His truth. To the extent that individuals saw what He was driving at, His message was full of information. However, He gave no public explanations. The mysteries were cleared up for anyone who trusted Jesus enough to approach Him for solutions. This tactic used by the Lord has a well-known and approved Old Testament precedent in the great 78th Psalm.

## NOTES.

**13:34 All these things spake Jesus in parables unto the multitudes.** While Matthew is consciously editing Jesus' message, putting portions of it out of its normal chronological order for reasons suggested by the Spirit, this sentence, however, signals not merely the conclusion of His discourse, but what to the original reader must have been nothing less than amazing. Jesus really succeeded in proclaiming all the preceding information to the people in story form without telling them anything that He did not want them to know. The marvel is even greater, because Mark (4:33, 34) not only agrees that this discourse was nothing but one story after another, but that the ones listed by the Evangelists are but typical samples! *All these things* are still the Word of God, whether people were able to understand it or not. (Cf. "He spoke the Word to them." Mk. 4:33)

**Without a parable spake he nothing to them.** Jesus knew His audience and followed this policy to handle the crowds on this occasion. (See on 13:1, 2.) It cannot mean that He never used another type of instruction in other situations. (Cf. Luke 12 all; 14:25; Jn. 7-10)

**13:35 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet.** See fuller notes on Matthew's use of this expression, because our author's use of this fixed phrase is far more general than ours. (Vol. I, pp. 81-86) Matthew is saying, "What Jesus did fits perfectly (and in this sense, fulfills) the grand prophetic precedent established by the prophet Asaph in his teaching." This fact vindicates the method against any Hebrew scandalized by it.

*Through the prophet* Asaph, not "Isaiah," as several important manuscripts have it. Since the practice for restoring the original text is to prefer the more difficult reading, the inclusion of the word "Isaiah" in the original text would for that reason be preferred, since so obvious an error on Matthew's part would have been corrected by scribes. However, Matthew may have placed no name in his original text. This is a real possibility since such omissions of the prophet's name appear elsewhere. (Cf. Mt. 1:22; 2:5; 12:4; Ac. 7:48) Perhaps several copyists would have been tempted to fill in the gap by inserting the name of a famous prophet. It is conceivable that a scribe, not only aware of the original source of the quotation (Psa. 78:2) and the prophetic office of its author (2 Chron. 29:30), added "Asaph." Others,

ignorant of both, "corrected" this to the more familiar "Isaiah," thus producing the mistaken manuscript reading. (See Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 33.)

*Asaph the prophet*, famous musician contemporary with David and author of twelve of Israel's Psalms, left a high standard in educational technique. In the context of Psalm 78, as Delitzsch (*Psalms*, Vol. II, 363) observes:

He here recounts to the people their history, from that Egyptaeo-Sinatic age of yore to which Israel's national independence and specific position in relation to the rest of the world goes back. It is not, however, with the external aspect of the history that he has to do, but with its internal teachings. . . . The poet, however, does not mean to say that he will literally discourse gnomic sentences and propound riddles, but that he will set forth the history of the fathers after the manner of a parable and riddle, so that it may become a parable, i.e., a didactic history, and its events as marks of interrogation and notabene's to the present age.

So the seer Asaph was not inspired to predict anything about Christ's teaching methods. Rather, in the sense that he rehearsed Israel's past in order to point out a moral, his own method actually anticipated and paved the way for Christ to draw illustrations from nature and human life to predict and explain the nature of the Kingdom.

**I will open my mouth in parables;**

**I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world.**

Asaph had really written: ". . . I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us." (Psa. 78:2b, 3) So, here again, Matthew consciously alters the quotation to render even more precise what would have been ambiguous or even untrue had he strictly followed the standard Hebrew or Greek text. In fact, Asaph intended only to reach back into five hundred years or so of Hebrew history, but Matthew wants his readers to note that the revelations Jesus gave antedate the creation of the world and come from the mind of God! To do this he rewords the latter sentence and chops off the mention of the traditional history of Israel, because he must affirm what is true of Jesus' revelations. While His method finds its superlative antecedent in Asaph's approach, the content of His message absolutely surpasses that of the

prophet. Matthew's Lord, in contrast to the great Asaph, reveals *things hidden from the foundation of the world!* This sudden change of text is calculated to shake the complacent Hebrew reader. Matthew says, "To you who are accustomed to great teachers who reach back to the beginnings of things for their teaching (cf. *ap archês*, LXX Psa. 77:2), I present you a Teacher who reveals things unknown even before there was a beginning. (*apò katabolês [kòsmou]*)!" By so doing, Matthew nudges his readers to ask: "Who IS this Jesus of Nazareth anyway?"

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. How many parables did Jesus present to the multitudes in this one great sermon? How do you know?
2. Did Jesus ever explain a parable to the crowds on this occasion?
3. Name the prophet and locate his text that Matthew cites to justify Jesus' use of parables.
4. Explain why Matthew does not quote verbatim the text of the very author cited to prove Jesus' method a sound approach. In what way(s) does Matthew's version of the prophecy differ both from the Hebrew text and its Greek translation?

### C. THE APPRECIATION FOR AND USE OF ALL TRUTH

TEXT: 13:51-53

51 Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea.  
52 And he said unto them, Therefore every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.

53 And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why would Jesus ask His disciples whether they understood everything He had preached that day?



## APPRECIATION

13:51-53

## THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

- b. Do you think they really did understand? Perfectly or partially? If you think they only partially understood what He had been driving at, how would you explain their answer?
- c. If you are convinced that they understood only partially, how would you explain Jesus' immediate reaction to their affirmative answer? That is, He goes ahead with His discussion as if their answer were in some way representative of their actual situation.
- d. Have you ever heard of a scribe who ever became a disciple to the Kingdom of God? Practically every scribe in the New Testament was hostile to Jesus. Is Jesus picturing a practical impossibility, as if He were speaking humorously of a Jewish rabbi's eating a ham sandwich on the wedding day of a Catholic priest? What is there about a scribe that makes Jesus' illustration live for the disciples, and, at the same time, urges them to achieve everything implied in the images here presented?
- e. What peculiar treasure possessed uniquely by a Christian scribe would so enrich him that he could share "things old and new"?

## PARAPHRASE

"Have you understood all these stories?"

They answered Him, "Yes, we have."

Then He continued, "This is why every theologian who has trained in the disciplines of God's Kingdom, like the master of the house who can provide out of his stores what is new as well as what is old, can teach old, long-known truth as well as the most recent revelations."

## SUMMARY

Before concluding the private session with His disciples, Jesus checks the disciples' own comprehension of the lessons. Since they affirm some understanding of His meaning, He can set before them the advantages possessed by a Christian scholar and teacher.

## NOTES

13:51 **Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea.** Earlier (13:10), the puzzled disciples had questioned the propriety

of His parabolic procedure, since it tended to obscure, rather than reveal, truth. Here the Lord pushes them to re-examine their own previous evaluation, because of their now greater understanding both of His methodology and the message thus relayed to them. They confess the effectiveness of the method. The highest theological truths have just been imparted impartially to everyone by means of the simple, accessible story. These disciples must see that high-sounding theological jargon and dry, uninteresting lectures cannot stimulate the imagination nor fire the will nor challenge the mind nor smite the conscience like well-planned, pointed illustrations.

The explanations Jesus gave of some of the parables doubtless provided insight into the meaning and application of the others. (Cf. on Mk. 4:13 before Mt. 13:18 notes.) Thus, in this limited sense, the disciples could honestly answer affirmatively. Naturally, fuller perception of the deeper significance of all the parables awaited the disciples' personal experience of the truths taught. Looking back on their positive answer that day, they must have smiled at how little they had really comprehended, so inadequate had been their ability to fathom their meaning or project into the future any clear outline of what the Kingdom might be or accomplish.

13:52 **Therefore** (*dià touto*), "On the basis of your answer, i.e., because you have understood these truths presented in parabolic form, I can now take you one step further." As conceded before, the disciples' subjective understanding was probably far below Jesus' objective intentions. Nevertheless, the Lord does not bother at this point to chide any overconfidence evident in their words, because He wants them to arrive at another, higher point in their growth. And, if He succeeds in bringing them to that point, they will themselves fill in any gaps in their knowledge. He sets before them an ideal that, whether He ever inspired them with supernatural guidance or not, would make these men avid students of God's Word and lead them to heights of growth in holiness and wisdom they had probably hitherto imagined inaccessible except to the well-born or especially gifted.

The phrase, **every scribe who has been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven**, must have seemed to the disciples almost itself a contradiction, since at practically every point at which they came into contact with Jesus' ministry, the scribes as a class had done everything in their power to hamper Jesus' progress, and logically so, because His theological position so often collided with their own.

(See notes on Mt. 2:4; 5:20; 7:29; 8:19; 9:2, 3 and 12:38 for a description both of their origin, position and relation to Jesus.) Despite their foibles, the scribes walked in the long shadow cast by one skilled scribe whose godliness and scholarship established a high, noble tradition: Ezra! (Cf. Ezra 7:6, 10)

1. He set his heart to study (what an engrossing, lifetime job!)
2. the law of the Lord (not merely oriental wisdom)
3. and to do it (how often a rare quality in theologians?)
4. and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel. (He labored not for his own good and glory, but for others.)

Other men whose gifts differ may serve God with their hands, but the ideal scribe loves and serves God specifically with his mind. (Jewish rabbis knew that the pursuit of the Law and earning a living and practical helpfulness are not mutually exclusive, the question being one of emphasis, of zeal to study and of preparedness to teach.)

*Every scribe* that amounts to anything in Jesus' service must *have been made a disciple*. The scholar who, because of his relative achievements in the disciplines of the Kingdom of God, somehow forgets his parallel role as a DISCIPLE of Jesus, is a positive danger for all under his influence: he must never get to the point where he ceases to learn from the Lord! The disciple can become a scribe, but the scribe must never cease being a disciple with all the obedience and teachability that that word implies.

But when Jesus spoke of *scribes*, did He mean them as a class existent in His day, or is He speaking more generally?

1. A *scribe* specifically? If so, He means the typical Jewish rabbi already educated in the Law, when converted to Jesus' view of the Kingdom, could make a tremendous contribution. Look at the excellent work of that budding rabbi Saul of Tarsus when once he became a disciple trained in the spirit and power of God's Kingdom! What a wealth of experience and knowledge of OT religion he brought to his service as a Christian Apostle!
2. A *scribe* generically? Any disciple, well-read in the Word of the Kingdom, would be able to function as a theological teacher, expounding the Word with understanding, clarity and authority. Is Jesus, because of the disciples' theological training in His school, describing His men as God's servants at the level of rabbis? Does He mean that what the scribes were to the OT, the disciples would

become to the Gospel? (Cf. Mt. 23:34)

If He intended the former, He could hope for very few applicants from that group (however, see Mt. 8:19!), but just to mention them fixes in the disciples' mind an ideal of zealous students and defenders of God's Word and teachers of the people.

Even as a provident master of the house keeps a larder well stocked with vintage wines and cheeses, heirloom lace and silver, as well as fresh fruits and vegetables and freshly-slaughtered meat, to be served on recently acquired table service, so it is with the Christian scholar. His *treasure* is his own personal repository of information and experience, his mind and memory. (See on 12:35 for fuller notes on this psychological reality.) Any learning, acquired by special studies or gained through experience, which helps the Christian better to understand God, His Word and His creatures, is his *treasure*. Consider, then, how rich indeed must have been the experience, how thorough the education, of these very Apostles. Despite their lowly beginnings, their day-by-day experiences in the constant company of Jesus of Nazareth while learning at His feet were beginning to qualify them as *scribes discipled for the Kingdom*. Only the most spiritually insensitive could have shared what these Twelve experienced with Jesus without becoming zealous scholars and no mean teachers of the Word.

**The bringing forth out of his treasure** speaks of the altruistic and effective use of what is there, distributing according to the need. There can be no "ever learning and never coming to the use of the truth" for the good of others. What, then, are the *things new and old* which this Christian OT scholar and teacher is to share?

1. Is Jesus still on the subject of parables considered as a didactic method? If so, the *old* refers to any previous knowledge of nature or human affairs or divine revelation that could be brought forth in the service of the Kingdom. Good parables require not only an observant eye, but also an intuitive discernment that sees in the *old*, familiar facts parallels with which to illustrate and communicate the *new*, unfamiliar ideas to be taught. As an educational methodology, the Lord's principle functions marvelously as it takes the mind of the hearer from the known to the unknown.
2. If, on the other hand, Jesus intends some more specific knowledge, then by "old" He points to the rich, many-sided revelations of God already given through patriarchs, Moses, the prophets, poets,

kings and priests, precepts and statutes, miracles and signs, which, taken together, were all intended to prepare Israel for her King, Jesus. The "new," accordingly, is the Savior's teaching which leads to the proper understanding of the old and completes it. (Cf. Lk. 24:25-27, 32, 44-48; 2 Ti. 3:15) In this sense, then, the Christian OT scholar not only appreciates the ancient Scriptures, because he reads them in a new light, that of Christ, but also because he grasps clearly the new revelations now unveiled by Jesus, he can share his bountiful treasure in a way that does honor to the Kingdom and enriches all whom he teaches. (Study 2 Ti. 3:14-17 in this connection; 1 Co. 10:11; Ro. 15:4.)

So, the *new and old* are truths, as Lenski words it, "not known or taught before or long known and often taught." Many conservatives in Jesus' audience would have rejected the *new*, preferring the *old*. (Cf. Mt. 9:16, 17; Lk. 5:39) Other doctrinaire zealots of modernity would be tempted to despise the old in favor of the most recently revealed truth. But either choice would be equally folly, since it would involve severing ties with all the rich preparations for Christianity that old, long-known truth had made. While there was no more vigorous exponent of Christ's triumph over the Law than Paul, this *scribe* now a *disciple for the Kingdom of God*, like a wise householder, could bring forth the old, long-cherished, now priceless heirlooms of understanding, knowledge and experience out of the OT for the eternal enrichment of Christianity. The so-called "Jewish Gospel" of our author, Matthew, is another superb illustration of this tasteful, harmonious blending of the best of ancient Judaism in the service of NT revelation. The Epistles to the Romans, the Galatians and the Hebrews, as well as numerous sections in others, point up the glorious realization, in Christ and the Kingdom, of all the truly essential concepts not only of Mosaic religion, but of the patriarchal faith as well. This merely underscores again the fact that all that is really truth is of necessity old as well as new. Truth is ancient, because, being reality itself, it dates back to the foundation of reality, however long it had been overlooked by man because of his ignorance, neglect and sin. (Cf. 13:35) This is why it seems new when called to his attention. (Example: 1 Jn. 2:7, 8; 3:11; 2 Jn. 6) Since the *things* old, here, are the things of God's Spirit, they never become obsolete, breathing forth a new freshness and vitality with each generation of new minds that sets itself to understand them.

Woe be to the Christian preacher or teacher whose life is so full of "busy-work" that he has no time to study the Old Testament! Those who have a grasp of Christ's message will be able, out of both new and old revelations of God's will, to treasure rightly all that is of value and utility and to share its treasures with others. Granted, the New Testament is the will of Christ for the Church, but who can pretend to be qualified to expound even this document, who is an ignoramus of the great 39-stone pyramidal foundation upon which the New Testament is built and of which it is the glorious capstone? Who can read with intelligence *Romans*, *Galatians*, *Hebrews*, *Revelation*, even *Matthew*, with a view to understand just these superb volumes, who has no time for *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel* and *Daniel* and a host of others? Will we ever grow to be able adequately to appreciate and properly use every truth, old or new, that God puts into our store?

**13:53 When Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence.** For the trusting reader, unoverburdened with scholarly prejudices, this sentence obviously signals the final conclusion of Jesus' great discourse, especially for the disciples listening in private to His explanations. But some modern scholars (e.g. of the *Redaktionsgeschichte* school) suppose that this verse just cannot be a simple declaration of fact that Jesus simply finished this series of parables and left. They see it as a literary device of Matthew (whoever HE was!) whereby the five major sections of this Gospel—i.e., 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1—are brought to an end. (See R.V.G. Tasker, *The Nature and Purpose of the Gospels*, 35.) But granted for sake of argument that Matthew, for theological purposes, includes some such sentence at the conclusion of the five major sections as asserted, what would that prove about their authentic historicity, i.e., about the objective reality that Jesus really concluded the particular message in question and left the scene for another destination? It is a false dichotomy to demand that such sentences be read EITHER historically or theologically, when it is intellectually honest and possible to have it both ways. The deliberate bias that forces such a choice is the conclusion of some that the Gospel cannot be read as a simple, forthright historical statement where it makes historical declarations. Despite any supposed "theological overtones" in this verse (13:53), the evidence for its probable authenticity as history is seen in these factors:

1. its naturalness as the conclusion of the event narrated, which,

without it, would have been left suspended;

2. its true chronological relationship to the subsequent events recorded by Mark 4:35;
3. and in the greater incredibility of deception by Matthew. That is, if our author has deceived us about a simple conclusion to a sermon, upon what grounds would or could we trust him to speak truly about the resurrection, since they stand upon the same grounds for us; i.e., his testimony?

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. What is a scribe? What was the relation of the scribal class to the nation of Israel? What was their usual response to Jesus?
2. In what does the scribe's position and preparation consist that makes him an especially valuable asset to the Kingdom once he has become a disciple of Jesus?
3. Identify the "things new and old" which the provident master of the house could bring forth from his treasure.
4. Now that you have seen the entire sermon in parables, discuss what Jesus taught about the Kingdom, its nature and its various aspects. When did it come, or when will it arrive? Who is to be in it? Who were called "the sons of the Kingdom"? Should we pray for it to come today? What importance did Jesus attach to the Kingdom in His teaching? How important did He say it should be to His listeners? In answering each of these questions, cite key words, or, if possible, the entire texts that illustrate your answers.
5. List as many parabolic figures as you can, that demonstrate the fact that the Bible does NOT necessarily mean the same thing every time it uses the same figurative expressions. To start you out, remember that the lion can be a symbol either for Jesus, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah," or of Satan who walks around as a roaring lion. Sheep are symbols both of Jesus, God's Lamb, as well as the errant people of God. Now make your own list. Why? Because a lot of bad theology is built on mechanical use of Bible figures of speech: parables, allegories and similes.
6. When and in what way are some of the features of God's Kingdom, predicted in any of these parables, already in the process of being fulfilled, or are already complete?
7. What is proved about Jesus in this sermon?

## THE GLORIOUS LORDSHIP OF JESUS CHRIST

*As seen in the great Sermon in Parables, Matthew 13*

While one of the distinguishing characteristics of Jesus' message is His absolute respect for human free-will, it should be equally clear to all that only He who is a true Lord can permit Himself this luxury! Only He who enjoys a position of true power could permit the following situations to exist:

1. In the Parable of the Sower and varying types of terrain, the great truth everywhere noticed is the absolute freedom of the individual who can actually accept or reject the Word of the Kingdom. This freedom to choose is also the freedom to become a rebel against God's good government, but Jesus knows that this is a worthwhile risk in view of the end He has in mind.
2. In the explanation of His own methodology (13:10-17) to whom does Jesus entrust the tremendous truths that would bring about far-reaching revolutions in the world? To a Peter, or a Matthew! But who are they? "Rustic peasants from the provinces!" many would have sneered, "A minimum of good sense would have dictated greater seriousness in choosing more qualified personnel, perhaps from the nobility, in order to propagate a message of such consequence!" Nevertheless, only a truly powerful Lord can permit Himself to use weak men do His bidding, to show that the greatness of the power is not of them, but in His own majesty and might.
3. In the Parable of the Weeds, the Lord of the field confidently orders His servants regarding the Wheat and the Tares: "Let them both grow together until the harvest; and at the time of the harvest I will say to the harvesters . . ." Evil can remain in the world clear up to the judgment, and Jesus does not feel Himself at all menaced by this fact! He will have the last word. (v. 41)
4. In the Parables of the Mustard Seed and of the Leaven, Jesus promises that the Kingdom of the great God of heaven, Creator of the heavens and the earth, will have an insignificant beginning! We usually judge the success of a thing by the auspiciousness of its beginning. Therefore, how is it born? great and powerful? or weak and hidden off in a corner somewhere? One can measure the stellar distance that divided Jesus from the politicians of this



world, on the basis of His brothers' pushy advice: "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples may see the works you are doing. For no man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." (Jn. 7:3, 4) Jesus, however, did not hesitate to describe His Kingdom as having a disappointingly unpromising birth. Further, He affirmed that its growth would be gradual, almost imperceptible, however sure. This was bad news for the public relations men who needed exciting material to make a sensational proclamation of the Kingdom. But this great Lord believes in "truth in advertising," even if many customers refuse to buy, because He is a true Lord who can well afford to tell people just how it is and still expect them to respond.

- 5: In the Parables of the Hid Treasure and the Precious Pearl, Jesus even pictures His precious Kingdom and His priceless truth as being discovered by chance, quite accidentally, by a fortunate person. Worse yet, He permits His truth to be freely evaluated along with all the other truth and so-called realities of this world! How confident He is that the supreme value of His Kingdom will not only be apparent, but especially desirable above everything else!
6. Jesus teaches, further, so as to hide certain truths from people, and, paradoxically, this fact demonstrates His Lordship. It is easy to feel a tender compassion for those few dear ones bound to us sentimentally. Sometimes this causes us to express an impulsive kindness toward them which actually frustrate our intentions to help them and results in positive damage to their highest good later. But Jesus was not that way: seeing the true need of every single hearer in His audience, and because of His profound love for each one, He composed a message that met their need by hiding under the parabolic form those truths that would have only been distorted by them to their ruin.

It is obvious that, in hiding these truths from people, Jesus feels Himself in a strong enough position to be able to run the risk that they would never have discovered them later when the Apostles would have revealed them in their preaching.

And so it is that Jesus does not impose His regime on anyone—yet. However, only He who enjoys a strong position can permit Himself this luxury, in the sense that He is sure to have the last word and that His truth is the only definitive reality to be reckoned with. The

## GREAT SERMON IN PARABLES

humanist must ask himself at this point, "What is the basis of this confidence of Jesus—uncanny, political astuteness alone?" Even an unbeliever could admit that Jesus acted in character as Lord, because only a true Lord could be patient enough to permit everyone the possibility to accept, or else reject, His Gospel.

## WHAT DOES THIS GREAT SERMON REVEAL ABOUT JESUS?

1. JESUS WAS NO CHILD OF HIS TIMES, gathering up into one message the aspirations and philosophy of the Jewish people! Ederheim (*Life*, I, 597) reminds how un-Jewish—even anti-Jewish—is Jesus' teaching concerning the Kingdom. This point becomes immediately clear when we remember what Jesus did NOT say in this sermon, quite as much as what He did, A.B. Bruce (*Training*, 43) indicated that

The kingdom whereof Jesus was both King and Lawgiver was not to be a kingdom of this world; it was not to be here or there in space, but within the heart of man; it was not to be the monopoly of any class or nation, but open to all possessed of the requisite spiritual endowments *on equal terms*. It is nowhere said, indeed, in the sermon, that ritual qualifications, such as circumcision, were not indispensable for admission into the kingdom. But circumcision is ignored here, as it was ignored throughout the teaching of Jesus. It is treated as something simply out of place that cannot be dovetailed into the scheme of doctrine set forth; an incongruity the very mention of which would create a sense of the grotesque. How truly it was so anyone can satisfy himself by just imagining for a moment that among the Beatitudes had been found one running thus: Blessed are the circumcised, for no uncircumcised ones shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. This significant silence concerning the seal of the national covenant could not fail to have its effect on the minds of the disciples, as a hint at eventual antiquation.

If Bruce's observation regarding the Sermon on the Mount be proper, how much more is it true regarding the Sermon in Parables, where Jesus had every opportunity to sanction His favorite current in Jewish apocalyptic writing! In the light of His further declarations

is it conceivable that He should ever have told the following parable? "The Kingdom of heaven is like a great king who organized his followers into a strong army. Together they marched against a great city to destroy the wicked and establish there the throne of David. Having established the Kingdom by the overthrow of all his enemies, the king ordered the conquest of all surrounding countries until his vast empire covered the earth, guaranteeing thereby to himself and all Israel great wealth and happiness. All the uncircumcised were destroyed and their property was confiscated and distributed among the children of Abraham." If such an illustration seems out of place, if not inconceivable, then, with Edersheim (*ibid.*) we may ask: "Whence this un-Jewish and anti-Jewish teaching concerning the Kingdom on the part of Jesus of Nazareth?"

2. JESUS IS A GREAT PROPHET. In each of the parables some prediction is made relative to the (then) future character of the Kingdom:
  - a. In the parable of the Sower and Soils the varying responses to the Gospel is foreseen and explained.
  - b. In that of the Weeds the presence of evil in the Messianic Kingdom is accounted for and its final removal predicted.
  - c. In that of the Mustard Seed the extensive growth of the Kingdom from a small beginning is foreseen.
  - d. In that of the Yeast the intensive expansion of the Kingdom by the power of its inner vitality is forepictured.
  - e. In that of the Hidden Treasure we see the prediction that the Kingdom's great value would be hidden from all but the fortunate ones who stumble onto it and sacrifice all to acquire it.
  - f. In that of the Pearl Merchant the presentation of the Kingdom-idea on the world market of ideas is predicted as well as its superlative value for those who diligently seek it to acquire it.
  - g. In that of the Dragnet the final separation of good and evil is promised.

Edersheim (*Life*, I, 597f) feels the force of this argument too:

Our second question goes still farther. For, if Jesus was not a Prophet,—and, if a Prophet, then also the Son of God—yet no more strangely unexpected prophecy, minutely true in all its details, could be conceived, than that concerning His Kingdom which His parabolic description of it conveyed. Has

## GREAT SERMON IN PARABLES

not History, in the strange, unexpected fulfilling of that which no human ingenuity at the time could have forecast, and no pen have described with more minute accuracy of detail, proved Him to be more than a mere man—One sent from God, the Divine King of the Divine Kingdom, in all the vicissitudes which such a Divine Kingdom must experience when set up on earth?

Even if, as was suggested in the notes, an unbeliever who had taken Jesus' earlier teaching seriously and studied its implications could have predicted that sooner or later Jesus would have arrived at some of these predictions implied in the parables, nevertheless the ring of divine certainty that we hear in Jesus' voice would be absent from the merely astute political sage. A mere human would have to hedge his predictions with expressions qualifying their likelihood, like: "If things turn out in a given way, then the following may be expected, etc. If not, then perhaps we will see some other phenomenon come to pass . . ." Since Jesus just tells it like it is going to be, we must pronounce Him either mad, or an imposter, or a great prophet worthy of our deepest respect!

3. JESUS IS DIVINE LORD. It is especially fitting that, in the very parable dealing with the thorny problem of continued evil in the world despite the establishment of Christ's Kingdom in it, Jesus' divinity also comes to the fore with a clarity equal to the seriousness of the evil.
  - a. The Son of man owns the field which is the world! (13:24, 37)
  - b. Jesus is Lord of the judgment who can afford to wait until both good and evil are fully mature! (13:30, 41)
  - c. "My barn" into which the righteous are gathered is none other than "the Kingdom" of God (13:30, 43), but it was out of "His (i.e., of the Son of man) Kingdom," that the evil-doers will have been cast! (13:41)
  - d. The ministers of justice directly responsible for the final separation of the souls of men are "His angels," i.e., of the Son of man. (13:41)

Plummer (*Matthew*, 197) asks: "Who is it that makes these enormous claims upon all mankind? Who is it that offers, to those who respond to the claims, such enormous rewards?" Indeed, who?

## SPECIAL STUDY: THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Perhaps the most important question affecting the interpretation of Matthew 13, is, "To what aspect of the Kingdom of God does Jesus refer?." Unless this problem receives a proper answer, unnatural interpretations will be forced upon the stories He told to describe the Kingdom. The essential aspects of a kingdom are themselves multiple, consisting of a king, a territory over which he rules, his subjects, the constitutional expression of the king's will, and the boundaries, or limits, of citizenship in his kingdom. There may be other essentials perhaps, however this multiplicity of essentials forewarns us that, in order to reveal the full nature of His Kingdom, Jesus might make use of various parabolic illustrations to clarify the various features. A system so many-sided as God's Kingdom is just incapable of exhaustive treatment by a single illustration or symbol! If this were untrue, Jesus could have told one, all-inclusive parable and dismissed the crowds that day! (Mt. 13) Let us, therefore, begin by examining the concepts of the Kingdom of God which God had taught Israel to understand, because this instruction served as background for Jesus' use of the same terminology.

## GOD'S UNIVERSAL RULE

It would be instructive here to recall that God's Sovereignty over heaven and earth proceeds in an orderly manner since before the creation of the earth and man upon it. (Dt. 4:32, 39; Psalms 47:2, 7, 8; 93; 95-97, 99; Isaiah 66:1, 2) As Ruler, Judge, Sustainer and Creator of the universe, His Lordship is an eternal Sovereignty which He will surrender to none. (2 Kings 19:15-19; Psalm 83:18; Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 23:24; Zechariah 4:14; 6:5; 14:9; Matthew 11:25; 1 Corinthians 10:26; Revelation 11:4) In this sense, then, God has always reigned and always will. The Kingdom of God in this sense is nothing less than His eternal sovereignty over the universe and all it contains.

## GOD'S KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

Nevertheless, there is also a sense in which God began to reveal a new expression of His rule on earth among men. This He initiated

GREAT SERMON IN PARABLES

by establishing a convenantal agreement with Israel when He freed that nation from Egyptian slavery. (Ex. 19:6) Whereas in the civil legislation God had foreseen the desire for a human king for the orderly exercise of kingdom (Dt. 17:14-20), God Himself remained tacitly the real Ruler of Israel, as also of the rest of the world. (1 Sam. 8:7, 8; 10:19; 2 Sam. 23:3) The political principle is true even here: the king-maker is really king, for God remained Sovereign over the monarchs of Israel. (Dt. 17:15: "You may indeed set as king over you him whom the Lord your God will choose.") And every time those kings forgot the sovereignty of God, they and the whole nation of Israel paid the price of their insubordination.

Nevertheless, all the development of the Kingdom of God in Israel has as its final purpose the readying of a people through whom the coming of God's Anointed might enlarge the bounds of God's earthly rule so as to embrace all men. Predictions picturing this new expression of God's rule began to fork out in two directions:

1. God Himself is coming to earth to rule over Israel. (Zech. 2:10, 11; 8:3; 9:9; 11:12, 13; 12:10; 14:3, 4, 9) He will do this through His suffering Servant and Shepherd. (Zech. 13:7; Mal. 2:17—3:2, 5; 4:3) He would be born as a child upon whose shoulders the government would rest and whose titles, "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace," identify him as truly "Immanuel, God with us" (Isa. 7:14; 9:6; 40:9-11; 42:1-4)
2. During the last of the great world empires, God, who continues to rule in the affairs of men, would "set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor its sovereignty be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever." (Dan. 2:44) The Anointed King over the Kingdom of God would be one

coming with the clouds of heaven like a son of man to the Ancient of Days . . . and to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall never pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed, . . . and the time came when the saints received the kingdom. . . . And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High . . . (Dan. 7:13, 14, 22, 28)

This Kingdom of God, thus, is to be an empire that would surpass the glory of all preceding ones, and, whereas the Kingdom of God in Jewish thought had been limited to Israel, it now becomes increasingly clear that God's design includes the whole world in its scope. (Dan. 2:35)

So, within Israel and beyond it, among the nations of the world, God's Kingdom would grow, wherever His rule be acknowledged or makes itself effectively felt. A Son of David, yet David's Lord (Psa. 110:1; 2 Sam. 7:11-16) would reign over God's Kingdom, yet not over Israel alone, but growing out of Israel, His authority would extend over the last man on earth. (Cf. Psa. 18:50; 117:1; Isa. 11:1, 10; 49:6)

As is evident from this briefest of sketches, "the Kingdom of God" is an expression which was already a complex subject before Jesus ever used it with the original hearers of this great sermon in parables. If any simplistic application of that expression to a limited phase of God's rule would have missed Jesus' meaning, i.e., were a Jewish listener to have applied the message of Jesus in any given parable to, say, the nation of Israel exclusively, he would have totally misunderstood the Lord, to what extent would we blunder, were we to assume that "the Kingdom of God" must always refer exclusively to the Church?

#### EVIDENCES THAT "THE KINGDOM OF GOD" AND "THE CHURCH" ARE NOT STRICTLY SYNONYMOUS NOT TO BE STRICTLY IDENTIFIED

In the overall picture presented by the parables it must be admitted that in the Parables of the Mustard Seed and of the Leaven, of the Hid Treasure and of the Precious Pearl, Jesus seems to be talking about the effective growth of the Church in the world, as well as about her surpassing value because of the truth she proclaims. Nevertheless, even this much precision of identification is modified by emphases evident in other parables:

1. THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER AND SOILS. If it be legitimately assumed that this entire parable pictures the inauguration of the Kingdom of God in the world as well as its continued progress through the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world,

GREAT SERMON IN PARABLES

then it may be said that the true Church is represented by the good soil alone; those who fall from grace, by the rocky and thorny soil. But the way-side soil—or the indifferent individual,—is also part of the total picture of God's Kingdom, in the sense that the Gospel of grace was offered to him too, but he turned it down, not really caring to understand it. In the final judgment, not specifically mentioned by this parable, he will be among the evil who will not be saved (Lk. 8:12), a detail that is, however, covered by other parables. Nevertheless, this non-church member was ever under God's control or Kingdom.

2. **THE PARABLE OF THE WEEDS.** The Kingdom is compared to the whole picture of a man who sowed good seed in his field, in which also his enemy sowed weeds. (Mt. 13:24)
  - a. *The good seed are the sons of the Kingdom*, the true Church, the saints. But they are only a portion of the total picture of God's government which includes the field, the sower(s), the reapers, the concerned servants, the harvest. God reigns over the whole situation, not permitting anyone the right of precipitate and final judgment. His Kingship is over more than just the sons of the Kingdom, since His Word governs also those who would destroy the wicked. His gracious and sagacious determination to "let them grow together until the harvest" permits time for the wicked to become sons of the Kingdom, and for the sons of the Kingdom to mature.
  - b. The harvest is intended not merely to destroy non-church members, but to "gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evil-doers." Since God's Kingdom includes the Church, wicked men will be removed from the Church too, but since the Kingdom is larger than the Church and includes the world also, the final separation will snatch all the sons of the devil from every quarter, be they in the world or in the Church.
  - c. Should we interpret the Kingdom as precisely equal to the Church, this parable could not but forbid church discipline, inasmuch as the order to "let them grow together until the harvest" would effectively prohibit any congregation of the Church to "drive out the wicked person from among you." (Cf. 1 Co. 5:13) It would also force the saints "to associate with immoral men . . . who bear the name of brother." (1 Co. 5:9, 11; Mt. 18:15-18; 2 Th. 3:6ff, 14, 15)
3. **THE PARABLE OF THE DRAGNET.** The Kingdom is again compared



to an instrument which gathers together men of every moral condition, the righteous and evil alike. Again, as in the Parable of the Weeds, the separation of the good and bad is pictured as the work of God's angels. The impression is left by the parable, although not specifically stated, that the net made one great sweep of the sea, inexorably taking with it all the fish therein, leaving none unnetted. Then, after the fishermen had separated the catch, there is no mention of further fishing to bring in those fish not previously caught. If this be important, then the implication is that the Kingdom of God includes the whole world in its scope, ruling over both Christians and non-Christians alike. The final judgment will distinguish them. Again, the Kingdom-net is greater in scope than either the Church-fish or the world-fish.

4. THE PARABLE OF THE POUNDS (Lk. 19:11-27). The kingly authority of the nobleman included even those citizens who hated him, who proved to be his enemies, because they "did not want him to reign over" them.

There could be other "Kingdom-parables," but let us now examine . . .

### THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST

As promised in the prophecies, in the days of the Roman empire there arose in Israel in the person of Jesus of Nazareth a royal heir to David's throne who set in motion the very principles which would guarantee the success of God's government on earth. Eventually, the message He proclaimed and the movement He inaugurated developed into a reasonably well-trained corps of genuine disciples ready to evangelize the world. But this is not yet "the Church," for that will be OFFICIALLY inaugurated on Pentecost. But first we must see . . .

### THE EVIDENCES OF THE PRESENCE OF THE KINGDOM BEFORE PENTECOST:

1. The announcement: "Repent for the Kingdom of God has arrived," when made either by John the Baptist, Jesus or His disciples' preaching, is always expressed in the perfect tense, i.e., expressed as a fact that has taken place in the more or less recent past and

## GREAT SERMON IN PARABLES

its effect continues until the present time. It is always expressed by *engiken*: Mk. 1:15; Mt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; [cf. Lk. 9:2] Lk. 10:9, 11; [cf. Lk. 9:60].

2. Jesus continually announced the good news of the Kingdom of God from the very outset of His earthly ministry. (Mt. 4:23; 9:35; 13:19; Lk. 8:1)
3. "Since the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and men of violence take it by force." (*biázetai*, see on Mt. 11:12; Lk. 16:16) There must be some sense in which, even in the days of Jesus' ministry before the cross, that these words are true.
4. Jesus' miracles evidence the reality of "the Kingdom of God come upon you." (Mt. 12:28; Lk. 11:20; *éft'hasen ef'humâs*: "arrived clear up to you, overtook you, has already reached you," cfr. Rocci, 1952; Arndt-Gingrich, 864) The defeat of Satan and his demons is evidence, says Jesus, that the Kingdom of God is not merely on its way, but, rather, evidence in every demoniac's deliverance, that God's royal government has already arrived. In fact, the defeat of Satan must actually precede the plundering of his house in the sense that God's Kingdom must have already been manifest before the demonized could be freed as Jesus Himself was liberating them. (Mt. 12:29)
5. To hear with understanding the message of Jesus preached in Galilee is "to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven." (Mt. 13:11, 19; Lk. 8:10) Although such explanations could well be given before the actual inception of the Kingdom, the disciples themselves were even then witnesses to the actual functioning of the Word of the Kingdom, the Word of God in men's hearts. (Cf. Mt. 13:16, 19; Lk. 8:11)
6. The Kingdom consists of such as are like children in Jesus' day. (Mt. 18:1-4; 19:14; contrast Mk. 10:14, 15 with 23-25) "Publicans and harlots precede you (Pharisees and lawyers) into the kingdom of God, because John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and harlots believed him . . ." (Mt. 21:31, 32; cfr. Lk. 7:28-30) The Kingdom is the possession, says Jesus, of those who grasped its fundamental message. (Cf. Mk. 12:34; Lk. 6:20; Mt. 5:3, 10; Lk. 12:31, 32; 18:16, 17) Is it conceivable that some people understood this and so entered into this new relationship with God before Pentecost?

7. The scribes and Pharisees before Pentecost "shut the Kingdom of heaven in men's faces," "not entering yourselves, you forbid the ones who are entering to do so." (*oudè tous eiserchoméous afiete eiseltheîn*) Were there some actually in the process of entering the Kingdom before the cross? (*tous eiserchoméous*)
8. "The Kingdom is not coming with observation," i.e., in such a way that its rise can be observed, because, "Take note, the Kingdom of God is:
  - a. "*within* you," i.e., inward or spiritual, not material, in nature;
  - b. or, "*among* you," i.e., already present in the personal presence of God's Messianic King Jesus, standing in front of the Pharisees. (Lk. 17:20, 21; cf. Jn. 18:36: "My Kingdom is not of this world.")
9. "Sons of the Kingdom" existed before Pentecost, because they had already left (*afêken*) possessions and loved ones "for the sake of the Kingdom of God." (Lk. 18:29; cf. Mt. 19:29; Mk. 10:29 "for my name's sake, for my sake and for the gospel")

None of the foregoing statements, of course, must ever be thrown into conflict with the even clearer descriptions of the external and formal realization of the Kingdom of God on earth in the Church. In fact, until the King is on His throne, there can be no formal Kingdom, however many are the loyal supporters who swear and prove their loyalty to Him by acts of service rendered even before His coronation. Further, whatever special problems arose in Jesus' earthly ministry and found their solution in the on-the-spot decisions of the King-designate, these solutions must be interpreted in the light of the King's constitutional law, once His will is ratified at His formal ascension to the throne and that will is now expressed through His new covenant with His people.

A mistaken application arising out of a misunderstanding of this evidence for the real existence of the Kingdom during, and expressed by, the personal ministry of Jesus, is that fostered by the "faith-only" branch of Christendom which urges, on the basis of examples of salvation of single individuals simply pronounced by Jesus, that such examples remain normative for the Church also after the personal ministry of Jesus, after Pentecost. They deny, thus, to baptism any relationship to salvation, simply because Jesus did not apparently require it for the salvation of any of these personal converts. (This is, of course, arguing from silence, since no "faith-only" teacher can

## GREAT SERMON IN PARABLES

prove that even one of these people had never been immersed by Jesus' disciples.) This rite, however, being a term of pardon expressed in the ratified will of the King upon the formal establishment of His Kingdom at Pentecost, is normative and universally to be required of believers to express their obedience, on the basis of which they too will be saved. It should be noted that, even thus, the terms of pardon in the Kingdom are unchanged, ever the same in every age since the time of Abel's offering: faith and obedience to *whatever* God requires—firstfruits, an ark, blood on the doorposts, the offering up of Isaac, looking at a serpent on a pole, being baptized, whatever God requires. This is why Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets and righteous men from the four corners of earth's geography and history are in the Kingdom of God, because they faithfully obeyed what was required of them in their historic situation. (Mt. 8:11, 12; Lk. 13:28, 29) And **THIS** is the Kingdom.

## THE INAUGURATION DATE OF THE KINGDOM

In very precise language, Jesus established the date for the inauguration of God's Kingdom on earth:

1. The preparation for the Kingdom was made by John the Baptist, Jesus and His Apostles. (Mt. 3:2; 9:35; 10:7; 11:11, 12; 12:28; 21:31; Lk. 4:43; 10:9, 11; 16:16)
2. The Kingdom was to begin during the personal absence of Jesus. (Mt. 26:29; Lk. 22:16, 18 all in connection with Jn. 14:16-18, 25-28; 16:4b-7; Ac. 1:3; cf. Lk. 19:11, 12, 15)
3. The Kingdom was to begin during the lifetime of the Apostles themselves. (Mt. 16:19, 28; Mk. 9:1; Lk. 9:27)
4. The Kingdom was to begin just a few days after the suffering, resurrection and ascension of Jesus into heaven. (Cf. Mt. 17:9; Lk. 19:11, 12; 24:46-49; Ac. 1:6; cf. Lk. 22:16, 18? Mt. 26:29?)
5. The Kingdom was preached throughout the world during the apostolic ministry as a realized fact even then in existence. (Mt. 24:14 [= Col. 1:6, 23]; Ac. 8:12; 19:8ff; 20:25; 28:23, 31; 2 Th. 1:4, 5?; 12:28)
6. Christ now reigns in His Kingdom. (Mt. 28:18-20; 13:37-43; 1 Co. 15:24, 25; Col. 1:13; 1 Th. 2:12?; Rev. 1:6, 9; Heb. 1:8) He shall reign until "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever." (Rev. 11:15; 12:10)

## HARMONIZATION OF THE TWO CONCEPTS

Thus far, we have the Kingdom of God as manifested in His universal government, and we have the Church sometimes thought of as an expression of His Kingdom. Someone might object: "But if the Kingdom of God is everything, what is the use for the Church then?" Edersheim (*Life*, I, 269) answers:

"The Kingdom of God," or Kingly Rule of God, is an *objective fact*. The visible Church can only be the *subjective* attempt at its outward realization, of which the invisible Church is the true counterpart.

Ideally, then, the Church of Jesus Christ is nothing less than a colony of the Kingdom of God on earth. (Cf. Phil. 3:20) Christ's true congregation (*ekklesia*) consists of those who submit to the rule of the King. Anyone else is a rebel against our Sovereign's government while camping on His land and taking ungrateful advantage of His benevolence. Also, because of the prevalence of evil in the world and its corruption even of people who have formally sworn allegiance to become subjects of the King, the boundary lines of the Kingdom are only imperfectly represented by the church-membership rolls.

The definition, which harmonizes these concepts, then, and explains how the great Kingdom of God is to be found in the heart of the Church and how anyone in the Church is a citizen of the Kingdom, is included in the following observations: The Kingdom is the total replacing of self with the will of God, even to the point of losing our lives in the service of God, losing all that matters of our lives. All that we could amass is bound up in our life, so Jesus urges us to give up our lives to receive what God would give us in its place. While our faith is important because it does things for God, it finds its highest value in what it is willing to receive from God. (Lk. 12:32 in its context!) This is a blow to man's pride, but the Kingdom is entered by self-renunciation and is often resisted by self-assertion. Asceticism, *per se*, is not submission to the King, because it may be nothing but a willful abuse of the gifts intended to be pressed into His service, and becomes but another form of self-assertion. Finally, the ultimate rebellion against the Kingdom is the demand for self-rule, motivated by self-interest, to arrive at self-complacency. But God's Kingdom is not His power over the material world manipulated for our advantage, but primarily God's control over our wills for

## GREAT SERMON IN PARABLES

His advantage. This is the Kingdom, and the reason why many Church members are not in it.

## SUMMARY

Edersheim's helpful summary bears restudy. (*Life*, I, 269ff; see his work also for Jewish views of the Kingdom.) His analysis of 119 passages in the NT where the expression "Kingdom" occurs—to which have been added eight more—, shows that it means:

1. THE RULE OF GOD: Mt. 6:33; 12:28; 13:38; 19:24; 21:31; (22:1); Mk. 1:14; 10:15, 23, 24, 25; 12:34; Lk. 1:33; 4:43; 9:11; 10:9, 10; 11:20; 12:31; 17:20, 21; 18:17, 24, 25, 29; Jn. 3:3; (18:36); Ac. 1:3; 8:12; 20:25; 28:31; Ro. 14:17; 1 Co. 4:20; Col. 4:11; 1 Th. 2:12; Rev. 1:(6), 9.
2. WHICH WAS MANIFESTED IN AND THROUGH CHRIST: Mt. 3:2; 4:17, 23; 5:3, 10; 9:35; 10:7; Mk. 1:15; 11:10; Lk. 8:1; 9:2; 16:16; 19:12, 15; (Jn. 18:36); Ac. 1:3; 28:23; Heb. 1:8; Rev. 1:9.
3. IS APPARENT IN THE CHURCH: Mt. 11:1; 13:41; 16:19; 18:1; 21:43; 23:13; (26:29?); (Mk. 14:25?); Lk. 7:28; (Lk. 22:16, 18?); Jn. 3:5; (Jn. 18:36); Ac. 1:3; Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:(6), 9.
4. GRADUALLY DEVELOPS AMIDST HINDRANCES: Mt. 11:12; 13:11, 19, 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52, 18:23; 20:1; 22:2; 25:1, 14; Mk. 4:11, 26, 30; Lk. 8:10; 9:62; 13:18, 20; (Jn. 18:36); Ac. 1:3; Rev. 1:(6), 9.
5. IS TRIUMPHANT AT THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST ("the end"): Mt. 16:28; (sic!); Mk. 9:1 (sic!); 15:43; Lk. 9:27 (sic!); 19:11; 21:31; 22:16, 18; (Jn. 18:36); Ac. 1:3; 2 Ti. 4:1; Heb. 12:28; Rev. 1:9. (See the special study "The Coming of the Son of Man," Vol. II, 430ff, for my dissent from Edersheim's interpretation.)
6. AND, FINALLY, PERFECTED IN "THE WORLD TO COME": (Heb. 2:5) Mt. 5:19, 20; 7:21; 8:11; 13:43; 18:3; 25:34; 26:29(?); Mk. 9:47; 10:14; 14:25(?); Lk. 6:20; 12:32; 13:28, 29; 14:15; 18:16; 22:29(30); (Jn. 18:36); Ac. 1:3; 14:22; 1 Co. 6:9, 10; 15:24, 50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; 2 Th. 1:5; (2 Ti. 4:18); Js. 2:5; 2 Pt. 1:11; Rev. 1:9; 12:10; (11:15).

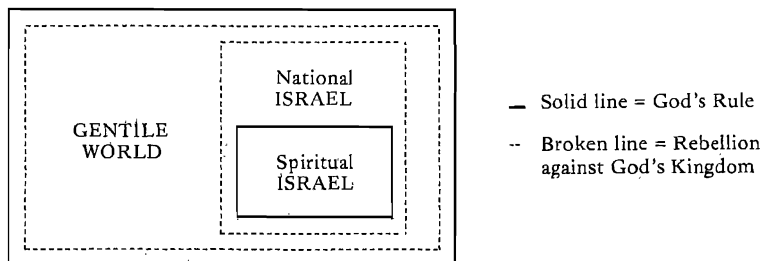
These conclusions may be represented graphically in the following way:

## KINGDOM

### THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

#### THE KINGDOM OF GOD BEFORE CHRIST

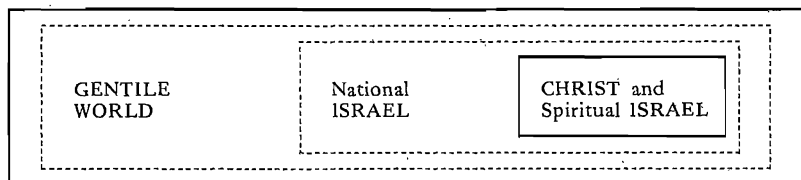
Ro. 3:29



God's Kingdom rules over the entire earth and all humanity, Jews and Gentiles alike. (2 Kg. 19:15; Dan. 4:2, 17, 25, 32-35; 6:26; Jer. 10:7, 10; 27:5; Isa. 43:13; Ps. 22:28; 47:2, 7, 8; 95:6; 96:10; 103:19; Mal. 1:14) However, within national Israel, there was always a remnant of believers who acknowledge God's rule. (Cf. 1 Chron. 17:14; 28:5; Ro. 9:6-8; Gal. 3:7-9, 29; Lu. 2:25, 38; 3:8, 9; 13:16; 19:9; 23:51; Isa. 1:9; 4:3; 10:20f; 11:11, 16)

#### THE KINGDOM OF GOD BEFORE PENTECOST

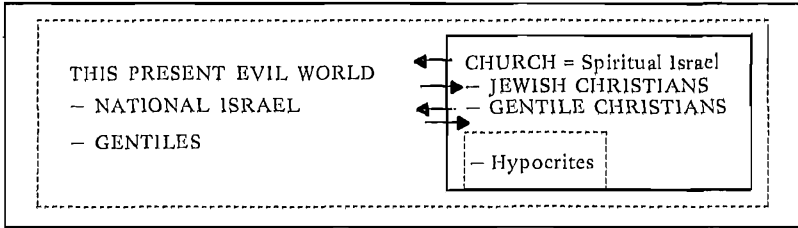
Ro. 4:16



In the time of the last world empire God set up a worldwide Kingdom under the rule of the Son of man, a Kingdom of the saints, the spiritual throne of David. (Cf. Dan. 2:35, 44; 7:13, 14, 28; Jn. 18:36; Lk. 1:32, 33; Ac. 2:30-36) But the Messianic King arose from within Israel, not from the pagan world. (Mt. 15:24)

GREAT SERMON IN PARABLES

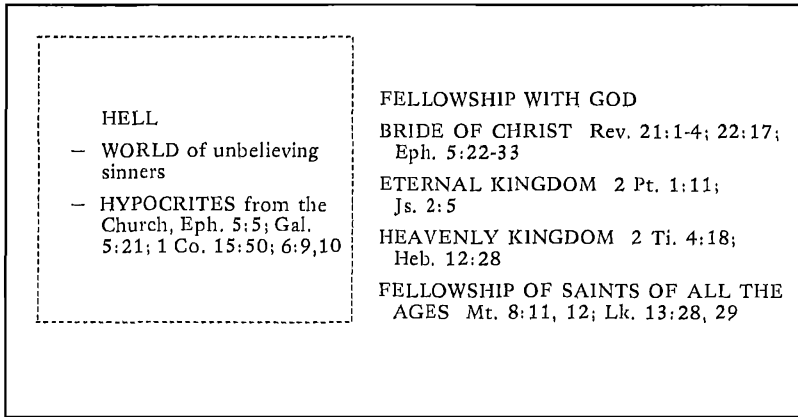
THE KINGDOM OF GOD AFTER PENTECOST UNTIL JUDGMENT



While God controls the entire world, yet by His permissive will men are permitted to choose good or evil. Most choose evil to remain in it, while a minority choose to enter that subjective expression of God's Kingdom, the Church. (Mt. 13:24-30; 47, 48; Jn. 3:3-5; 1 Co. 1:18—2:16; 3:18-23; Col. 1:13)

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN ETERNITY AFTER JUDGMENT

1 Co. 15:24-28



(Zech. 14:9; Dan. 7:22, 27; Mt. 13:40-43, 49, 50; Rev. 1:5; 11:15; 15:3)

The first thing to notice about each of these diagrams is the solid line of the Kingdom of God around every single diagram: God is ALWAYS on the throne! The next thing to observe in the first three diagrams is the broken line surrounding the world within the Kingdom



of God, the dotted line of evil, because the whole world lies in the evil one, but only by the permissive will of a sovereign God who has the last word. (1 Jn. 5:19) But the third thing to notice is crucial: within the evil world God has established a beachhead: spiritual Israel = the Church today. The fourth detail is the final and permanent separation of all evil doers into one place reserved for them: even Hell is positive proof of the power and reality of God's government. Note, contemporaneously, the glorious revelation of the people of God enjoying the perfect rule of the eternal Kingdom of God.

For further notes on the Kingdom and the great sermon in parables, see especially Seth Wilson's Special Study, *Mark* (Bible Study Textbook Series, pp. 499-506: "What the Kingdom is Like" and "Treasures of the Kingdom") and R.C. Foster's *Middle Period*, pp. 79ff.

### Section 32

## JESUS IS REFUSED BY HIS OWN AT NAZARETH.

TEXT: 13:54-58  
(Parallel: Mark 6:1-6)

54 And coming into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? 55 Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joseph, and Simon, and Judas? 56 And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? 57 And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house. 58 And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What is so significant about the amazement of these people, given the fact that it is caused by the miracles and message of Jesus?
- b. Why do you think that the Nazarenes did not know the answer

to their own question: "Where did He get all this wisdom and these miracles?"

- c. Analyze the reasons why the Nazarenes were "caused to stumble" in Jesus.
- d. Now, if causing someone to stumble is regarded by the NT as sin, how can you justify Jesus' doing precisely that? The Scripture says that the Nazarenes were scandalized by Jesus.
- e. One of the accusations we often make against faith miracle workers today is that too often their miracles do not seem to want to occur in the presence of skeptics, unbelievers or other critical eyes. Here Jesus did not do many miracles because of the Nazarene's unbelief. Nay, worse, Mark (6:5) actually affirms that the Lord **COULD NOT** do any miracles in Nazareth. Does faith—or is it credulity?—in the miracle worker or in the recipient of the miracle create miracle-working power? Perhaps Jesus was limited by the same weakness and failure as modern fake healers. What is your explanation?
- f. What is the importance here of the mention of Jesus' brothers and sisters?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Jesus left Capernaum and went to His own hometown, Nazareth. His disciples accompanied Him. On the sabbath He began to teach the folk in the local synagogue. Many who listened to Him were astonished and asked, "Where did this man get all this wisdom? What great wisdom He has! What mighty works are done by Him! Is not this the carpenter, the son of the carpenter? Is not his mother called Mary? Are not his brothers named James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters here with us? Where, then, did he get all this?" So they were shocked at Him.

But Jesus commented to them, "No prophet is left unhonored, except in his own hometown, among his own kin, and in his own house."

And He could not do many mighty miracles in Nazareth, because of their unbelief, except that He laid His hands upon a few sick folk and healed them. He marveled because of their unbelief.

## SUMMARY

Jesus tried again to win His own hometown to discipleship. The result was superficial amazement at His supernatural wisdom and miracles, but no real conviction of His true position as God's Prophet. The Nazarenes were shocked at Jesus; He marveled at their continued unbelief. The townspeople gave Him little or no opportunity to work great miracles on their behalf.

## NOTES

Before attempting to comment on this section, it is well to ask whether it be the same incident as that recorded by Luke (4:16-30). Some commentaries identify the two accounts and create thereby unnecessary problems for the reader. The coincidences which make the identification appear possible are three:

1. In both accounts the Nazarenes marveled at Jesus' ability. (Mt. 13:54b = Mk. 6:2, cf. Lk. 4:22) Is this psychologically credible especially the second time, if there were two visits? Yes, because, however well they may have remembered a supposed first visit to Nazareth at the beginning of His ministry (i.e., Lk. 4:16-30), several new factors would have contributed to occasion their astonishment: His far greater popularity in Galilee is now a fact that demanded reappraisal of His claims. New to them also would be His surprising courage in returning after the attempt on His life on His last visit, as well as the loving meekness of His manner, in contrast to their meanness, and His magnanimity in not holding their deeds against them. If "time heals things," then Jesus' absence from Nazareth for a sufficiently considerable interval would render a repetition of some of the same surprise quite credible.
2. In both accounts the Nazarenes objected to Jesus' pretended authority, because He was the son of Joseph the carpenter. (Mt. 13:55 = Mk. 6:3; cf. Lk. 4:22b) But this is only natural, since it is the basis of their refusal no matter how many times He visited there.
3. Would Jesus on two separate visits have reiterated the prophet? Although not exactly verbatim, the wording is close enough. (Mt. 13:57b = Mk. 6:4, cf. Lk. 4:24) Yes, the reverting to this proverb is not exceptional, since the general circumstances of the two visits

to the same hometown could have evoked the same general reaction in Jesus. In fact, the deliberate hammering on this particular motto may indicate Jesus' aim to reach a far higher goal than a mere accounting for local prejudices. (See below on 13:57b.)

Nevertheless, the differences are more marked than these supposed likenesses:

#### THE NARRATIVE OF MATTHEW AND MARK

1. Mark links this visit to Nazareth with the events around Capernaum following the great Parables Sermon, the trip to Gerasa and return to Capernaum. Matthew, having already told this, links this trip to Nazareth more loosely after the Parables Sermon. But these events are admittedly late in the Galilean ministry.
2. Mark notices the presence of Jesus' disciples on this visit, a natural feature to be expected, as Jesus has now developed His program more fully since His earlier visit, including a following. This argument cannot be conclusive, since Matthew is silent about disciples here, and his account alone cannot argue their absence any more than can Luke's earlier story (Lk. 4:16-30).
3. Matthew notices the paucity of miracles while Mark mentions a few.

#### THE NARRATIVE OF LUKE

Luke gives the definite impression that he is narrating an incident early in the Galilean ministry of Jesus shortly after His baptism and temptations.

Luke is silent about disciples on Jesus' first visit to Nazareth, a fact that cannot militate against their possible presence. Nevertheless, the very progress of His relationship to His immediate followers at that early period indicates that He may not yet have called them to personal discipleship. (See Lk. 5:1-11, 27-32.)

Luke not only records no miracles, but cites Jesus' words about Elijah and Elisha that seem to preclude His having done any before entering the synagogue. Certainly, none were recorded as done later.

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| <p>4. Matthew and Mark indicate no specific duration of His visit to Nazareth, but they imply at least some time to do a few miracles.</p> | <p>Luke tells how in the synagogue an attempt was made on His life from which He narrowly escaped by walking through the crowd and departing immediately.</p> |
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These differences are explicable on the basis of Jesus' love for His own townspeople: is it like Jesus to have entirely abandoned even Nazareth after one rejection? Second, Jesus' growing popularity throughout Galilee and the healing of time might have counselled a second visit because of changed circumstances. Although time did not heal their unbelief, it may have let their offended pride cool enough to permit Him to try again.

13:54 **Coming into his own country**, as Mark connects it, means leaving the unwanted excitement around Capernaum where Jesus had just completed a series of steps to keep tight reins on His own popularity:

1. The Great Sermon in Parables intended to hide vital truth from any but the most understanding disciples. (Mt. 13:1-53; Mk. 4:1-34; Lk. 8:4ff)
2. The withdrawal from the Capernaum crowds by a stormy voyage to Gerasa and, hopefully, some tranquility was interrupted by Gerasene fearful reluctance. (Mt. 8:28-34; Mk. 5:1-20; Lk. 8:26-39)
3. Then followed the return to Capernaum and the great crowds, the healing of the woman with the hemorrhage, and the resurrection of Jairus' daughter and the injunction to the parents to avoid publicity. (Mt. 9:1, 18-26; Mk. 5:21-43; Lk. 8:40-56)
4. Although He sternly ordered two healed blind men not to publish the news of their healing, they disobeyed. (Mt. 9:27-31)
5. The crowds marvelled yet more when He freed a dumb demoniac. (Mt. 9:32-34)

These pressures on Jesus may have determined His decision to reach an area where His unpopularity would have granted a small respite from the constant thronging of people. Nazareth suited His requirements ideally, since the earlier disapprobation of His townsmen had been previously encountered. (Lk. 4:16-30) But Jesus' return to Nazareth is no mere avoidance of Capernaum, as if He had nowhere else to go. He strode into Nazareth, because He knew His people and loved them, despite their sins, pride and prejudices. He

had remained away from them to let them study Him at long range while He preached and healed all over Galilee. Now He must return once more to teach them, work among them and give them fresh glimpses of His true identity.

**Coming into his own country He taught them in their synagogue.** Matthew's imperfect tense (*edidasken*) does not in this case mean to suggest that He kept this up for some time, because this is an example of the inchoative imperfect which describes an action as recently, or just begun, being in its first stages. (See Robertson-Davis, *Short Grammar*, 300; Blass-Debrunner, 169, sec. 326 call it "conative imperfect") So, Mark's expression, "he began to teach," is only the more explicit equivalent of Matthew's idiom.

So earnest and powerful, so winsome and true was His message that its immediate effect was the astonishment of the audience. But this amazement is not the marveling that leads to joyous acceptance. It arose, rather, out of what they suppose to be perfect familiarity with Jesus: they think they know Him, as their questions reveal afterward. Their perplexity, expressed in the question: **Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?**, arises out of the apparent incongruity between what they thought they knew about Him and what they were even then experiencing with their own senses. But He was, in reality, a perfect Stranger. Edersheim (*Life*, I, 636ff) rightly notices that the very events of Jesus' miraculous conception and birth were hidden from the Nazarenes, even as His earthly development was unseen by the Bethlehemites. But this fact in no way lessens the responsibility of both cities to test the claims of Jesus. In fact, the ignorance of Nazareth concerning the great fact of the Incarnation is no warrant for their unbelief. It should, rather, have spurred them on to examine all the more critically His claims in the light of His miraculous credentials. If they are curious enough to ask this kind of question, which itself contains such damaging admissions on their part, let them seek their proper answers! There was no denying that **this man has this wisdom and these mighty works are wrought by his hands!** Since their knowledge of these deeds is largely based on hearsay evidence filtering back into Nazareth from nearly every village in Galilee,—apparently He worked no miracle in His hometown prior to this historical moment,—is it credible that the popular opinions of their fellow Galileans, that Jesus might possibly be the Christ, should not also have been breathed about? They were taken aback, not because of His grace in speaking or because of the truth of His doctrine, but that these virtues should be His. Had they not

been wilfully blind, they should have understood that ANYONE so demonstrably without the preparation of academic education who proves himself so amply in possession of such unmatched wisdom and such glorious power MUST have been sent and empowered by God. Their culpability is the more inexcusable because not only were they well aware of *these mighty works*, but before He left town, they were even to witness "the healing of a few sick folk." (Mk. 6:5) Even when they saw it, they did not afterward repent and believe Him. (Cf. Mt. 21:28-32) Were they but to pronounce Him Christ, they would arrive immediately at the only satisfactory answer to their questions, but they supposed the matter settled merely by voicing a few insinuating questions.

**13:55 Is not this the carpenter's son?** For this oblique reference to Joseph, Mark has only: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary . . .?" Did Jesus so establish Himself as a worker in Nazareth during His pre-ministry days that His acquaintances remember Joseph only in passing as the man whose carpentry his son took over? Where then is Joseph? His passing may be implied in his not being mentioned in any of the events immediately concerning Jesus' family following the return to Nazareth after Jesus' birth. (Cf. Mt. 1:16, 18-20, 24; 2:13; Lk. 1:27; 2:4, 16, 33, 43; 3:23; 4:22; Jn. 1:45; 6:42 are the only references to Joseph by name in Scripture.) His absence on some occasions may be explained on grounds other than his death, for example, where business demanded that he be elsewhere when Mary and her sons visited Jesus. (Mt. 12:46; Lk. 8:19) However, if Joseph were still alive during Jesus' last visit, the unusual phrasing of some Nazarene's question according to Mark, is remarkable.

**Is not his mother called Mary?** "Is not this . . . the son of Mary . . .?" (Mk. 6:3) The simplest reading of either of these versions would lead the uncomplicated reader to think the Nazarenes are simply confirming by a negative question expecting a positive answer what they think they know about Jesus. But, some, remembering it somehow un-Jewish to identify a man by mentioning his mother's name, think Mark to be pointing to some peculiar fact.

1. These words in the mouth of the Nazarenes, says McMillan (*Mark*, 76) smell of an early rumor circulating to the effect that Jesus was illegitimate, but his proof-texts (e.g., Jn. 8:41; 9:29, etc.) do not substantiate this, being open to other interpretations. Rather, as discussed at Mt. 1:24, the very circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth, in the wisdom of God, forestalled such an accusation on the

part of the Nazarenes. Further, Matthew's text, parallel to Mark, actually quotes the Nazarenes themselves as describing Jesus as "the carpenter's son," before ever mentioning Mary. If the Nazarenes believe Jesus to be Joseph's son, there can be no suspicion of illegitimacy here. Again, that these words indicate no such rumor is proved by their very vagueness, if such an insinuation were intended. Jesus' detractors did not mince words when resorting to name-calling! (Cf. Jn. 8:48, 52; 7:20; 10:20; Mk. 3:21, 22, 30; Mt. 10:25; 11:18, 19)

2. Is Mark's special wording intended to convey the concept of the Virgin Birth? That is, by saying, "Is not this . . . the son of Mary?" is he not eliminating Joseph as Jesus' real father in the same sense that Mary is His real mother? No, because Mark is citing the objections made by the Nazarenes on the basis of what they considered common knowledge. These words, far from containing Mark's doctrine, are in fact not really his at all.
3. An even simpler solution for the Marcan phenomenon is available: Mark mentions only Jesus' mother, because the people he is quoting could not, for some reason, refer directly to Joseph as any longer an active participant in Nazareth's life. Is he only remembered by some (cf. Matthew's "the son of the carpenter"), but absent from immediate concern, whereas Mary, being still alive, is very much present in their thinking? Mark's words, rather than express editorializing, may well reflect the precise situation in Nazareth and suggest the well-nigh universal supposition that Joseph had been long dead.

Contrary to Plummer, (*Matthew*, 199), this difference in the form of the questions does not at all represent redactional changes by Matthew, but rather the natural, rapid-fire questioning of excited people.

**Are not his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?** See the Special Study, "The Brethren of the Lord" after this chapter. But why do the Nazarenes bother to mention these men by name? They are proudly proving thereby to be able to remember them, since these brothers had moved to Capernaum with Jesus some time earlier. (See on Mt. 4:13; Cf. Jn. 2:12.) By proving their ability to name them one by one, they think they have thereby explained Jesus too: could He possibly be any different from those named?

**13:56 And are not all his sisters here with us?** Did these girls marry Nazarenes and so not move with Jesus' mother and brothers to Capernaum with Him? How many ladies are implied in "all his sisters"



is unknown, but, when considered as all younger than Jesus the first-born and included with four baby brothers, they certainly represented a houseful for Jesus and His (widowed?) mother. Because of the poignant note in Jesus' sad proverb: "A prophet is not without honor except . . . among his own kin, and in his own house," some have wondered whether the sisters, fearing reprisals from their townsmen who had so bitterly rejected Jesus earlier, had sought to disassociate themselves from Him, because of His apparently unwarranted assumption of superiority over His own people.

The surprise expressed by these Nazarenes in their barrage of questions indicates just how perfectly normal must have been the entire course of Jesus' life and development there. This does not deny the deep-running differences that only Mary could have known. Nevertheless, their astonishment serves to mark the perfect humanity of His maturity in wisdom and physical stature to the delight of God and man. (Lk. 2:40, 52) For, if the Nazarenes who knew His history among them best, humanly speaking, could trace no abnormality in His boyhood conduct, we are right to conclude that

1. He did no miracles as a boy, contrary to the fantastic narrations of the apocryphal gospels. His first miracle was done at Cana of Galilee and not sooner. (Jn. 2:11)
2. His anointing by the Spirit at His baptism really signalled the beginning of His Messianic mission, after He left Nazareth a few days prior. (Ac. 10:37, 38) None of His days at Nazareth before this anointing should be considered as having any relation to that commission except as they gave Him time and opportunity to mature as a perfect human being. (Cf. Lk. 2:40, 52)
3. The doctrine of Jesus' perfect humanity (cf. Heb. 2:14, 17; 4:15; 5:7, 8; Phil. 2:8) passed the test of His closest acquaintances. The Nazarenes could not tell the difference between Jesus and His four brothers and all His sisters. His humanity was convincingly real to them.
4. Their rhetorical questions are devastating to any theory of perpetual virginity for Mary, because they imply the common knowledge that Jesus is in no way different from His brothers, sisters, mother or father. Had there been some suspicion that they were but cousins, their questions would not have been able to imply so much, since He would, in that case, not have been of the same family as the brothers, hence He could have potentially been actually superior and their own argument falls. In fact, they use

the words "son," "mother" and "sisters" in their normal connotation. Why should they be thought to have changed to a larger range of meaning when they speak of His "brothers"?

13:57 **And they were offended in him.** "By what right does the village carpenter, whom we have known all our lives, rise to speak to us with an authority superior to the learned rabbis?" Indeed, what right? Their former astonishment hardened into scandal. He did not fit the slot they had carved for Him. So, rather than reject their categories, they rejected Him. But in so doing, they left themselves without any accounting for His wisdom and works, real facts that, despite the fact that they surpassed human understanding, were to be believed. Their shock, indignation and hurt was not any whit less real because Jesus, far from intending them any spiritual damage, aimed only at their eternal life and peace. Their stumbling into sin, further obstinacy and unbelief, could not be helped by Jesus, and this fact leads us to see that stumbling-blocks are of two types:

1. Sinners being offended by righteous men in the pursuit of righteousness whose godliness itself is the cause of pain, indignation, shock or disgust. Jesus, in the pursuit of His messianic mission, could not help becoming the world's greatest stumbling block! (Lk. 2:34; Mt. 21:44 = Lk. 20:18; 1 Pt. 2:6-8 = Isa. 8:14, 15; see notes on Mt. 11:6).
2. Weak, or relatively innocent people are offended by supposedly righteous men in the pursuit of their own comfort, exercising their rights or freedom while quite unconcerned for the conscience of others. (Cf. Notes on Mt. 18:5-9; Ro. 14:1—15:7; 1 Co. 6:12—11:1)

Ironically, the Nazarenes mistakenly reputed Jesus to be a stumbling block of the latter type, only to splatter their lives against the Rock of Ages!

The Nazarenes blundered by trying to account for Jesus by discussing His quite human family, but they omitted from the account the one ingredient which, though they could not have known it, would have explained Him: the Incarnation. Lest we too stumble over Jesus, we must appreciate how gross is the blunder involved in attempting to explain Him by ordinary rules. We are tempted to think that unless or until we are able to fathom the mystery of God, or, at least, solve the problem of Jesus Christ, we shall not surrender to Him. Nevertheless, even a perfect intellectual solution would not bow our heads in submission since common canons permit us to measure

other people every day, yet we never throw ourselves at their feet to become their servants. In fact, were we to succeed in reducing the Lord's Christ to a philosophical formula or a mathematical equation, He would then be unneeded, because, in our conceit, we would have thought to understand Him perfectly. He would be then useless to us as Master and Lord, since we would have then reduced Him to our own self-created categories. But His Incarnation and His Atonement are facts to be believed on the evidence He gives us of their truth, not propositions for debate the issue of which is of little or no consequence. Rather than discredit the evidence because of our failure perfectly to comprehend, let us postpone debate and submit! After all, what is faith for, if we must walk by sight?

Our scandal-level, i.e., that point at which we too are most liable to be shocked, disgusted or hurt by Jesus, is really that point in our thinking at which Jesus holds no surprises for us anymore. When our theology will have succeeded in saying all there is to know about Him, we are perfectly set up for our big disappointment in Him. We are Christians, wrote Morgan (*Matthew*, 181ff), because Jesus towers above us, impresses us, baffles us, eludes us, yet enwraps us with love and thrills us with power. We are Christians in the presence of the Infinite Mystery, infinitely more than in the presence of things that can be perfectly explained.

**But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house.** Two thrusts are noticeable in Jesus' use of this proverb:

1. He cites to the Nazarenes this true psychological observation, and by so doing, shows them that, humanly speaking, He understands them. It is genuinely difficult to appreciate the surpassing importance and real accomplishments of someone whose entire growth and development occurred before our eyes. We do have problems accepting the profound changes in people with whom we think ourselves perfectly familiar. So, the Lord, perfectly familiar with His own people, because He really knew their weakness and need, in heart-warming understanding and generous mercy, expresses this solidarity with them in their difficulty.
2. But the very proverb He selected so to express Himself speaks volumes. He could have said, "A successful man is not without honor, etc.," and have communicated the above-mentioned human comprehension. Instead, His choice of wording may be nothing less than the earnest challenge to His dear acquaintances to

re-examine the evidences that would have led them to see Him as a **PROPHET**. They might not understand Him to be God's Son, rather than Joseph and Mary's boy, but even so, let them think of Him as Joseph's Son the **PROPHET**! Let them study His message, accept His credentials as proving His right to reveal God's message like any other mighty prophet born of human parents but called by God! By this approach they might eventually be convinced to bow in humble submission of their divine Townsman. (Cf. Jesus' use of a similar approach with Judean enemies, Jn. 10:37, 38 and with His most intimate followers, Jn. 14:10, 11.)

**13:58 And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.** If it be true that faith is that positive contact which man makes with God by abandoning his self-justifications, if it be that positive living in conformity with the convictions he has about Him, then we see why these Nazarenes' unbelief caused them to stay away from Jesus. They made no contact with Him, so He did not force them to accept unwanted miracles. If they did not believe Him enough to come bringing their sick to them or ask Him to help them, then "He could do no mighty work there." (Mk. 6:6) Jesus could truly say, "I just could not help them, because they would not let me!"

Further, since Jesus had chosen to limit Himself to help only those willing to receive His blessing, He deliberately did not force either their belief or acceptance of His help. The seemingly objectionable statement of Mark ("He could do no mighty work there.") reflects only this moral commitment, not any objective ability that somehow failed in Nazareth. Rather, here is written the meekness of the Son of God: we would have been sorely tempted to rip off some stupendous wonder "just to show them," but Jesus stood firm. Again, the Lord refused to undersell the evidential value of a single healing! If the imposition of hands on a few sick folk to heal them (Mk. 6:5) will not produce the unshakeable conviction that God has sent Jesus, no mere escalation of signs and wonders could be hoped to produce it. Nor is He willing to discount the importance of believing the true testimony of others who carried the news of His miracles to Nazareth. (Cf. 13:54; Lk. 4:23)

Not only **did Jesus not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief**, but He marveled because of it. (Mk. 6:6) See notes on 8:10 where Jesus marveled at the great faith of the Roman centurion. There, marveling is described as implying some ignorance of that about which one feels genuine surprise. But who can complain if JESUS CHOSE NOT TO KNOW who would eventually believe or

disbelieve Him? This very choice, itself part of the mystery of incarnation, lets Him react genuinely, because He is truly overjoyed at excitingly real faith, or stunned and grieved at obstinate unbelief. He was astounded as He heard their reaction, because their unbelief was so unreasonable. Even though they admitted the premises for the divine origin of His mission and message, they resolutely denied the obvious conclusion to which these premises must necessarily lead.

Although Jesus' own doctrine that the quality of one's heart affects his receptivity to the truth had already been expounded in the Parables of the Kingdom, (Mt. 13:1-53), this did not alleviate His heartbreak when He too had to live with that reality embodied in the wayside hearts of His old friends and fellow townsmen. Here, again, we see that the atmosphere which a congregation brings to a message deeply affects its effectiveness, being either a stone wall of hostility through which the message cannot penetrate, or a friendly expectancy that can turn the simplest testimony into soul-stirring eloquence. Many a message has been absolutely ruined, not because it was not true and needed, but due to prejudices against the speaker. And Jesus faced this too—in His own hometown.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Is this event but another version of Jesus' rejection at Nazareth as recorded in Luke 4:16-30? What are the similarities and differences?
2. What is the point of the rhetorical questions asked by the Nazarenes in reference to Jesus' family?
3. What damaging evidence against the theory of the perpetual virginity of Mary is unconsciously provided by the Nazarenes' questions in this section?
4. Did Jesus do any miracles at Nazareth? How do you know?
5. Explain how the Nazarenes "took offense at Him."
6. Name Jesus' brothers.
7. How many sisters did Jesus have?
8. How did the Nazarenes admit as a matter of fact the miracles that Jesus did? What, then, did they reject?
9. What proverb did Jesus cite as the explanation of the Nazarenes' rejection of His person and ministry?
10. According to the best information available in the NT, how many times did Jesus visit the Nazareth synagogue after the beginning

of His ministry? What was the response each time?

11. Explain how Jesus could marvel at the unbelief of His townspeople. Did their unbelief surprise Him? If so, how? If not, why not?

### SPECIAL STUDY: THE BRETHREN OF THE LORD

What is the real purpose of this study? Is it to discover from an examination of the best evidence available to us, whether the men who are entitled in Scripture "the brethren of the Lord," were real, natural half-brothers of Jesus, being sons of Mary; or whether they were step-brothers, being sons of Joseph by a former wife before espousing Mary; or whether they were cousins, being sons of Alphaeus (or Clopas), Joseph's brother (or else, sons of Mary of Clopas, sister of Mary, Joseph's wife)? Is this research into the semi-obscure facts surrounding the life of our Lord only for academic discussion? What could be gained by a knowledge of the answer to the proposed questions? Beyond mere acquaintance with the facts, are we any richer morally?

Or is it the purpose of such a study to affirm or deny the perpetual virginity of Mary as a dogma affirmed by the Roman Catholic denomination? Even if, after accurate study, one concludes that Mary did, in fact, have no other children after the birth of Jesus, and that the reputed "brethren of the Lord" were, in fact, sons of Joseph by a former wife named Hannah, what is gained for the Catholic position, or what is lost for those who previously objected to the idea (not to say, doctrine or dogma) of the perpetual virginity of Mary?

Or is the question even correctly put in that fashion? Could we not ask ourselves, what **USE** is to be made of the supposed perpetual virginity? What is the **FUNCTION** of such a pretended fact?

So the importance or value of this study does not lie so much in enriching our information about the private life and relations of Jesus, as in dealing with the Catholic apologists who would elevate Mary to a superhuman plane. To do this they must demonstrate three fundamental propositions, one of which this study touches directly:

1. "Mary was herself conceived without sin," or the dogma of the immaculate conception;

2. "Mary remained virgin throughout her married life," or the dogma of perpetual virginity;
3. "Mary is an object of special veneration," or the dogma of her special status in heaven whereby she is supposed to be accorded particular devotion. This last step in her exaltation involves the following unproven assumptions: (Cf. *I.S.B.E.*, 2003)
  - a. Christ's perpetual humanity (something else to prove) presumes His perpetual Sonship to Mary, as argument which implies that the glorified Lord Jesus is still subject to His mother.
  - b. Christ hears her prayers, hence she is an intercessor through whom prayers may be addressed to Jesus.
  - c. Since Mary cared for the body of Christ when He was on earth, naturally, His spiritually body, the Church, would be her special care in heaven.

Even if it were possible to establish as fact that every Church Father who supported the perpetual virginity of Mary had no ulterior theory to defend by that stand, in which case each may be regarded as trustworthy to transmit no more than simple, historical fact, and even if it were possible to establish on purely logical and exegetical grounds from the Scriptures that both Mary AND Joseph remained virgins in their marriage relationship, still much stands or falls in relationship to the moral implications drawn therefrom by the modern Christian, some of which are:

1. The medieval conception, not yet fully clarified or changed by those whose denomination officially tolerated it, of the intrinsic sinfulness of the desire for marital relations and the act by which that desire is realized. (Contrast 1 Ti. 4:3, 4; Heb. 13:4) Marriage, though a holy sacrament for many, must yet be viewed by them as inferior to celibacy and incompatible with holy living in its highest, purest sense. This conclusion must necessarily follow and certainly was the view of many, however contradictory both to Scripture and to logic. For, if, "Mary was married to Joseph and Joseph to Mary in *appearance* only, then they were recreant to each other and to the ordinance of God which made them one." (*I.S.B.E.*, 2003)
2. Must the ancient "repugnance to Christian feeling to think of the womb of Mary, in which the Word, made flesh, had dwelt in a peculiar way, as the habitation of other babes," (*I.S.B.E.*, 520) express also the sentiments of the modern Christian?
3. Must the modern Christian share the view "that Mary is not to be

considered a human being under the ordinary obligations of human life," (*I.S.B.E.*, 2003), "removed from the sphere of ordinary life and duties as too commonplace for one who is to be surrounded with the halo of a demi-god, and to be idealized in order to be worshipped"? (*I.S.B.E.*, 520)

4. Must the Scriptures continue to be mishandled in order to support an unjustifiable theory of celibacy, an unbased theory of Joseph's virginity, a distorted view of marriage and an inadequate understanding of the family? Even if it were logically conceded that Joseph and Mary chose, for whatever reasons, to abstain from marital relations after the birth of Jesus, and even if the brethren of the Lord are logically conceded to be the sons of any other woman than Mary, it is not right that Biblical texts be distorted to prove it.

It is too apparent that the presumption of perpetual virginity for Mary is an important link in her exaltation without sin to be an object of worship in her function as mediatrix, just as much as the dogma of her immaculate conception (her being born sinless so as not to transmit inherited original sin to Jesus) and the almost forgotten but necessary assumption of her immaculate life. But whatever may be the eventual use of the particular information regarding the "brethren of the Lord," the evidence for this link in the chain of Mariolatry, which binds the conscience of millions of people for whom Christ died, is as weak as any of the others.

### WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE?

As will be seen, the main interpretations of "the brethren of the Lord" have been three: the "cousin" theory, the "step-brother" theory and the "half brother" view. (For fuller exposition of these views and their relative literature, see *I.S.B.E.* and other encyclopedic articles on "the brethren of the Lord," on the individual names of the four brothers, on Mary, on virginity and similar topics. See especially J.B. Lightfoot's commentary on Galatians, pp. 252-291. For much of the following material, I am indebted to Lightfoot's collection of evidence, however much I may disagree with his choice of conclusion.

The basic problems involved in the identification of "the Lord's brethren" turns upon the following considerations:



1. The identification of Clopas (or Cleophas): was he the same man as Alphaeus, father of the Apostle, James of Alphaeus? Was Clopas the brother of Joseph, foster father of Jesus? Are Judas Thaddaeus or Simon the Zealot, or both, sons of this Alphaeus-Clopas?
2. Is Mary of Clopas to be identified with the Mary mother of James and Josés, hence also mother of Simon (or Simeon) Zelotes and Judas Thaddaeus? Is this Mary to be identified as the sister of Jesus' mother?
3. Is Jesus' mother's sister to be identified with the wife of Zebedee and with Salome?

In order better to see the relative connections the following charts are offered:

Chart 1: WOMEN AT THE CROSS. <i>Question marks indicate doubt about the identification.</i>			
	Mt. 27:56	Mk. 15:40	Jn. 19:25 (rearranged)
1.	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene
2.	Mary, mother of James and Josés	Mary, mother of James the Little and Josés	Mary of Clopas (?)
3.	_____, mother of Zebedee's sons	Salome (?)	_____, Jesus' mother's sister (?)
4.	_____	_____	_____, Jesus' mother

The identification of these women depends upon the certainty of several probabilities:

1. It is unlikely that in Jn. 19:25 the phrase "Jesus' mother's sister" is to be taken as in apposition with "Mary of Clopas," making John list only three women at the cross, since he is actually listing two pairs of women. This is shown in two ways:
  - a. He links the first two and the last two by the conjunction "and," almost, as if to indicate a separation of some sort between the two pairs.
  - b. John's well-known habit throughout his gospel of suppressing the names of himself and his relatives may be evident here, since it may be presumed that Mary Magdalene and Mary of Clopas were not relatives of John, whereas if this identification suggested above proves valid, then Mary, Jesus' mother, and Salome, John's mother, would be sisters. For this reason John leaves both women nameless, identifying them only by a descriptive phrase.
2. It is likely that John's mother is to be equated with "Jesus. Mother's sister," since John's mother was certainly at the cross and it does not seem likely that John would have omitted her.

3. Both Salome and Jesus' mother's sister remain otherwise totally unidentified and unidentifiable to the modern reader of the text, unless they are otherwise to be identified with the also unnamed mother of Zebedee's sons. This is not impossible, since "Salome" would be her name, "mother of Zebedee's sons" gives her relationship to the Apostles, and "Jesus' mother's sister" identifies her connection with Jesus and His mother.

One result of this theory, of course, is that Jesus is seen as a cousin of James and John, a theory which may also account for the definite intimacy these two enjoyed with the Lord, as well as provide a reason why Jesus consigned His mother over to John the Apostle, His cousin.

Chart 2: LISTS OF THE APOSTLES INVOLVED IN THIS QUESTION

Mt. 10:2-4

Mk. 3:13-19

Lk. 6:12-16

Ac. 1:13

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9. James of Alphaeus	James of Alphaeus	James of Alphaeus	James of Alphaeus
10. Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot
11. Simon the Cananean	Simon the Cananean	Judas of James	Judas of James
12. Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	=====

For a full list of the Twelve, see notes on 10:2-4.

In this chart several items are to be noted:

1. James of Alphaeus is always the principle name leading this third group of Apostles, even as Peter's always leads the first group and Philip's the second. Judas' Iscariot's name always concludes this third group, except in Acts where his suicide is already an accomplished fact, hence the omission in the fourth list.
2. The remaining two names, though reversed in the last two lists, remain together as if bound together by some unmentioned tie.
3. The identification of Thaddaeus with Judas of James is discussed under Mt. 10:2-4; so also the names "Cananean" and "Zealot."
4. The intriguing question to be solved is which James is intended in the descriptive "Judas of James." Is Judas the *brother* of the son of Alphaeus? Or is he the *son* of another unknown James?

With these crude, rudimentary tools in hand, let us examine the evidence for each view.

## THE COUSIN THEORY

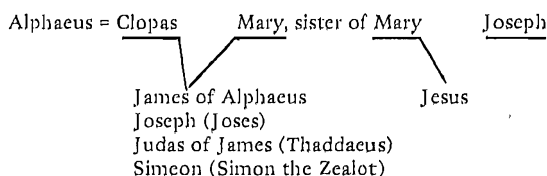
The great Jerome propounded the theory which has gained currency among Catholic commentators that "the brethren of the Lord" are, in reality, His cousins. Others have noticed certain points necessary

to sustain this suggestion and so have added features unknown to Jerome but were essential to the theory. The theory is based upon the following points:

1. James, son of Alphaeus, is thought to be the Lord's brother, James.
2. Alphaeus, the father of James, is supposedly to be identified linguistically with Clopas (or Cleophas), since *Alphaeos* is the Greek equivalent of the Aramean *Chalphai*. (On this, see Lightfoot's learned discussion, pp. 256f and footnotes, 267f.)
3. The term "James the Less," seemingly, implies only one other eminent man among the Apostolic band known by the name of James, i.e., James of Zebedee. Therefore, James of Alphaeus would be also James the Less, son of Mary, whose brother's name is Josés (or, Joseph), a name also found in the list of "the brethren of the Lord."
4. According to the theory, Mary of Clopas is said to be the wife of Alphaeus, hence, mother of James of Alphaeus.
5. Mary of Clopas (Alphaeus), being the mother of James, is said to be sister of Jesus' mother.
6. The result of this theory, that James the Lord's "brother" is really the Lord's cousin, is also based upon the loose Aramaic use of the word "brother" in Scripture for: actual brotherhood, common nationality, wider kinsmanship or only friendship or sympathy.
7. Due to the testimony of Hegesippus (cited by Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* iii, 20), some add also "Judas of James," considering him to be *brother* of James the Lord's brother, and perhaps Simon the Zealot as well, since these three names are kept together in the list of the Apostles. Not only are the Lord's "brethren" to be thought of as His "cousins," but some, if not all, of His brothers are also Apostles, according to the theory.
8. The theory presupposes also the death or incapacitation of Alphaeus (= Clopas) the putative father of these four men, as well as the inability of Mary ("of Clopas") to care for them, in which case they must have been practically raised in the house of Joseph and Mary in whose company they are often seen. (Cf. Jn. 2:12; Mt. 12:46 and par.) The Nazarenes consider these "brethren" to be as much a part of the family of Joseph and Mary as Jesus or His sisters. (Mt. 13:54-58)

Perhaps it would help to visualize the view of Jerome as it was adapted by its adherents:

Chart 3: THE COUSIN THEORY



Objections to this theory are hardly less numerous than the points on which it is founded:

1. While it may be granted that in Hebrew or Aramaic the word "brother" must do service for a wider range of relationships, it would be unnatural for the Evangelists who left their works for us in Greek to have failed to specify the exact relationship intended, especially since in Greek the words are available for *cousin* (*anepsibōs*, Col. 4:10) and *kinsman* (*suggenēs*, Lk. 1:36; 2:44; 21:16; Mk. 6:4). Surely the very Evangelists who describe the other most intimate facts about the relationships of people in the Lord's family would not have failed to be reasonably specific about this point, avoiding those expressions which are ambiguous at least, and might be understood as implying that these men were half brothers through Mary.
2. Another serious objection to the Cousin Theory is its presumption that at least two (i.e., James of Alphaeus and Judas [brother] of James), if not three (including Simon the Zealot), of the Lord's brethren were Apostles, a conclusion inconsistent with the Apostle John's declaration (7:5) that as late as six months before Jesus' death: "even his brothers did not believe in him." Could John say this of two or three out of four "brothers," if those who did not believe were supposedly Apostles? Instead, the "brethren" are clearly distinguished from the Apostles. (Cf. Ac. 1:14; 1 Co. 9:5, Cephas' name being distinguished in this latter passage only for special emphasis, not as being separate from the Apostles' group just mentioned.) Judas of James (Jude 1:1, 17) only seems to disclaim being an Apostle, since Peter speaks the same way (2 Pt. 3:2). However, this latter part of the argument would not be conclusive.

3. The expression, "James the *Less*," implies only two of the name James, one of which is distinguished from the other by this epithet. But Mark (15:40) wrote: "James the Small, Little or Young," not "the Less." (*Iakòbou toû mikroû*, not *mikrotérou*) So the descriptive title usually translated as an adjective of comparative degree, which generally speaks of only two between which the comparison is made, turns out to be one of positive degree. That it certainly denotes some standard of comparison, without which it would make no sense, cannot be doubted, but that that standard has to be one, and only one other, James (and not rather two or three others) must be questioned. Besides, there might be some long-forgotten reason in the domestic life of James the Less that dubbed him with that distinctive title that even in adult life he could not shake off. (Cf. the diminutive ending on "Jimmy," or even "Jim" for James, used as names for grown men. Also, "James the Less" may have been a very tall man, earning him the humorous label "Little Jimmy.") So it may well be that the expression, "the Less," relates the James to no other James at all, but refers, rather, to some other point of comparison. Even if the comparison is with others by the name of James, these cannot be limited in number to only one other, as Jerome's theory demands.
4. According to the theory, "Jude . . . of James" is considered as the "brother," instead of *son*, of James, an interpretation which, according to Lightfoot (*Galatians*, 253), is not the proper word to be supplied in the ellipsis. It also goes against early translations which use *son*. Had these two men been brothers, it is probable that Luke would have written "James of Alphaeus and Jude his brother," or else, "James and Judas, sons of Alphaeus," as in the case of the other pairs of brothers. Also in the Apostolic lists of Luke (6:16 and Ac. 1:13), Simon the Zealot interrupts this supposed brotherhood, for, if he were not a brother, why insert his name here? If Simon too were a brother, as some adherents of this theory claim, why call only Judas "of James" and not Simon too? Further, neither Matthew nor Mark, who actually mention Thaddaeus (presumably the same as Judas of James) immediately following James of Alphaeus, show any evidence of connecting Thaddaeus with James of Alphaeus. Finally, Lightfoot remarks that since this Judas is described in so many different ways ("Thaddaeus," "of James" and "not Iscariot," Jn. 14:22), were he really the Lord's brother, as this theory supposes, it would not be thought possible that he could, in all these instances, have escaped being

described in that way, when that one designation would have immediately identified the man meant by the authors.

Of course, it must be admitted in reference to Simon the Zealot that the fact that he is not designated also as "of James," is not conclusive, since he is uniformly labelled "the Zealot = the Cananaean." This appellation distinguishes him at once from Simon Peter and, at the same time, indicates his background. Both are sufficient reasons perhaps to override the necessity to mark him as brother of James of Alphaeus and Judas of James. So the "interruption" mentioned above would not in itself be fatal to this part of the theory.

5. Another significant improbability to be noted in the Cousin Theory is the presupposition that there were two Marys in the same family: Mary of Joseph and Mary of Clopas. (Jn. 19:25, see Chart 1) The problem rests in the decision whether the expression "Mary of Clopas" is to be taken as in apposition with the descriptive: "Jesus' mother's sister," and not rather as naming another woman. The reasons offered for taking the two expressions as designating two separate women are:
  - a. It is at least reasonably improbable that two sisters should have borne the same name. Among near kin, such a practice would not be so improbable as its use in the same household for blood sisters.
  - b. John 19:25 seems to separate the four women into two pairs each by his use of conjunctions.
  - c. Lightfoot (*ibid.*, 264) puts emphasis on the rendering of the Peshito Syriac which inserts a conjunction between the two names: "his mother's sister, *and* Mary of Cleophas . . ." He says, "It is not unlikely that a tradition underlies the Peshito rendering." (*ibid.*, 264)
6. Regardless of the linguistic relationships between the Aramaic name "Cleophas" (*Chalpai*) or "Clopas," and the Greek name "Alphaeus," (*Alphaios*), let it be remembered that perfect identification of names still does not prove identity of persons.
7. Jesus' brothers are mentioned in the Gospels in connection with Joseph and Mary, Jesus' reputed father and real mother, never with Mary of Clopas, the presumed wife of Alphaeus-Clopas. (Mt. 12:46; 13:55 and parallels) Further, these "cousins" real mother, Mary of Clopas, was very much alive even until Jesus' crucifixion. (See Chart 1: Jn. 19:25.) Why she could not have raised these boys, instead of Joseph and Mary is, of course, unknown

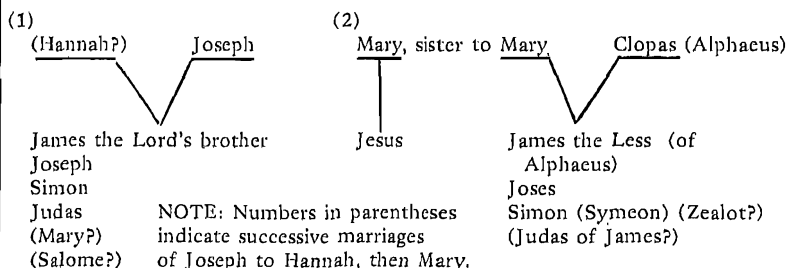
to us, but is it likely that the Nazarenes should have described them as Jesus' "brethren," in the same sense that they supposed Him to be Joseph's "son," Mary to be His "mother," and the girls in that family to be His "sisters"? Their argument, intended to account for the humanness of Jesus, implies the quite ordinari-ness of these relations. (See on Mt. 13:54-58.)

### THE STEP-BROTHER THEORY

This understanding of the matter sees the brethren of the Lord as sons of Joseph by a former wife before marrying Mary. Having, as it does, the advantage of the support of the large majority of the Church Fathers would seem to give this explanation additional importance, since that fact alone would seem to signify that a nearly unanimous opinion on the subject was shared by the very men most able to testify on the subject. Various, interesting bits of "information" are supplied by those Fathers who happened to write on the subject, as, for instance, the names of Jesus' sisters (Mary and Salome, according to Epiphanius in his treatise against Heresies), the name of Joseph's former wife (Hannah, or Anna, according to Eusebius, *On the Star*) or that Joseph was at least eighty years old or past when he married Mary (Epiphanius, *Protevangelium Jacobi*). Without pretending to pronounce upon the worth of each testimony of the Fathers, a task well beyond my competence, I might just observe that the support by a large majority of the Church Fathers does not necessarily argue the validity of the view. It may only demonstrate how widespread the error was believed and handed on. So, like any evidence received from the Fathers which must be tested by the revelation they purport to explain, so this theory of theirs must face the same fire, despite the fact that some of them write as if they thought to be giving testimony to fact, not theory.

This explanation may be represented graphically as follows:

Chart 4: THE STEP-BROTHERS THEORY



Support for this theory is not so much exegetical or logical as it is traditional, i.e., based upon citations from the Fathers, who are themselves debating the issue.

The question, then, must be resolved in the same way the Fathers themselves tried to deal with it, i.e., by debating the relative points in the argument. While it seemed to Lightfoot, and certainly to others, that certain of the more informed Fathers were giving testimony to facts against which the appeal of logic or exegesis of Scripture would have no force, yet the Fathers themselves, if the citations brought forward by Lightfoot are typical examples, do not affirm the antiquity of their opinions on the basis of undoubted, uninterrupted tradition. Or, if some of them seem to do this, others of the same periods do not let this hinder their own independent investigation of the case. Although the great Jerome ultimately seems to have relinquished his position, yet at the close of the fourth century in his commentary on Matthew (398 A.D.) he does not seem to consider the question closed on the basis of traditional authority. Rather "he taunts those who considered the Lord's brethren to be the sons of Joseph by a former wife with 'following the ravings of the apocryphal writings and inventing a wretched creature . . . Melcha or Escha by name.'" (Lightfoot, 260) This state of affairs in the Fathers leaves us freer to consider the bad logic or bad exegesis involved in the problem and freer to come to our own conclusions.

The advantage of this position over the Cousin Theory is immediately apparent in that this theory takes the word "brother" seriously, giving to it a more natural meaning. These step-brothers



can be called “brothers” in the same sense in which Joseph is called Jesus’ “father” (Lk. 2:33, 41, 43), even by Mary who knew the facts best. (Lk. 2:48) This view also takes better account of the fundamental Gospel description of the Lord’s brothers as unbelievers distinct from the Apostles. It also connects them better with Joseph and Mary, instead of bringing them in from a completely different family.

However, several objections appear at once to this theory:

1. The “Step-brothers Theory” makes Joseph a very old man, assuming for him a previous marriage, a supposition nowhere alluded to in the canonical Gospels. The argument usually offered for Joseph’s advanced age, on the basis of the NT Gospels, is these books’ silence regarding the man after his appearance in the narrative of Jesus at age twelve in the Temple. (Lk. 2:41-51) From this silence it is usually presumed that he passed permanently out of the picture by death. But this very silence, offered as Biblical evidence for the advanced age of Joseph (ignoring for sake of the argument the traditions in the *Protevangelium Jacobi* and in Epiphanius), is perfectly consonant with the possibility that Joseph was killed or died a natural death while relatively young. So, silence proves nothing certain about the age of Joseph.

But granted for sake of argument that Joseph actually did die shortly after Jesus was twelve years old, this still means that Joseph lived as husband with Mary for twelve years. One of the incredible results of this fact, if the perpetual virginity of Mary be true, is that, if Joseph dwelt with Mary for twelve years yet keeping her a virgin until the day of his own death, then Joseph must be seen to have made a solemn renunciation of his own marriage rights. As far as Mary was concerned, and as far as Joseph in his new relation with her was concerned, he was virtually a virgin too. Were it possible to demonstrate categorically that the Lord’s brethren were His cousins or His step-brothers, yet the words of Sweet (*I.S.B.E.*, 2003) would still ring with devastating truth: “That a married woman has no children is no proof of virginity—perpetual or otherwise.” The idea of Mary’s perpetual virginity demands, by the nature of the marriage relationship, the continued abstinence from marital relations with his wife on the part of Joseph, dating at least from the time of his marriage to Mary until his death.

Further granted for sake of argument that Joseph were eighty when he married Mary and died when Jesus was twelve years old,

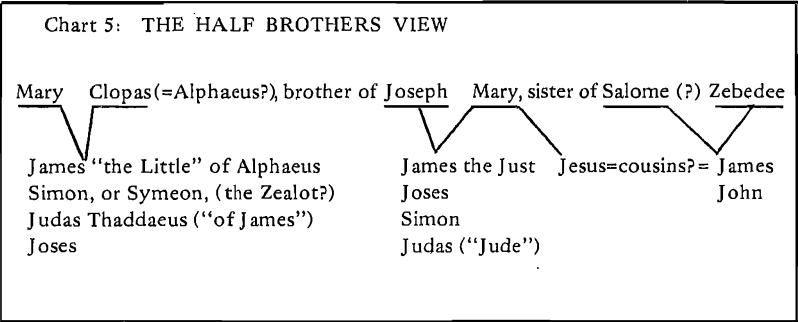
- let it not be supposed that he COULD NOT have begotten by Mary at least six children before his death. Neither the birth of Isaac (Gen. 21:1-3) nor that of John the Baptist (Lk. 1:5-24, 57-67) are ever thought of as miraculous (i.e., supernatural) conceptions, even though they were born of extremely old parents, a fact which makes the births marvellous indeed, but that fact alone would not necessitate their being considered as being supernaturally conceived. Had they been supernatural, then the astonishing, supernatural conception of Jesus would not have been at all unique.
2. Another objection that should be raised to this theory is the fact that, had these "brothers" been sons of Joseph by a former wife before he espoused Mary, then the oldest of these brothers would surely have been regarded as legal heir to Joseph, hence to the throne of David. Jesus would not be the legal heir of Joseph, as attested by the genealogies of Matthew (1:1-17, on which see notes, Vol. I) and of Luke (3:23-38), since Jesus, in such a case, would be but the youngest of five legal sons of Joseph. While it is true that these very genealogies of Jesus do not always follow the direct line of descent from father to his firstborn son, due to deaths, adoptions, etc., yet the generally established rule is to follow this direct succession, unless there be some well-known, overriding factor that prohibits this. But in the Gospel there is no such fact that would justify the passing over four older sons of Joseph merely in order to consider Jesus as the legal heir of Joseph, unless that were His rightful position because of His real primogeniture.
  3. While the argument from silence can never be conclusive, yet the ancient authors, who are cited as being of the opinion that "the Lord's brethren are elder sons of Joseph by another wife before his espousal to Mary," do not take adequate account of the Scriptures' silence regarding their (supposed) existence from before the birth of Jesus until their actual appearance in the narrative. That is, where were those supposed sons of Joseph while he took Mary to Bethlehem for the census? Where were they during the flight into Egypt? Until Joseph brought the family back to Nazareth? That is, unless the testimony of Eusebius ("On the Star") be so construed, which says, "Joseph and Mary and Our Lord with them and the five sons of Hannah (Anna) the first wife of Joseph." Supposedly, the account from which this passage is taken professes to be founded on a document dating A.D. 119. (See Lightfoot, *ibid.* 283, footnote 1.) The usual assumption of the Fathers, who lean heavily upon the apocryphal gospels for

their proof of the existence of these sons of Joseph prior to Jesus' birth, is that the Gospel silence is to be interpreted as suggesting that either the brethren were present on the occasions mentioned above but escaped mention by the Evangelists because of the relative unimportance of their place in the history at that point. Or, it must be assumed that they were left at home in Nazareth, being grown up enough to care for themselves during Joseph's absence. Let it be remembered, however, that this same silence of the Evangelists is just as fully capable of being interpreted to mean that these "brethren of the Lord" had not yet been born!

THE HALF BROTHERS VIEW

This view, in the words of Lightfoot (*Galatians*, 253), is "that the obvious meaning of the term ("brethren") was the correct meaning, and that these brethren were the Lord's brethren as truly as Mary was the Lord's mother, being her sons by her husband Joseph." Though each detail in connection with the protagonists of this question, when considered individually, "might with some difficulty be explained otherwise, the force of the argument is cumulative. There are too many items to be explained away, in order to establish any other inference" than that these people were half brothers of Jesus. (*I.S.B.E.*, 519)

This view may be diagrammed as follows:



Some of the points in the chart depend upon factors already discussed, such as the identification of Mary of Clopas with Mary the mother of James and Joses (see Chart 1), the identification of the Apostles

James, Simon and Judas (Chart 2 and notes under the Cousin Theory), as well as the linguistical identification of Alphaeus with Cleophas (or Clopas), hence enjoy the strengths or suffer the weaknesses of the position of these factors in the other theories.

There are, however, several new items that are derived, rightly or not, from the testimony of Hegesippus, a Hebrew Christian of Palestine living around 160 A.D. Though the testimony was cited by Lightfoot as tending to support the Step-brothers Theory, rather than the Half Brother View, since Eusebius and Epiphanius who quote Hegesippus take former view of the question, yet the objective facts which Hegesippus mentions are susceptible of another interpretation:

After the martyrdom of James the Just on the same charge as the Lord, his paternal uncle's child Symeon the son of Clopas is next made bishop, who was put forward by all as the second in succession, being cousin of the Lord. (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.*, iv. 22)

They say he (Simeon the son of Cleophas) was the cousin german of our Saviour, for Hegesippus asserts that Cleophas was the brother of Joseph. (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.*, iii, 11)

In another place (iii, 32), Eusebius cites Hegesippus' testimony to the same effect. Now, the question arises whether it is legitimate to reject out of hand the contrary testimony of the Fathers on one view and appeal to agreeable testimony for another view. It will be noticed, however, that appeal is not made here to direct testimony on the perpetual virginity of Mary or upon the relation of the brothers to Jesus, even though Hegesippus' witness contains also notice of this latter fact. Rather, the testimony is brought forward to notice the connection of Cleophas and Joseph, a relationship that, while not directly material for the controversy, yet provides a link in an otherwise incomplete chain. Eusebius himself quotes this testimony no less than three separate times as if he had no doubt about its authenticity even though he himself lived about 180 years later.

Weaknesses of this theory of the relationships immediately arise:

1. The identification of Clopas with Alphaeus, which itself, in turn, is dependent upon the following considerations: (*I.S.B.E.*, 106)
  - a. That Mary of Clopas is the same as Mary, mother of James the Less and Joses. (See Chart 1.) Impossible to prove or disprove.
  - b. That James the Less and James of Alphaeus are the same person.

Though this is impossible to demonstrate absolutely, this identification is the absolutely necessary key to solve the problem.

- c. That Clopas and Alphaeus are different variations of a common name, variations arising out of varying approximation in Greek of an Aramaic name. Competent scholars stand both for and against this identification. But, as noted before, certain linguistic identification of the two names would never prove identification of persons.
  - d. That Clopas (or Alphaeus) was known by two names, a hypothesis not unlikely, considering the practice of that period. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to demonstrate whether he too followed this usage.
2. Also the supposition that we have correctly identified the sons of Clopas (Alphaeus?) and Mary as being James and Joses (Mt. 27:56; Mk. 15:40), Simon (Hegesippus, cited above) and Judas "of James" (or Thaddaeus). While it would seem that three out of four of these cousins of the Lord are to be numbered among the Apostles, yet the tenuous identifications are impossible to prove:
- a. While Simon of Clopas is described by Hegesippus as "the Lord's cousin," this seems to weigh against his being the same as Simon the Zealot, the Apostle, else would not Hegesippus have found it easier so to describe him? Further, Hegesippus' remark (*Eccl. Hist.* iii, 11) is found in a context where the Apostles, brethren and disciples of the Lord gather to seek a worthy successor to James, bishop of Jerusalem. Considering the particular mission of the Apostles, it would be hardly likely that an Apostle, Simon the Zealot, were he to be identified with Simon of Clopas, should have been selected to fill the episcopal office.
  - b. The likelihood of Judas' being the *brother* of, rather than the *son* of, James, has already been noticed. (See objection 4 under the Cousin Theory.) Yet, if the writer of the Epistle of Jude is the same man as "Judas of James," the identification of that "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James" (Jude 1) is reasonably assured. Unfortunately, the very fact that the name "James" was so common, reduces our certainty that the very James to whom he was brother is also James of Alphaeus.

At this point it is worthwhile to examine the objections Lightfoot (*ibid.* 270ff) offers to the Half Brother View:

3. Without stating it clearly, Lightfoot seems to suggest that since Joseph disappears from the record after Jesus' visit to the Temple

at age 12; therefore Joseph died. Hence, Mary naturally appears alone with Jesus' brethren. Lightfoot suggests (but does not state) the conclusion that Joseph could not have begotten at least six children in these twelve years. If so, this is patently impossible to prove, since Mary and Joseph could have had one baby every other year, all born after Jesus.

4. It is objected also that the perpetual virginity of Mary is not hindered by certain expressions thought to deny it:

a. According to Lightfoot, the expression "he knew her not until" (Mt. 1:25) does not imply normal marital relations after the birth of Jesus. But this is manifestly false in light of the following considerations:

(1) The very fact that Matthew made any declaration at all, short of saying, "He knew her not until her death," suggests quite the opposite interpretation. Had the Apostle Matthew considered the perpetual virginity of Mary to be so important as later to be recognized as dogma, he could not have expressed the critical information upon which the dogma depends in more equivocal or compromising language.

(2) It is often argued by defenders of the perpetual virginity myth that the Evangelist, whose purpose in this chapter (Mt. 1:25) is to bring out the supernatural birth of Jesus, clearly affirms the virginity of Mary up to the moment of birth; what occurred after that, and that which comes to us through tradition, lies outside of his present perspective. In an excellent discussion of the critical word "until" (*héos hoû*) Fausto Salvoni (*Sesso e amore nella Bibbia*) brings forward cogent reasons why the word "until" actually does deal with, or speak clearly about, that period which follows the time limited by "until." It has been thought useful, therefore, to include in summary form Salvoni's argument at the conclusion of this study.

- b. As Lightfoot rightly points out, some have mistakenly supposed that Luke's (2:7) expression, "She gave birth to her first-born son," implied a "second-born" and so further. However, "first-born" to the Jewish mind had special significance. (Cf. Lk. 2:22-24) The first-born belonged to the Lord in a special way that was not true of the "second-born," or of other children born later. The term "first-born" refers, then, to a position based upon order of birth, it is true, but does not necessitate other births.

5. "Woman, behold thy son." (Jn. 19:26, 27) is thought by Lightfoot to be most devastating to the Half Brothers View, for this phrase seems to indicate that Mary did not have four grown sons who should care for her so well as John the disciple. Lightfoot argues (*ibid.* 272):

Is it conceivable that our Lord would thus have snapped assunder the most sacred ties of natural affection? The difficulty is not met by the fact that her own sons were still unbelievers. This fact would scarcely have been allowed to override the paramount duties of filial piety. But even when so explained, what does this hypothesis require us to believe? Though within a few days a special appearance is vouchsafed to one of those brethren, who is destined to rule the mother Church of Jerusalem, and all alike are converted to the faith of Christ; yet she, their mother, living in the same city and joining with them in a common worship (Acts 1:14) is consigned to the care of a stranger of whose house she becomes henceforth the inmate.

But Lightfoot's rejection of the Half Brothers theory is ungrounded in light of the following considerations:

- a. The supposed "unnaturalness" of Jesus' action on the cross in consigning His mother to John, were there other sons of Mary to whom He might have given her, is not formidable against His placing her in the hands of John. As a matter of fact, no one knows exactly WHERE those brothers were at that moment, just before Jesus died. Some "unknown domestic circumstance may explain the omission of her sons." (*I.S.B.E.*, 520) If, for any reason whatever, those sons of Mary were not present at the cross, Jesus COULD NOT have consigned her care to them, even had He wanted to, unless by delegation.
- b. But the very assumption by those who argue against the Half Brothers Theory on the view that these men were older sons of Joseph by a former marriage, falls at this very point. Their assumption fails to take into account the fact that Jesus, according to their theory, turns out to be the YOUNGEST of five sons in the legal family of Joseph. Hence, Jesus does not have the right to turn His mother over to anyone! That right belongs to the oldest brother, not to Jesus. If appeal is made in this discussion to Jewish custom, neither Jesus' authority nor the special circumstances under which Jesus made the statement

can have anything to do with the question. On the other hand, Jesus' action on the cross, delivering Mary into John's care, is perfectly harmonious with the view that He consistently maintained the position and performed the duties of the eldest son throughout His earthly life. "Jesus could hand over His sacred charge to the trustworthy keeping of another, because He had faithfully maintained it Himself." (*I.S.B.E.*, 2002)

Some may take exception to this view that the picture seen of Jesus in the Gospels is that of His playing the part of the eldest son, by objecting, "But does not the interference of His mother and brothers with Jesus' ministry (Mt. 12:46ff; Mk. 3:31ff; Lk. 8:19ff; cf. Mk. 3:19b-21) presuppose a superiority? This attitude of superiority is quite inconsistent with the position of younger brothers, according to Jewish customs." Jacobs (*ISBE*, 520) answers, "Those who pursue an unjustifiable course are not models of consistency."

- c. True, the mere supposition that Mary's own sons were still unbelievers, by itself, would not be completely convincing, since it was Jesus' intention to make a special appearance to James (1 Co. 15:7) who was to become such an important leader in the early Church (Gal. 1:19; 2:9, 12; Ac. 15). Yet, conceding all this, it must still be repeated, they were yet unbelievers. Even Lightfoot himself admits the force of this fact: (*ibid.* 265)

A very short time before the Lord's death His brethren refuse to accept His mission: they are still unbelievers. Immediately after His ascension we find them gathered together with the Apostles, evidently recognizing Him as their Master. Whence comes this change? Surely the crucifixion of one who professed to be the Messiah was not likely to bring it about. He had claimed to be King of Israel and He had been condemned as a malefactor: He had promised His followers a triumph and He had left them persecution. Would not all this confirm rather than dissipate their former unbelief?

Lightfoot believes with us that only the post-resurrection appearances would have been sufficient to produce the great turning point in the religious life of Jesus' brethren.

Granted, then, the importance of the unbelief of Mary's own children, the extreme likelihood of a profound spiritual sympathy



and friendship between John Bar-Zebedee and Jesus and His mother, as well as a possible kinship (if John be Jesus' cousin and Mary's nephew), when considered together with the unbelief of Mary's own sons, form an almost irrefragable combination that both justifies and explains Jesus' choice.

- d. If it be objected that this view sees two families (that of Joseph and that of Cleophas, Clopas or Alphaeus) naming their sons with nearly identical names, this is no great difficulty, since these four names are all famous in Israel. (Lightfoot, *ibid.*, 268) No special claim is made for the order in which the names of the sons of Clopas-Alphaeus are given, except to show the coincidence of the first three names with those given in the Apostolic list. But, as the question marks on the graph indicate, no claim is made that all the men named were actually Apostles; the intriguing, but unanswerable, query is raised whether they might not be the same.

As Lightfoot (*ibid.* 269) notes further, the difficulty in seeing two families, possibly related, is not at all increased but actually diminished on the supposition that they were actually related, since family use of the names of common ancestors or relatives is most reasonable. (Cf. Lk. 1:59-61)

## CONCLUSION

While the view that "the Lord's Brethren" were actually Jesus' half brothers, being true sons of Joseph and Mary born after the birth of Jesus, is not without weaknesses, it appears to possess fewer weaknesses than are found in the alternate theories, while at the same time this view explains equally well, if not better, the scraps and pieces of information given in Scripture.

Also, in relation to the motherhood of Mary, it may be said that

The interpretation that they are the Lord's real brethren ennobles and glorifies family life in all its relations and duties, and sanctifies motherhood with all its cares and trials as holier than a selfish isolation from the world, in order to evade the annoyances and humiliations inseparable from fidelity to our callings.

(*I.S.B.E.*, 520)

Thus, the polemic against the "perpetual virginity of Mary" is not by any means a polemic against Mary. Rather, it is the desire to

present the relations of our Lord in their proper light, in order better to understand our own position before God, for if we are ignoring a fundamental part of our mediation between us and God (the supposed mediation of Mary), then we do her injustice and weaken our own spiritual position on earth. On the other hand, since the major step in her exaltation, the human declaration of her perpetual virginity, is founded upon bad exegesis and human authority (i.e., of the Fathers who assert it), the modern Christian loses nothing to reject it.

### "AND HE KNEW HER NOT UNTIL SHE HAD BORNE A SON"

Does the use of the word "until" in this Matthaean text suggest anything about what took place in the marital relations of Joseph and Mary after the birth of Jesus? Or, as many think, does the word "until" affirm only that Joseph kept Mary a virgin until the time of Jesus' birth, without either affirming or denying anything about his attitude following that event?

Fausto Salvoni (*Sesso e amore nella Bibbia*, 95-132) deals with the question underlying the problem of interpretation of the word "until": "Is there a defining use of the word 'until'?", by putting to critical examination the proofs offered. In reading the text of the English Bible, beware of missing the point of Salvoni's illustrations by failing to note that in English translations the word "until" might not have been used in the passages cited. However, a cognate idea is always present, even if the English translators adopted another word having the same meaning as "until."

#### 1. "Until death . . ."

Many times Fathers and theologians try to prove the definitive sense of "until" by referring to those numerous Bible passages in which it is affirmed that a given thing took place until the death of an individual. Evidently the fact indicated could not be done after his death! However, the passages of this category have no value whatever, since the situation of the individual after death was so totally altered as to impede any possibility to act. But this is not true in the case of Matthew, which puts the limitation in a period in which there was yet the possibility for conjugal relations. Now if in Matthew we should have read "until death," there would not be anything

we could object to on this subject, 'since any matrimonial relationship would have been evidently and forever excluded. Unfortunately, this is not the case with Matthew. It would be useless to examine such examples, which, however, will be presented, even if briefly, for greater completeness:

- a. *Until the death of the individual.* (2 Sam. 6:23; 20:3; 2 Kg. 15:5; Job 27:2-5; 2 Kg. 7:3)
- b. *Until the death of one's adversaries.* (Psa. 112:8; 1 Mac. 5:54)
- c. *Until the end of the world.* Here, too, the passages are parallel to those on the death of the individual, except that instead of one's death, the end of the world or of humanity is spoken of. (Mt. 28:20; Psa. 72:7) Such passages evidently cannot be considered as being truly parallel with Matthew 1:25, because this latter text is not discussing the end of the world or of the individual which would have rendered any conjugal relationship impossible. Rather, we are talking about a particular period prior to it, that is, the birth of Jesus, after which conjugal relations continued to remain possible.

## 2. "Unto this day"

Cf. Dt. 34:6; Gen. 35:20; Mt. 27:8; 28:15. This expression really limits the consideration of the writer to the period prior to the limit set (the defining sense), not because that limit is inherent in the word "until," but because this is required by the limit established, which is the moment in which the writer is living. He wanted to limit his statement to this instant for the simple reason that the rest of the future remained unknown to him. The reality he indicated could have continued or not, for which reason he could not predict what would have happened after the moment in which he was writing, unless he had a divine revelation. So we are not talking about a true parallel with the passage in Matthew in which he is talking about a period prior to the moment in which the Evangelist was writing, that is, the birth of Jesus. If Matthew had written: "Joseph had no relations with Mary to this day," in that case, then, he would have excluded from his consideration all the time from Joseph's espousal of Mary until the time of writing the record by Matthew.

All the passages presented up to this point do not correspond at all to the "until" used in Matthew's sentence in our study, since, at the end fixed in them, it was not at all possible to act in the manner indicated, whereas, contrarily, the action of "knowing" Mary was

always possible after the birth of Jesus. Therefore, they are not parallels to the Matthaean text. For if they were, it would be necessary to read that Joseph did not have relations with the bride until her death, or to this day, or up to the moment of the time of writing or until the moment in which such an act was no longer possible.

Let us now see the importance of the Biblical "until" in the various cases where the action indicated by the principle verb always remained possible even after the limit established. Here we are in the field more exactly parallel with the Matthaean text under study.

### 3. Until a certain moment in the past.

In all these cases the "until" always presupposes a change of situation after the limit indicated.

- a. In the case in which the indication of the principle clause is positive, "until" affirms the denial of it at the moment of the limit set by "until." Examples offered by Salvoni are: Dan. 11:36; Gen. 24:19; Ruth 2:21; Nu. 32:17; Is. 30:17; Mt. 2:15, 19; Mt. 13:33; Lk. 13:21; Mt. 14:22; Mt. 26:36; Lk. 12:50; 24:49; Ac. 21:26; 25:21; 2 Pt. 1:19; cf. Rev. 22:5. In each of these illustrations he shows how a reasonable view of each case shows that, once a change is brought about in the situation, the action limited by "until" is no longer needed, possible or reasonable.
- b. If the principle clause is negative (as in the case of Matthew), the "until" always indicates the realization of the thing denied before.

Eliezar, sent by Abraham to search for a wife for his son Isaac, said to Laban, "I will not eat until I have said (what I must say)," after which, naturally, he would eat. (Gen. 24:33) Also the Jews that intended to kill Paul "made a vow not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul" (Ac. 23:12, 14, 21). After the transfiguration Jesus demanded that the three Apostles present not speak about the vision "until the Son of man be risen from the dead" (Mt. 17:9); afterwards they would have been able to talk about it. When Jesus left Jerusalem He said that they would not have seen Him any more until they received Him with the cry of "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord." In that moment, then, they would have seen Him. (Mt. 23:39) Other illustrations: Mt. 5:26; Lk. 22:16, 18, 34; Jn. 13:38; 18:27; 9:18; 1 Co. 4:5. After considering seeming exceptions to the rule (i.e., Ps. 110:1; 1 Co. 15:27f; Ps. 123:2; 1 Ti. 4:13; Lk. 1:80; cf. Lk. 3:4 and 7:24;

Gen. 49:10; Nu. 20:17; Gen. 28:15 of cf. vv. 20, 21; Mt. 12:18-21 citing Isa. 42:1-4), Salvoni concludes that, unless the action which is the logical opposite to that indicated in the principle clause is rendered impossible by death or the end of the world or a (then) unknown future, the action is to be considered possible, the limitation "until" indicating the change of what was affirmed or denied by the principle verb.

To keep from limiting the abstinence from marital relations to the period prior to the birth of Jesus, Matthew would have had to use an expression similar to that describing Judith where it is said that after the death of her first husband, "No man knew her all the days of her life." (Judith 16:22)

### THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE PASSAGE

Now we need to see why Matthew should have used such a limiting formula. For what reason did he want to insist on the fact that the marital relations did not take place before the birth of Jesus?

1. Some have found the motive in the fact that Matthew wanted to use this phrase to underline the virginal conception of Mary and the purely legal paternity of Joseph. But there was no motive to take up this theme again, since it had already been clearly established by the expression "and before they came together, she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 1:16), or else by the words of the angel to Joseph: "Do not fear to take Mary your wife, because what is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." (1:20) Later marital relations would not have had any influence on the conception that had already taken place.
2. Others insist on the fact that Matthew wanted to demonstrate how the prophecy of Isaiah that he had cited had been fully realized in Mary: "Behold the *virgin* shall be *with child*: and she *shall bring forth* a son; and He will be called Emmanuel." (Mt. 1:23 = Isa. 7:14) Here the virginity of Mary is not only affirmed at the time of the conception, but also at the time of the birth. But the wife of Joseph would not have been a virgin at the time of the birth of Jesus, had Joseph had conjugal relations with her prior to that moment. Thus, those who hold this view emphasize that clear up to the moment of delivery Joseph respected the virginity of his own wife.

But as we have seen before, with this phrase Matthew hints at conjugal relations in a later period, i.e., after the birth. In fact, after having said that Joseph took Mary as his wife and introduced her into his own house, it was logical for the reader to conclude that he would have treated her as his wife. Therefore, Matthew corrects such a thought, saying that in fact they abstain from every contact until the birth of Jesus. The reader was logically led to conclude, by the normal course of marital relations, that later he acted toward her as any husband. Even if his intent had been to announce that the bride remained a virgin until the birth of Jesus, Matthew used language that clearly lets the reader catch a glimpse of a different comportment after that birth. If Matthew had been convinced that Mary remained always a virgin, he would not have expressed himself in an ambiguous, actually compromising, phrase such as he did.

Blinzler does not want to feel this difficulty and debates it by saying that inasmuch as the early Christians knew that Jesus did not have brothers german by Mary, the expression of Matthew did not cause them any difficulty. But this argument has the defect of supposing already proved what must yet be demonstrated. Who says that the early Christians, who tranquilly speak of brothers and sisters of Jesus, did not consider them as being born from Mary and Joseph? Given the fact that there were persons described as "brothers of the Lord," would it not have been much simpler to clarify yet further the fact of the perpetual virginity of Mary, if her supposed condition had possessed such importance for Christian theology? The early believers were interested in Jesus and not in the virginity of Mary, and this latter truth had value only insofar as it could document the virginal conception of the Christ. Having completed this mission, Mary returned, as far as they were concerned, to the situation of all other women.

3. Why did Joseph abstain from any marital relationship until the birth of Jesus? It is usually thought that Mary, being a temple of God, that she would be considered taboo for Joseph. But this reasoning is based upon the metaphysical concepts of much later Catholic theology that Joseph did not possess at that time. For him Mary was his own wife, for him the yet unborn babe was the fruit of a special divine intervention, after whose birth there could be no reasons for which he should regard his own wife as taboo. Given the illumination by the angel, it would have been logical, as Matthew says, that Joseph should have abstained from marital

relations as long as the unborn Babe lived in the womb of Mary, and not afterwards.

4. Fausto Salvoni's own view is that due to influences of the Essenes felt in Jewish life, perhaps Joseph would have abstained from regular marital relations during the pregnancy, even as the Essenes reputedly did. This, even though not a member or even a sympathizer with their movement. Of course, this view is absolutely impossible to prove, however attractive to some, since it is impossible to document to what extent the Essene's views permeated and affected Jewish life or to what extent Joseph or Mary would have respected those views.

Salvoni concludes by repeating that the perpetual virginity of Mary, asserted by many, creates some not indifferent Biblical problems, since it seems to be contradicted by clear New Testament testimonies. Such a doctrine obligates the believer to give to the "until" of Matthew a defining sense that is never found elsewhere in Holy Scripture, introducing into it an exception without any sure foundation.

## DO YOU HAVE THE WORD IN YOUR HEART?

### Matthew 13

Can you remember who made each of the following statements? What was the occasion? To whom was it spoken? What did they mean by it? Are there any manuscript variations or other ways of translating it? Is it possible to apply its truth to our own day? If so, how?

1. "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given."
2. "Blessed are your eyes, for they see . . ."
3. ". . . and the thorns grew up and choked them."
4. "Let them both grow together until the harvest . . ."
5. ". . . but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath."
6. "Is not this the carpenter's son?"
7. "All these things spake Jesus in parables unto the multitudes; and without a parable spake he nothing unto them: *that it might be fulfilled* which was spoken through the prophet . . ." (Deal

particularly with the phrase *in italics*.)

8. "He that hath ears, let him hear."
9. "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire . . ."
10. "Therefore every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven is like unto a . . . householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old."
11. "A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country . . ."
12. "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief."

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN OUTLINES

Section 33: Jesus Hears of the Assassination of John (14:1-13a)

Section 34: Jesus Feeds 5000, Walks the Waves, Stills Storm (14:13b-33)

Section 35: Jesus Heals the Sick of Gennesaret (14:34-36)

## STUDY OUTLINE

- I. JESUS HEARS OF THE ASSASSINATION OF JOHN (Mt. 14:1-12; Mk. 6:14-29; Lk. 9:7-9)
  - A. Herod's opinion of Jesus (Mt. 14:1, 2; Mk. 6:14-16; Lk. 9:7-9)
    1. Herod hears about Jesus.
    2. His interpretation of the rumors
    3. Others' views of the matter
    4. Herod desires to see Jesus.
  - B. (Historical Flash Back) The death and burial of John (Mt. 14:3-13a; Mk. 6:17-29)
    1. John imprisoned by Herod to appease Herodias for John's accusations.
    2. Herodias tries to avenge herself against John.
    3. Herod's mixed motives blocked any effective action.
    4. At his public birthday celebration Herod rashly vowed anything to Herodias' daughter.
    5. Herodias requires John's murder which Herod reluctantly orders.



6. John's body is buried by his disciples and Jesus is informed.
- II. JESUS FEEDS 5000, WALKS THE WAVES, STILLS STORM  
(Mt. 14:13-33; Mk. 6:31-52; Lk. 9:11-17; Jn. 6:1-21)
- A. Jesus' Problem: need for privacy amid great excitement
  - B. Jesus' Plan: withdrawal from population centers
  - C. Jesus' Provision: feeds 5000-plus crowd
  - D. Jesus' Prayers: almost all night with the Father
  - E. Jesus' Powers: sees disciples' struggles in the storm, walks on the water and calms the storm, after empowering Peter also to walk on sea
  - F. Jesus' People: Peter and the others
- III. JESUS HEALS THE SICK OF GENNESARET (Mt. 14:34-36; Mk. 6:53-56)
- A. The depth of the need
  - B. The trusting humility of approach
  - C. The simplicity of His method
  - D. The completeness of His results

## Section 33

### JESUS HEARS OF THE ASSASSINATION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

(Parallels: Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:7-9)

TEXT: 14:1-13a

1 At that season Herod the tetrarch heard the report concerning Jesus, 2 and said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore do these powers work in him. 3 For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. 4 For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her. 5 And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. 6 But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced in the midst, and pleased Herod. 7 Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she should ask. 8 And she, being put forward by her mother, saith, Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist. 9 And the king

was grieved; but for the sake of his oaths, and of them that sat at meat with him, he commanded it to be given; 10 and he sent and beheaded John in the prison. 11 And his head was brought on a platter, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother. 12 And his disciples came, and took up the corpse, and buried him; and they went and told Jesus.

13 Now when Jesus heard *it*, he withdrew from thence in a boat, to a desert place apart: . . .

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How do you explain this apparent presence of conscience in a man who had, apparently without conscience, been willing to follow the demands of his lust in order to marry his brother's wife after divorcing his own (if, in fact, he actually succeeded in divorcing her!)?
- b. Why do you suppose Herod linked the activity of Jesus with the person and ministry of John the Baptist? Had John worked any miracles? Had Jesus thundered great judgments upon Herod? From news about Jesus, then, how could the king logically be drawn to suppose that John had arisen from the dead?
- c. With so many personal spies at his service, how could Herod be so ignorant about Jesus as to confuse Him with John the Baptist?
- d. How do you explain the two apparently contradictory reports about Herod's attitude regarding John the Baptist:
  - (1) "And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people . . ."
  - (2) "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and kept him safe. When he heard him, he was much perplexed; and yet he heard him gladly." (Mark 6:20)How could both statements be true?
- e. Why should Herod, the powerful ruler of Galilee and Perea, fear the multitude of common people so much that he dared not put John to death?
- f. How would you analyze the difference in attitude toward John shown by Herod and by Herodias? Why did their attitudes differ?
- g. Do you think Herodias plotted the death of John, caused Salome to dance before Herod, thus luring him into the rash oath that would make possible the demand for John's death? Or did Herodias merely seize an unexpected opportunity suddenly presented to her

by the puzzled daughter's request? What is your opinion?

- h. Once Herod had made the oath before God and before those men present, did he have to keep it, even if it meant he must commit a crime to maintain his word? What were the moral alternatives open to Herod when Salome returned with her criminal request? Be careful; God regards the breaking of an oath as sin.
- i. Luke (9:9) reports that from the moment that Herod began to hear the reports about Jesus, "he sought to see Him." Why would Herod, wicked as he was, desire to have opportunity of audience with Jesus? How do you think Herod would go about seeking to see Him? Publicly? Privately?
- j. Why did John's disciples, after the burial of their teacher's body, go and tell Jesus?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

At that time Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, heard about the fame of Jesus, the miracles and ministry of His Apostles as they went through the villages of Galilee preaching the gospel that men should repent. Jesus' name had become well-known, so the king heard about it and all that was going on. This left him perplexed, because it was whispered by some that John the Baptist had been raised from the dead. Others suggested, "It is Elijah." Still others affirmed that either one of the old prophets or one like them had risen. But when Herod himself heard it, he said to his men, "This is John the Baptist, whom I beheaded: he has been raised from the dead. That is why these wonderful powers are at work in him. But who is this man about whom I hear such news?" Herod began seeking to see Jesus.

Earlier, Herod himself had sent men to arrest John. They bound him and locked him in prison. Herod did this for Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, for he had married her. John kept saying to Herod, "It is not right for you to take your brother's wife!"

Now Herodias held a grudge against John and longed to kill him, but she could not, since Herod respected John, knowing him to be a righteous and godly man. So Herod protected him from harm. Whenever he heard him preach, he was deeply disturbed and yet he listened gladly to his messages. Ironically, though he wanted to put John to death; Herod feared the masses, for they considered John to be a prophet of God.

But an opportunity came when Herod's birthday arrived. Herod gave a banquet for his court officials, military officers and leading Galileans. When Herodias' daughter, Salome, came in and danced before the company, she pleased Herod and his guests.

Then the king promised the little girl with an oath, "Ask me for anything you desire, and I will grant it,—even half of my kingdom!"

Then Salome went out to ask her mother, "What shall I ask for?"

Herodias said, "The head of John the baptizer!"

So, prompted by her mother, she came in immediately, rushing up to the king, requesting, "I want you to give me here at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter!"

The king was exceedingly sorry. However, because of his oaths made in the presence of his guests, he did not want to break his word to her. So he commanded it to be given. Without delay the king ordered an executioner to behead John and bring his head. The soldier went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl. She, in turn, presented it to her mother.

But when John's disciples heard about his murder, they came, took his corpse and buried it in a tomb. Then they went to inform Jesus. So when He heard the news, He withdrew from the Capernaum area to a lonely deserted area on the east side of the Sea of Galilee.

## SUMMARY

The guilt-ridden conscience of Herod Antipas began to plague him more severely when he mistook the reports about Jesus' miracles and ministry for the resurrection of John the Baptist whom the king had murdered. At an earlier period John's fearless preaching directly struck the public image of both Herod and Herodias. Consequently, neither could forbear from silencing this voice of God in the land, accusing them of gross incest and adultery. Herodias wished to murder John; Herod, however, preferred only to imprison him, since the tetrarch himself highly respected the prophet. However, a thoughtless oath at a public dinner party cost Herod his desire to protect the Baptist. Ignoring all conventions, Herodias demanded the head of the great prophet be brought immediately on a charger. Herod gave the fatal order, preferring to commit murder than repent of his oath. Faithful disciples of John buried his headless corpse and reported the horrible facts to Jesus.

### INTRODUCTION: WHY DID MATTHEW INCORPORATE THIS ACCOUNT?

As with our other attempts to capture the organization and direction of Matthew's thought, so here too we ask how this narrative *as it is organized and set in this place* would have been intended to affect the original readers, and, thus, how it reveals the genius of the Holy Spirit who inspired Matthew so to order it. The striking chronological order within the narrative itself draws attention to itself:

3. Herod hears about the fame of Jesus and attributes the phenomena to a resurrected John the Baptist.
1. Herod imprisoned John for his accusations relative to Herodias.
2. Herod assassinated John against his own conscience.

Whatever motive may be attributed to Matthew for his inserting it at this point in his narrative in precisely this order, must be attributed to Mark also. Luke, on the other hand, having already spoken of John's imprisonment at an early point in his gospel, described as the capping climax of Herod's wickedness and the eventual conclusion of John's work (Lk. 3:18-20), does not inform us of the circumstances surrounding his murder, limiting himself to cite Herod's words: "John I beheaded . . ." (Lk. 9:9) from which we are to intuit what Matthew and Mark describe in their historical flash back. Their use of this literary device is completely legitimate and nicely changes the pace of simple chronological reporting. Still, the puzzle remains: why did they both use it here?

1. Was it, as González-Ruiz (*Marco*, 136) believes? (It was) to emphasize the ridiculous attitude of that controversial monarch who was partly slave to his passions and partly interested in the austere figure of the Baptist. In the final analysis, that Herod was more consistent with himself than the orthodox Pharisees who collaborated with him while faking an extreme moral dignity. While this latter observation is a reasonable psychological consideration, it is doubtful that Matthew or Mark is merely moralizing about wicked kings in the style of a Josephus. Their purpose is to present and expound Jesus of Nazareth.
2. Or, was González-Ruiz (*ibid.*) right to point out that this passage, as read originally, establishes the theological independence of

Christ's movement from that of John, by recording the liquidation of John and the scattering of his group, in order thereby to show that the congregation created by Jesus was completely new, while, at the same time, preserving the high honor of the martyred prophet? This would tend to discourage any who were tempted to seize upon John's style of piety as somehow normative for Christianity and canonize John himself as a representative Christian, when, as a matter of fact, John's work ended tragically before Jesus established His Kingdom. (Cf. Ac. 18:24—19:7; cf. the Mandaean, or Sabian, Ebionites, who, while other Ebionites revered Peter the Apostle, glorified John the Baptist. See Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, II, 433, 434.) Perhaps the Essenic Ebionites, forced by the facts Matthew here states, could not adopt John as their saint, notwithstanding his ascetic life style. But because these tendencies did not mature until the late first and second century, some might doubt that their rebuttal were our Gospel authors' purpose. However, this would be no hindrance to the Spirit's foresight to see any future tendency where previously given information could forestall it. Besides, who today could say how many disciples of John had difficulty swinging into line behind Jesus after the demise of their master?

3. Since Matthew and Mark intend to glorify the Christ, they have omitted the circumstances of His forerunner's death until this point, because those facts were relatively less important. Now, however, in their analysis of Jesus Christ, they must picture, in addition to the religious opposition to Him, the political risks also. Further, because Herod's treacherous interest in Jesus is but another limitation of His freedom of movement from this historical moment forward, hence part of the explanation of Jesus' decisions, and because Herod's curiosity arises out of a historical fact of special interest to godly admirers of John, this is a convenient point at which to connect those otherwise disparate notes.
4. There is a lateral psychological effect of postponing any direct mention of John's martyrdom until exactly this point, when it could have been recorded earlier. The assassination of John, the great forerunner of Jesus, at the hands of impious men is but an ominous warning of what would happen to the Lord Himself just a little over a year later. Now, if this retelling of John's heroic end prepares the reader for the suffering of Jesus, a fact which the original readers probably already knew, the psychological impact of the entire episode must be another: if Jesus left John unavenged, either by miraculous intervention or revolutionary

uprising against world evil, and if Jesus Himself had to undergo such brutal opposition of sinners against Himself before arriving at His glorious goal, what must be the lot of any genuine disciples who cast their hope on Jesus? Whatever they may have seen in Him up to this point, they must recognize the unwelcome reality that "all who would live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and being deceived." (Cf. 2 Ti. 3:12) In this sense, then, this episode is a telling example of the kind of coexistence in the world between "the sons of the Kingdom" and "the sons of the evil one," as that concept was communicated by the Parables in Matthew's Chapter Thirteen.

5. Plummer (*Matthew*, 199), too, feels that this insertion needs explanation:

So detailed a narrative of John's death would not have been given merely to explain the craven fear of Antipas that Jesus was the murdered Baptist risen from the dead. The story of John's end is required to complete the account of his message to the Messiah and to illustrate the Messiah's eulogy of him (11:2-19); and as the one narrative begins with a message carried by John's disciples from Machaerus (11:3), so the other narrative ends with one. (14:12)

To conclude, perhaps a combination of these various factors may have decided this notable literary side-trip into a Herodian dinner-party.

## NOTES

### A. HEROD'S OPINION OF JESUS

(Mt. 14:1, 2; Mk. 6:14-16; Lk. 9:7-9)

#### 1. Herod hears about Jesus

14:1 **At that time**, does not refer strictly to the events mentioned in chapter 13, but more generally to the wide-ranging, intensive evangelistic activities of Jesus and His Apostles in Galilee, before the crisis and collapse of His popularity near the beginning of Jesus' third year of ministry. (Cf. Mt. 14:13—15:21; Jn. 6 all) Mark and Luke connect this event directly with the mission of the Twelve in Galilee which Matthew recorded in chapter 10:1—11:1. (Cf. Mk. 6:7-14; Lk. 9:1-7) *Herod Antipas, the tetrarch*, loosely called "king"

by courtesy, not by right (see on 14:9), ruled only Galilee and Perea from his capital at Tiberias on the Lake of Galilee. In fact, it was Herodias' ambitious urging him to convince the emperor Caligula to recognize Herod officially as "king" that precipitated his ruin. (*Ant.* XVIII, 7, 2; *Wars*, II, 9, 6) If it be thought puzzling that the Synoptic authors should spend even one line on this weak, minor ruler of Palestine, let it be recalled that ~~this~~ Herod was, by a quirk of history, to become one of the judges of Jesus Christ. (Lk. 23:6-12; Ac. 4:27. See also introductory note 3 above.)

**Herod heard the report concerning Jesus** and "all that was done" (Lk.), "for his name had become known" (Mk.). He was actually hearing of the expanded evangelistic power of Jesus' multiplied preaching force represented by the six two-man teams, but the undeniable result of their magnificent work is not self-glorifying, because the attention of all Galilee—and, consequently, that of Herod,—is concentrated only on Jesus. Their mission, their labors and their attitude unselfishly held up "the name of Jesus" before Israel! *Herod heard the report*, because he would not himself go hear the itinerate Galilean rabbi, and had to depend upon the intelligence reports. He had to depend upon reports, also because Jesus deliberately avoided Herod so as not to precipitate the crisis of the cross before He had enjoyed sufficient opportunity for the training of the Twelve. The vices and vexations of court life and the uncertainties of Middle-East political relations would have more than filled Herod's major attentions, leaving minor religious figures and movements relatively in the background of his mind until their importance threatened his tranquility. Perhaps Herod's absence from Galilee on trips to Rome and his preoccupation with the war with the vindictive Arabian king, Aretas, would explain much of Herod's ignorance about the exact identity of Jesus.

## 2. Herod's interpretation of the news

14:2 **Herod said to his servants . . .** How did Matthew, or any of Jesus' disciples, supposedly far removed from any connection with Herod's corrupt court, learn that Herod was making these presumably private, self-incriminating observations? Is it possible that Chuza, Herod's steward, overheard it and reported the conversation to his wife, Joanna? (Lk. 8:3) And did she pass the word directly to the Lord? Or did this entire scene come through Manaen, Herod's foster-brother (*sunitrosfos*, also rendered "familiar friend"), who later became



a noted teacher and prophet in the Antiochean church? (Cf. Ac. 13:1) *His servants (tois paisin autoû)* are his courtiers. (In 1 Macc. 1:6, 8 *pais* means the generals of Alexander the Great; cf. Gen. 41:10, 37f; 1 Sam. 16:17; 18:22-26; 22:7ff, 17; 2 Sam. 3:38; 10:2; 12:15-21; 15:21, 34; Jer. 36:31; 37:2) He is not merely chatting with his household servants (*doûloi*, *oikétai* or other); rather, he is taking counsel with responsible men in his court.

**This is John the Baptist . . . risen from the dead; that is why these powers are at work in him.** However wicked Herod may have been, he could not shake himself free from his own presuppositions nor his conscience. Resurrection from the dead was a fact of Old Testament history. Was Herod perhaps troubled by Jewish history of the apparition of the prophet Samuel to King Saul with the message of doom? (Cf. 1 Sam. 28:8-19) Was he troubled by reports of resurrections reportedly done by Jesus Himself at Nain just 15 miles southwest of Tiberias, or up at Capernaum 6 miles north of his capital? (Cf. Lk. 7:11-17; Mt. 9:18-26) Further, his own admission of John's prophetic greatness, when combined with a not totally unfounded fear of God's vengeance, may have pushed him to conclude tentatively that God, in fact, resurrected His great prophet.

Was Herod himself sympathetic to the Pharisean views? (Cf. Ac. 23:8) Edersheim sees the Herodian party as combining strict Pharisaic views with devotion to the reigning family. (*Life*, I, 240) But Jesus seems to distinguish the influence of Herod from that of the Pharisees and probably also that of the Sadducees. (Cf. Mt. 16:6, 11, 12; Mk. 8:15) Other commentators, perhaps harmonizing these texts cited, see Herodianism as essentially Sadducean religiously. If so, Herod's Sadduceism, which technically denied the resurrection from the dead, melted before the glaring sun of his own conscience.

While John had done no miracles during his ministry (Jn. 10:41), so powerful must have been the effect of his life and work that the tetrarch has no difficulty believing that so mighty a prophet should be risen and now working miracles too. It is unnecessary here to superimpose the idea supposedly prevalent "among the ancients that departed spirits were endowed with superhuman powers," or that "Herod therefore supposed that the risen John had brought these powers with him from the spirit world." (McGarvey, *Fourfold Gospel*, 370) Rather, if Herod's understanding of God had been at all sharpened by John's preaching (Mk. 6:20), then the 'ancients'

views may have had no bearing at all on Herod, since he could have truly imagined that God would raise and empower John. His actual deduction about Jesus is: "This is John . . . risen from the dead." Nor is it necessary to ascribe to him a belief in the transmigration of souls (from John to Jesus), since he is simply confused, having never seen Jesus, as had, for example, some of his own courtiers, as their arguments imply. (Mk. 6:15; Lk. 9:8)

**These powers are at work in him.** Plummer (*Matthew*, 201) rightly sees that "all these conjectures about Jesus are indirect evidence of the reality of His miracles." In fact, all that Herod heard "of all that was done," "Jesus' name" and "fame," can point to nothing less than the mighty miracles which were characteristic of the ministry of the great, ancient prophets. In fact, the counsellor's conjectures would have been meaningless, had His miracles not been of such character that their first reflex explanations of the phenomena should be "It is Elijah," "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old!"

### 3. Others' opinions

While Matthew briefly reports only Herod's views, Mark and Luke relate the ignorant suggestions of his courtiers stabbing at an explanation of the marvel. They reject Herod's view, because they, having perhaps seen and heard both John and Jesus, would not confuse the two. So they seek another explanation.

### 4. Herod's desire to see Jesus

Herod's tormented conscience refused their comforting logic only partially, because Luke reports him as musing: "John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?" At this point Herod began seeking to see Jesus (Lk. 9:9), a fact of significance, because the suspicious king's sinister interest is now directed fully at Jesus. Perhaps it was to apply tests that would have settled in his own mind this tormenting question of identity. After all, the trouble he had suffered earlier was supposedly concluded with John's assassination, but here was an as yet unidentified person who is bringing the whole question to life again. Was his guilty conscience yearning merely to identify Jesus?

On the other hand, did the ghost of John rise in Herod's mind, not because of a superstitious dread, but rather because he desired that the Baptist rise again? What a relief it would have been to Herod

were John alive again! Trapped into slaying him, John's murderer must have been haunted by the deed. The news about Jesus may have temporarily awakened that vain, impossible desire to right what had been done. But, since Jesus was not John, Antipas remained an unpardoned murderer with no way out, but to repent. When a man refuses to be ruled by God, he begins to be ruled by tyrants a thousand times worse, even though they be but the ghosts of his own imagination.

While Luke 9:9 seems to point to some definite endeavor to get to see Jesus, it is to be doubted that Herod himself would stoop to wandering about among the multitudes to hear Him—unless he were so desperate as to attempt something incognito. Was he hoping that the Lord would visit Tiberias so that, without too much trouble, the encounter with Him could be arranged? If so, the silence of the Gospels regarding any such visit to Tiberias on the part of Jesus suggests that Herod kept waiting in vain until the very end, because Jesus, fully aware of the king's treachery, deftly avoided all contact with him until the Last Week trials. (Study Jesus' movements after the crisis and collapse of the Galilean ministry: Mk. 7:24, 31; 8:13-15, 27; 9:30; Lk. 13:31ff; 23:7-12)

## B. THE HISTORICAL FLASH BACK: THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF JOHN

### 1. John imprisoned by Herod to appease Herodias

14:3 **For Herod had laid hold on John.** (Mt. 4:12; Mk. 1:14; Lk. 3:19, 20) The Synoptics clearly link John's arrest with the general period following Jesus' baptism and before He moved from Judea to Galilee. John (3:22-30) pictures the Baptist as free to evangelize in the Aenon-Salim area until Jesus' trip to Galilee through Samaria. (Jn. 4) From this point John disappears into Herod's prison whence he sent his last recorded message to Jesus. (Mt. 11:2ff) The apparently easy access enjoyed by his disciples is explicable on the basis of Herod's own capricious attitude. (Mk. 6:20; see also on Mt. 14:12.)

### WAS JOHN EVER AT MACHERUS FORTRESS?

Josephus (*Ant.* XVIII, 5, 2) locates John's prison as in the castle

at Macherus, 20 miles southeast of Jericho on the east of the Dead Sea, about 100 miles southeast of Galilee. Several supposed discrepancies in this construction of the events have been noticed. (Cf. Kraeling, *Rand-McNally Bible Atlas*, 385; also *ISBE*, 1959a)

1. Josephus himself affirms (*ibid.*, 5, 1) that "Macherus . . . is a place on the borders of the dominions of Aretas and Herod . . . Macherus . . . was subject to her father," Aretas. But Aretas the Nabatean king is the outraged father ready to make war against Herod for the insult of discarding Aretas' daughter in favor of Herodias. Although the fortress was in the territory inherited by Herod Antipas from his father, Herod the Great, having actually been fortified by the latter (*Wars*, VII, 6, 1-2), it may have been held by Herod and Aretas conjointly by some unrecorded agreement. Thus it may have been in Aretas' hands when his daughter fled to him there before Herod was aware that she had already privately learned of his infidelity to her in favor of Herodias. Consequently, John the Baptist who piqued Herod for his stern denunciations of this infidelity would not have been imprisoned in a castle that AT THAT MOMENT was subject to the embattled father, Aretas!
2. The birthday party to which the principle men of Galilee were invited would probably have been held, not 100 miles to the south of their Galilean homes, but most likely at Tiberias, Herod's capital on the Lake of Galilee.
3. Further, there is no hint in the Gospel story that any significant time elapsed between Herod's order to execute John and the actual presentation of his head on a platter as requested by Herodias and Salome, i.e., time required to send a soldier from Galilee down to Macherus to return with John's head.

### ANSWERS TO THE OBJECTIONS

1. Josephus can make mistakes, but the alleged error of his placing Macherus in Aretas' dominion while affirming that Herod beheaded John at Macherus, as if the castle were under his own influence, is an affirmation that he makes within two consecutive paragraphs. (*Ant.* XVIII, 5, 1-2) The close proximity of the two expressions which supposedly create so glaring an error would represent an unusual inadvertence on

the part of Josephus, or else it would be a historical fact so obvious to him that he saw no need to clarify what appears to us to be a discrepancy. The quirks of reality are often stranger than can be invented.

Aretas apparently did not himself live at Macherus, but in Arabia, because Josephus affirms that his daughter, to anticipate Herod, made as if she were going to Macherus, but upon her arrival there, she just kept traveling until "she soon came to Arabia . . . and she soon came to her father, and told him of Herod's intentions."

The solution may be that, though Macherus was officially within Aretas' jurisdiction, it may have been available by special treaty to Herod by virtue of his marriage to Aretas' daughter. If such an agreement provided for common access, then until Aretas declared war on Herod (shortly after John's death?), Herod could use the Macherus castle as if it were his own. (Study the relation of his grandfather, Antipater of Idumea, with the Arabians: *Wars*, I, 8, 9)

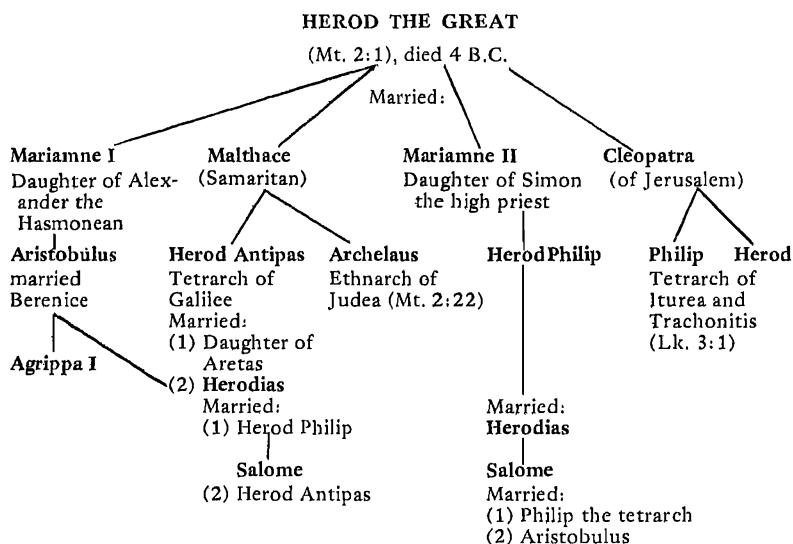
Was Herod, even at the time of John's murder, living in this border fortress to direct the war with his offended former father-in-law, Aretas?

2. What if Herod, in a gesture of personal bravado, paid the round-trip travel expenses of his Galilean princes clear down to Macherus just to combine a military and political visit to that castle, and, while there, to celebrate his birthday with a feast?
3. The assumption that time would be required for the executioner of John to travel from Galilee to Macherus to behead him and return is eliminated by the above-mentioned considerations.
4. If Edersheim (and others, see on 14:6) is right in thinking that the banquet in our text is not merely a birthday party, but rather a grand feast celebrating Antipas' accession to the tetrarchy, such a trip from Galilee to Macherus as that demanded by the facts related by the Evangelists and Josephus, would not at all be unfitting.
5. Since the very war with Aretas was not merely over Herod's repudiation of Aretas' daughter, but also a border dispute with a king who lived at Petra (*Ant.*, XVIII, 5, 2-3), where could Herod better pursue his battle plan than from a fortress on the Nabatean frontier about 88 miles from Aretas' capital? What

more logical headquarters could he find where he could gather "his courtiers, officers and leading men of Galilee" to counsel him in the prosecution of the war?

Despite the conjectures, the hypothesis of Josephus' credibility is the better, because the above suggestions show a possible harmonization of the Gospel accounts and Josephus, thus helping us better to visualize the situation and assure ourselves of the Evangelists' accuracy in describing John's death as a historical fact.

**For the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. 4 For John said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her."** A simplified version of the Herodian family tree will show the relationships on which John's charge was based:



Josephus (*Ant.* XVIII, 5, 4) explodes:

Herodias, their sister, was married to Herod [Philip], son of Herod the Great, who was born of Mariamne, the daughter of Simon the high priest, who had a daughter, Salome; after whose birth, Herodias took upon her to confound the laws of our

country, and divorce herself from her husband, while he was alive and was married to Herod [Antipas] her husband's brother by the father's side; he was tetrarch of Galilee; but her daughter Salome was married to Philip, the son of Herod, the tetrarch of Trachonitis.

The bracketed additions to Josephus' text are by the translator Whiston, wisely added because of the multiple confusions created in Herod the Great's family by the latter's using the same name to name different people. Negative critics could accuse the Synoptic authors of a historical blunder wherein they seem to confuse Philip the tetrarch for the first husband of Herodias, when in reality he later became her son-in-law. In this case Matthew and Mark would be guilty of confounding the Herod of Rome, mentioned by Josephus, with his half-brother, Philip the tetrarch of Trachonitis, as well as of making the latter Herodias' husband. But Whiston's additions are perfectly justifiable for the reasons collected by Edersheim (*Life*, I, 672, note 2):

1. Among the eight sons of Herod the Great, three are also named Herod. Of only one, i.e., Herod Antipas, do we know the second name. It is not very probable that the other two did not also have some distinguishing name. While Josephus speaks of both Herodias' first and second husbands as simply "Herod," the Evangelists use only the distinctive name of the former: "Philip."
2. Herod the Great must have named two sons "Herod Philip" by different mothers, which, though problematic, is not impossible, because:
  - a. He had two sons named "Antipas," or "Antipater," sons of different mothers, Doris and Malthace. "Antipas" may be a short form of "Antipater." (See Arndt-Gingrich, 75; cf. *Ant.* XIII, 14, 1!)
  - b. He had two wives of the same name: Mariamne.

While as yet non-Biblical historical documentation is lacking to prove that Herodias' first husband was named "Philip," as the Evangelists affirm, the above-mentioned considerations definitely lift the Gospel narratives above the suspicion of inaccuracy levelled at them by the detractors. There is no confusion in the Gospel narrative over the identity of Herodias' first husband, as some critics allege, (Cf. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 35) In fact, the "Philip" in question here is never termed "the tetrarch," as is his half-brother

in Lk. 3:1. Thus, Matthew and Mark are as knowledgeable as Josephus on this point. (Contrast Emil Kraeling, *Bible Atlas*, 385.)

On the basis of the foregoing it is now possible to see why John charged: **It is not lawful for you to have her.** The legal points in his accusations are two:

1. **INCEST:** as discernible from the genealogical chart above, the relation of consanguinity between Antipas and Herodias was within the forbidden limits, because she was his own step-niece, being the daughter of his half-brother, Aristobulus. (Cf. Lev. 18:16; 20:21) The only exception to these laws was the levirate marriage in the event of the death of a childless brother. (Dt. 25:5ff) However, Herodias had already borne one daughter to Philip, i.e., Salome, moreover Philip himself was still alive. The crime, then, is incest. Farrar notes (*Life*, 296, note 2):

Even the Romans regarded such unions with horror; and never got over the disgust which the Emperor Claudius caused them by marrying his niece Agrippina; but they were almost the rule in the Herodian family.

2. **ADULTERY:** Herodias' husband and Herod's wife, daughter of Aretas, were both still alive. (Cf. *Ant.* XVIII, 5, 1-2) John interpreted the marriage institution as did Jesus. (Mt. 5:32; 19:3-9; Lk. 16:18; Mk. 10:11, 12) In fact, Mark's version (6:18) clearly quotes John as labelling Herodias as "your brother's wife," as also Lk. 3:19. Even though Herodias succeeded in divorcing her husband, Philip (or Herod) of Rome, it appears that Herod Antipas himself had not been able to effect his divorce from Aretas' daughter, because she outwitted him before he could legitimize his separation from her. But that annoying detail did not hinder the lusty tetrarch from taking up his adulterous-incestuous union with Herodias in open defiance of truly Jewish sensibilities.

These particular charges, added to the other public rebukes of Herod's misdeeds (Lk. 3:19), blew the safety valve by exposing the tetrarch and his lover as common sinners before the Jewish law. Herod Antipas himself had not a drop of Jewish blood in his veins, being the son of Herod the Great, a pure Idumean (*Ant.* XIV, 7, 3 also 15, 2), and Malthace, a Samaritan woman (*Wars*, I, 28, 4). Whereas the Idumeans "submitted to the use of circumcision, and the rest of the Jewish ways of living; at which time therefore this



befell them, that they were hereafter no other than Jews" (*Ant.* XIII, 9, 1), yet the Herods could be reproached for being but "an Idumean, i.e., a half Jew" (*Ant.*, XIV, 15, 2). John's attack is legally based on the Mosaic legislation to which the Idumean Herods never gave anything but the most distant attention. But the very Jewishness of John's rebuke can easily be construed as a political threat, because it exposes Antipas' unwillingness to be governed by those laws to which truly JEWISH kings must submit.

**14:4 For John kept saying to Herod (*élegen*)** on what occasions? Is the direct statement, "It is not lawful for you to have her," a summary of the Baptist's message addressed to Herod's face? While the Gospels do not affirm that John uttered this blistering condemnation either in the wilderness before the approving multitudes or in the audience of the tetrarch himself, it would seem more consonant with John's known character to envision him fearlessly denouncing the prince personally. He had not feared to expose the hypocrisy and iniquity of the religio-political power-bloc at Jerusalem. His single-minded fearlessness and sense of right and duty probably drove him to encounter Herod head-on.

## 2. Herodias tries to avenge herself against John.

Mk. 6:19: "And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him, but she could not for Herod . . . kept him safe." Accustomed to the self-importance of the royal house, the grandeur of Rome and the broadening of travel, Herodias was not about to permit a brassy-voiced backwoods revivalist to call her—even by implication—an incestuous adulteress! While as fully pagan as Herod, she apparently had less conscience. Stung by John's condemnation, she took it as a personal affront, flew into a terrible rage, screaming fiercely her hatred and demanding John's execution.

She is under stress not only because of John's publicly denouncing her as an adulteress. She is also menaced, because if she must return to her first husband, or at any rate, leave Herod, to whom she has attached her ambitions, these very ambitions must be immediately relinquished, and her personal struggle for supremacy must begin all over at a time when she sees herself beginning to arrive at her goals. Quite insecure since her childhood, being the orphaned daughter of Aristobulus who was murdered by her grandfather, Herod the Great, murderer of her grandmother, Mariamne I, she had been married to her half-uncle, Herod Philip, only son of Herod the Great

and Mariamne II, even before she was of age. (*Ant.* XVII, 1, 2) This would have guaranteed the throne to her husband in the event of the unforeseeable death of Antipater, the heir apparent, because Herod the Great's will set Herod Philip as next in line. (*Ant.* XVII, 3, 2) Unfortunately for Herodias, Herod Philip's mother, Mariamne II, was caught in a plot to murder Herod the Great, for which the latter "divorced her, and blotted her son out of his testament." (*Wars*, I, 30, 7) Herodias thus found herself married to a Herod, who, however wealthy (*Ant.* XVII, 8, 1; 11, 5), had become just another private citizen who could not even boast a portion of a semi-royal position. Now that she is finally enjoying her first ladyship, i.e., married to Antipas, John's righteous sentence threatens to snatch it from her. No wonder she was nervous!

Lest our self-righteousness blind us to the "Herodias" in our own spirit, have we never felt the same bitterness and anger toward someone who challenged our goodness and rebuked us for some cherished sin? Our mere shock at committing murder to turn off the embarrassing accusation must never blind us to what the Lord thinks about our hatred and desire for revenge, since the spirit behind both is essentially the same, and will be judged accordingly. (See on Mt. 5:21, 22.)

"Herodias . . . wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod . . . kept him safe." Did Herod's self-estimate of his own goodness grow in direct proportion to his effectiveness in blocking Herodias' agitated urging? Did he satisfy himself for yielding to one temptation (to live with her) by reminding his conscience that he did not yield to the other (to surrender John to her)? Was this his attempt to bargain with Divine Justice?

### 3. Herod's mixed motives blocked any effective action.

**14:5 And though he wanted to put him to death he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet.** Herod makes an interesting character study because of the contradictory elements that constitute his personality:

1. Sheer political expediency demanded the death of an enemy so dangerous to the crown as John, and yet extraordinary measures must be taken to avoid public displeasure on the part of a nation conscious of the divine call and the righteousness of that enemy's accusations. Josephus (*Ant.* XVIII, 5, 2) writes:

. . . Herod . . . feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion, (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise), thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it should be too late.

Herod feared the nationalistic Zealots, because of his collaboration with Rome; he feared the Romans because his tenuous power depended upon their good grace as long as he preserved order in his realm; therefore he feared John, because the latter could easily, by inciting the Zealots and others of Herod's political enemies, dynamite everything Herod had so laboriously constructed. In fact, but for the refusal of Jesus to head such an insurrection after John's murder, Herod would have quite probably faced the violence of civil war, precisely BECAUSE he murdered John! (Jn. 6:15; Mt. 14:12, 13) Ironically, from a purely self-serving political standpoint, to eliminate John meant political suicide for Antipas! The notorious scarcity of genuine prophets in Israel for centuries made it a particularly serious matter to manacle, much less murder, this rare man. Further, the Herods in general, primarily because they were merely tolerated Idumeans, had followed a very astute policy of seeking to ingratiate themselves with the Jewish people. To hinder this holy man, from the people's standpoint, meant to outrage public opinion and reverse the pacifying policy to a most dangerous degree.

Note a similar mental block in the minds of the Jewish authorities when Jesus quizzed them about John's authority: "If we say, 'From men,' we are afraid of the multitude; for all hold John to be a prophet . . ." (Mt. 21:26) Fear of public opinion, more than fear of God, keeps men from acting consistently with their real views, reducing them to moral cowards and hypocrites.

- Matthew's statement of Herod's murderous intention toward John may reflect Antipas' original reflex action before actually hearing John on numerous occasions and, because of which preaching, mellowed for the other motives mentioned by Mark (6:20):
2. "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man," despite his own political conviction demanding his death.

What a contrast: the ragged prisoner in Herod's presence stood free and uncondemned by a holy God, while the richly-robed monarch himself grovelled in his own moral filth in the presence of the same God John so valiantly proclaimed! Herod feared John, because he feared John's God. In fact, John made his God so real to the vile tetrarch that the latter could not but bow his crowned head in awesome respect at the unsullied sincerity and unrelenting courage of the prophet. He possessed not even the suspicion of a defense against the truth of John's accusations. Herod was conscious that before him stood a MAN whose soul was honed razor-sharp by constant communion with God, a man who knew precisely what he thought and where he was going, and for whom the reality of righteousness was his daily bread. Here stood a mighty rock of a man whose moral power laughed at all the waves of shame and insults beating helplessly against him, whom the threats of imprisonment and death could not shake and the bribes of office, wealth and glory could not buy. Herod's court was filled with enough "reeds shaken by the wind," time-serving, self-seeking "men clothed in soft raiment," who pliantly bent morality and truth whenever Herod willed. But here is a giant of a man who is not afraid to live the life of the living God in the presence of dying men, and the tetrarch could not but admire this rare specimen. Though Antipas pile up defense upon defense against the forerunner's message, no vindication could satisfy even the corrupt tetrarch himself, because he sensed that he had at last come face to face with reality itself, the truth of God incarnate in one single man who would not budge. Either Antipas must surrender to God and to John, or . . .

- Whereas Mark mentions only Antipas' conviction that John was a righteous and holy man, it is evident, from Antipas' surmise about Jesus, that the former considered John to be the kind of man from whom not even the performance of miracles to almost any extent—even his resurrection from the dead—might not be reasonably expected. Either Antipas too sees John as a prophet of God, which is more likely, or his surmise about Jesus reveals a paganish superstition, which is not altogether unlikely either.
3. "Herod kept him safe" (Mk. 6:20) probably includes the ideas involved in the alternate textual reading included in the KJV: "he did many things," now corrected to "he was much perplexed" (the difference between *epoiei* and *ēpōrei* in the next phrase). The verb *sunteréo* means not only "to protect, defend against harm,"

contextually pointing to protective custody from Herodias' murderous clutches, but also "to keep in mind; be concerned about," and "to hold or treasure up (in one's mind, memory)." This latter significance suggests that he treated John with respect and a kindness limited to their respective positions and circumstances. It appears, thus, that Herod's official stand on John collided with his personal concern. Whereas he must officially silence that embarrassingly public accusation that menaced his throne, yet, once John was securely locked in Herod's dungeon, the king could safely be generous with him whom he really respected. But Herod was unwilling to do the one thing that would free him from his guilty conscience: break with his beloved sins and Herodias. Did he hope that such kind treatment shown John could atone for his adultery, or be substituted for doing the very thing God demanded of him? But in the long view, what became of the king's solicitous carefulness for the wilderness preacher, his eager listening to his message? The inadvertence of an unguarded moment and a rash promise wiped it all out! And even later, his alarmed conscience, shaken by news about Jesus, did not lead to any deep repentance either.

4. "When he heard him, he was much perplexed; and yet he heard him gladly." (Mk. 6:20b) Herod's perplexity was caused, on the one hand, by his unwillingness to make a break with the luxury and licentiousness he desired, and, on the other, by his consciousness of the rightness of John's denunciations and his fear of God's wrath. The word rendered "perplexed" (*aporèō*) beautifully sketches his embarrassment, uncertainty and mental inability to resolve his dilemma. Here is a man whose will is completely blocked in the presence of clear-cut choices, because of the contradictory demands of his desires.
  - a. "He heard him gladly," perhaps because John was a link with a better past. Herod too had been a boy once, trying to make sense out of the world, and had perhaps set higher ideals for himself than were common among the corrupt Herodian courts. Later, gradually slipping and finally plunging to the hilt in the powerful vices which his unique position offered him, and even now, compromised completely by his incestuous paramour, he cannot shake that lingering appreciation for integrity, principle and the service of God in the life of another young man who made it.
  - b. "He heard him gladly" perhaps for a more sinister reason. Did

Herod frankly enjoy the verbal beatings John gave him? That is, because of the vicarious punishment he received thereby, did he actually like to hear his sins aired and condemned? His guilty conscience would not let him rest, but his desires would not let him repent either. Is it possible that the more John leveled his fiery denunciations at Herod, the happier Herod could feel psychologically? Naturally, since this type of catharsis does not lead to repentance and restitution, the temporary feeling of psychological cleansing lasts only until the whole scene is forgotten under the rush of other interests, other lusts, which, in turn, bring on the felt need for another "blistering" by John's fearless declaration of divine truth and righteousness. In this sense, Herod NEEDED John, keeping him on call for his private catharsis.

(Compare the mixed motives of another ruler and his preacher. Acts 24:24-27, Paul and Felix)

4. At his public birthday celebration Herod rashly vowed anything to Herodias' daughter, Salome.

14:6 But when Herod's birthday came (*genesiois de genomenois toh Herodou*), the tetrarch "gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and the leading men of Galilee." (Mk. 6:21) Some, with Edersheim (*Life*, I, 672), doubt that what is involved here is a simple birthday party for a few choice guests. They think it, rather, the anniversary of the death of Herod the Great and, consequently, the anniversary of the accession of his son Herod Antipas to the tetrarchy. The debate revolves around the word *genesia* and the probabilities of Herod's character; the outcome of the discussion strengthens the Gospels' position.

*Genesios*, according to Rocci, 381, refers either (in the neuter plural as in our case) to "the anniversary date of the death of a parent," or to "the feast for the anniversary of the birth," but in Mt. 14:6 Rocci prefers "birthday." Arndt-Gingrich (153) also think it means "birthday celebration," but point out that "*genesia* earlier . . . meant a commemorative celebration on the birthday of a deceased person." Vine (*Expository Dictionary*, 128) notes that the interpretation "the day of a king's accession . . . is not confirmed in Greek writings." The irrelevance of this latter remark is illustrated by the fact that we are not dealing

only with Greek writings as such, but with Jewish Greek of the LXX (cf. Gen. 40:20) as well as the Jewishness of both our Gospels and of the situation described. Edersheim (*ibid.*) cites the Rabbinic equivalent in Abod.Z. 10a where *Yom Ginuseya* is expressly and elaborately shown to be the day of accession. He further shows that "the event described in our text certainly took place *before* the Passover, and this was the time of Herod's (the Great) death and of the accession of Antipas."

It is impossible to establish the likelihood of the celebration of Herodian birthdays, because of the unpredictability of the human personality, and because Herod, with perfect consistency, could be deliberately affecting imperial manners where he could manage it. Plummer (*Matthew*, 202, note 2) cites Origen as arguing that birthday celebrations are wrong, affirming that "we find in no Scripture that a birthday was kept by a righteous man." Pharaoh and Herod Antipas are the two examples he offers, a fact which argues that Origen translated *genésia* "birthday" rather than "accession day."

The foregoing conclusionless debate only demonstrates the probable authenticity of the Evangelists' narrative against any who would question their veracity by doubting that Herod would drag his courtiers clear to Macherus for a little birthday party. Further, as suggested above ("Was John ever at Macherus?"), the tetrarch and his court may have been at Macherus, as Josephus informs us, on quite other business than birthday parties, in which case, Herod may have wished to combine several things together by uniting the celebration of his accession to the throne (or his birthday) with the presence of his courtiers and generals at his southernmost military post.

Mark notes that the opportunity Herodias had so diligently sought, came. While Herod dallied, wavering between the threatenings of his conscience and the satisfaction of his desires and the day-to-day prosecution of his reign, Herodias singlemindedly plotted the venting of her rage. Was it at her insistence that Herod should give a banquet on his birthday? Did she draw up the list of big names to invite as witnesses of her vendetta, choosing men whose doubtful moral fiber could be counted upon not to quail at murder? Did she groom Salome for her chorus-girl act so as to entice some rash promise from Herod? Did she leave Salome deliberately uncoached as to what to request, or was this feigned unpreparedness also part of the act? Josephus' attitude toward Herodias describes her as an ambitious plotter, fully

capable of managing from offstage every move in the scene the Gospels describe here. (Cf. *Ant.* XVIII, 7 1-2; *Wars*, II, 9, 6) Or, did Herodias merely seize an unexpected opportunity suddenly thrust into her hands by the puzzled request of her daughter? Her quick-wittedness to grasp this unparalleled opportunity is certainly the deliberately sought outlet for months of frustrated revenge.

**The daughter of Herodias danced in the midst and pleased Herod.**

The girl, Salome, was also daughter of Herod Philip of Rome, apparently brought along with Herodias when the latter divorced her husband for Antipas. (*Ant.* XVIII, 5, 4) The attentive reader of the Greek in Mk. 6:22 will notice what seems to be a mistake on Mark's part:

1. With the reading *autoû* in the text, the girl is described as Herod's daughter: "his daughter came in." In verse 24 she is correctly described as Herodias' daughter, whom Josephus identifies as step-niece of Antipas. But Mark makes no blunder here, because, in the wider Jewish usage, any younger female relative may be called "daughter," or else, because, by virtue of Herod's illicitly contracted marriage to Herodias, Salome became the "daughter" of Herod.

However, Metzger (*A Textual Commentary*, 89f) believes that according to this reading the girl is herself named Herodias, i.e., *Herodiados* is taken as an appositive genitive with "daughter," thus naming her "Herodias." However, in light of the historical and contextual difficulties such a translation causes, it is better to consider *Herodiados* to be a genitive of origin or relationship, thus identifying Herod's unnamed "daughter" as "of Herodias," without naming her. (Cf. Blass-Debrunner, *Grammar*, Sect. 162, 168) The interpretation would be stronger, however, had Mark added the article *tês* before *Herodiados*, but such a solecism as the text now stands might not overly trouble a Hebrew writing in Greek as he constructs this concatenation of genitives with different meanings.

2. With the reading *autês tês*, however, the situation becomes more picturesque and significant: "the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced." This reading draws instant attention to the shocking lowering of this girl of rank who thus displays herself in this dance. However, the former textual variant must not be ignored, because of the strength of its external attestation.



*The daughter of Herodias* is described later (14:11) as a "girl" or *korasion*, a diminutive form of *kòre*, "a girl; maiden; virgin," or even a "married daughter, or bride," hence *korasion* would indicate "a little girl, a child." (Rocci, 1073) Nevertheless, we have no way of ascertaining her exact age, nor, on that basis, what kind of dance she did, nor, on the basis of this, how *she pleased Herod and his guests*. Various commentators have pictured, not impossibly, a luscious teenager doing something like an Egyptian belly dance. However, is it possible that we have a mere child doing some more innocent presentation particularly well, who rightfully deserves the applause she received? Then, after taking her bows, did she wiggle into her new daddy's arms for a kiss of approval and the promise of some future bauble? It is psychologically possible that Herod in his (drunken?) exuberance would have made just such a promise to this child just to see if her young mind were as keen as her ability to perform. This, if it turns out as Herod desires, would become one more way of showing off Herodian pride, since she is his grand step-niece. Unsuspecting the outcome, Herod may even have thought her taking counsel with her mother a mark of maturity.

14:7 **So that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask**, to which he rashly added: "even half of my kingdom." (Mk. 6:23) Is Herod's swaggering manner a conscious imitation of real emperors? (Cf. Esther 5:3, 6; 7:2; 1 Kg. 13:8)

About this same period, Caligula was making this same kind of patronizing promise to Antipas' step-nephew, Agrippa I, at Rome. On that occasion, too, Caesar felt he could not back down from his promises, because of so many witnesses to his promises. See *Ant.* XVIII, 8, 7.

The inconsiderateness of these oaths, however often repeated for emphasis (cf. "oaths" 14:9), becomes apparent from the fact that they were never made with that seriousness of purpose, that consciousness of God and that appreciation of truth and righteousness that must always accompany a proper oath. (See on 5:33-37.) Otherwise, when confronted with such a request as Herodias demanded, which took such unfair advantage of the broad terms of his promise and oaths, he would not have been caught so completely off guard.

5. Herodias requires John's murder which Herod reluctantly orders.

14:8 **Prompted by her mother** summarizes a short, behind-the-

scenes: conversation narrated by Mark: "She went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask?' And she said, 'The head of John the baptizer.' And she came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, 'I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist here on a platter.'" The words "at once . . . here on a platter" point to the nearly immediate possibility of instant compliance with her request, hence to the nearness of John's prison.

This gesture of asking her mother is absolutely no indication of Salome's chronological age, since psychological subjection to an ambitious, domineering mother is possible from the cradle to the grave. It is perfectly natural for a little girl to ask her mother, but it may also have been perfectly natural for a *Salome* to suffocate her own desires in favor of a *Herodias'* ambitions. Agreed, she was not mature enough to make her own decisions, but what does THAT tell us about her age?

14:9 **And the king was** (Mark: exceedingly) **sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests, he commanded it to be given.** Did Herod's oaths really obligate him to grant this criminal request? No, he had two valid options:

1. The actual request made was not contemplated in the oath-covered promise. Despite the exceedingly general nature of his promise, he might honorably have declared that his generosity implied, so necessarily that it needed not be expressed, an intention to give her an expensive gift, or at any rate, what was lawful and proper. So, when she demanded that a crime be committed, the oath was no longer valid and his obligation to keep it ceased.
2. Even if all the men present had objected that the very generality of his promise should be interpreted to include even this request, Herod Antipas could have REPENTED of his oath. An oath is a solemn promise guaranteeing the seriousness and certainty of its fulfillment because of man's awareness of God's presence to witness the affirmations. But this very awareness of God's concern in the transaction must remind the swearer of God's interest, not only in the validity of human promises, but also in the sacredness of human life. Ethically, the choice between the murder of an innocent victim of an adulteress' revenge and the possible embarrassment because of a broken oath, should have been easy to solve on the basis of moral priorities. But this awareness of God and this sense of ethical priorities was notoriously absent in the case of Antipas. From this standpoint his oath and what it should

have stood for was better honored by being broken than by being kept. To have repudiated the hasty oath would not have been sin, but repentance. If the oath must be considered valid, repentance was his only way out, but it was a way out! (Lev. 5:4, 5) Despite John's preaching, Herod had so long followed a pattern of refusal to repent that, now when he needs desperately to respond better to this crisis of conscience, he cannot. Though his conscientious awareness of John's righteousness, holiness and innocence threw him into deep grief (*perilupos genômenos, lupetheis*), other factors blocked any effective decision to repent of his oaths.

Herod is an example of the supposed "necessity" for sinning. Though stricken with a feeling of grief at what necessity made him do, he felt the apparent validity of his reasons: "For the sake of his oaths . . ." But these are the justifications of a man whose conduct was governed, not by the unchanging ethical principles of right and wrong, but by a vague sense of honor and a flexible, dubious conventionalism derived from his own profligate society and its traditional customs. So, the snare which entrapped Antipas was of the flimsiest quality, because he could have repudiated his oaths, and because he knew he was gratifying a cruel hatred with which he did not really agree.

Herod's conscience was dead to real crimes like adultery, incest and murder, but supersensitive to the point of scrupulousness about a broken oath! What moral blindness to uphold a dubious point of honor at the expense of elementary justice!

The second factor blocking Herod's decisive refusal of so wicked a request is his guests. *His oaths and his guests*, as factors, must be taken together, because of the unspoken social pressure these witnesses supplied. His oaths had not been spoken in a vacuum nor merely for the sake of Salome. He intended to impress *his guests* and now their very existence pressured him, as if they said, "Can Herod's word to any of us be trusted, if here in his presence he breaks his most solemn oaths?" The king's fear of being disgraced in their presence proves that both his oaths and Salome's request were heard by the entire group. The moral immobility of each single guest at this sudden turn of events which unavoidably involved the life or death of God's prophet, is the more eloquent against them, because of their unpreparedness to impede the tragic conclusion of a merry feast brought on by Herod's cowardly acquiescence. It is unfair to believe that all the guests were cutthroats, because the politician in

Herod may have invited some reasonably good men for political "window dressing." Even Herod himself had balked at killing John before this. But in these few seconds after Salome delivered her mother's demand, no voice of protest, no remonstrating with the tetrarch to repent of his oath, is recorded. How mistakenly Herod read the thoughts of the most reflective among them: "Let Herod show us by royal example for once the high regard with which the life of an innocent private citizen in his realm is to be regarded! Even at the doubtful cost of temporary embarrassment! Let the king repent of his oath, refuse the iniquitous request, spare the life of God's prophet, and his kingdom may stand forever!" Nevertheless, the order was given and executed before they reacted, and a valiant, innocent victim lay dead because of this inaction. Would Herod have repented of his oaths, had but one or two brave men stood up to defend John? (Contrast Eph. 5:3-18; cf. Jer. 26 all; 36:25; 1 Sam. 14:43-46.) Certainly it was too much to hope that Herod himself should have correctly read the thoughts of any men of character in the group, for how could a man, so habitually insensitive to other people, hope to understand their deepest thoughts at a crisis like this? Or, on the other hand, did those guests, with their consciences deadened and reflexes slowed by wine, actually express their insistence that he maintain his oaths? The monstrousness of his distorted ethic is well-measured in Edersheim's exclamation (*Life*, I, 674):

Unfaithful to his God, to his conscience, to truth and righteousness; not ashamed of any crime or sin, he would yet be faithful to his half-drunken oath, and appear honourable and true before such companions!

Mark (6:26) underlines another deciding factor that tipped the scales in Herod's mind: "He did not WANT to break his word to her." (*ouk ethélesen athetêsai*) His desires, or wishes, conspired against his conscience, will and intelligence, and because he was accustomed to do whatever he wished, he simply did what instinctively seemed most natural to him. He could have repented, objected and refused, but he did not want to.

What irony: some men defy the blazing judgment of an angry God rather than face a snicker from an unpredictable crowd, or a tongue-lashing from their women! Herod was just another weakling like Ahab, who although they recognized the divine mission in God's prophets, John or Elijah, and gestured with the pride of a Xerxes,

meekly folded before those vicious wretches, Jezebel and Herodias, to whom they were slaves!

**14:10 he sent and had John beheaded in the prison. 11 and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother.** What a dainty dish to set before the king! Yet from that platter the now lifeless eyes of the holiest man Herod had ever known stared at him. Sinners like Herodias and her dancing daughter seemed momentarily to have conquered by silencing the prophet's voice, but too late. John had already indicted them of evil, already thundered the judgment of the living God in their hearing. Already their consciences had been warned. John had won, because by lifting his head, they only hurled him into the presence of his Vindicator and their Judge!

Ironically, their crime precipitated the very security crisis Herod and Herodias had hoped to avoid, because to their publicly condemned adultery is now added the infamy of murdering a popular holy man.

6. John's body is buried by his disciples and Jesus is informed.

**14:12 And (Mark: when the disciples heard of it) his disciples came and buried it (Mark: in a tomb). And they went and told Jesus.** When John's followers heard of it, who told them? Was Chuza, Herod's steward (Lk. 8:3) also present at that fatal banquet and a horrified witness to the scene when John's disembodied head was presented to the tetrarch? Was he the contact in the Herodian bureaucracy through whom John's disciples could be assured of access to their master in the dungeon? It is not unlikely, because Herod needed not only fawning pawns who would bend truth and righteousness at his demand, but also a few dependably upright, godly men to whom he could entrust the administrative oversight of his affairs. Where would he have been able to find a more faithful manager than among those men with ability who possessed the undoubted character of a John the Baptist? Was Chuza perhaps a disciple of John, whose wife had already swung over to Jesus, and whose own sentiments agreed with everything John stood for? If so, he may have moved rapidly and certainly to contact other godly men to come to prepare the corpse for a proper burial "in a tomb." Did Chuza, himself a conspicuously wealthy man, provide the tomb, in somewhat the same way Joseph of Arimathea offered his for the entombment of the Lord? Too many unknown factors prohibit any

certainly. In fact, perhaps even the remorse of Herod himself played some role here too, facilitating the burial.

**Then went and told Jesus: why?**

1. They have no decent alternative. While some disciples of John had chosen previously not to follow Jesus in order to remain loyal to their master (see notes on Mt. 9:14-17), now they have no other option to their dark despair and heartbreak but to seek Him out who was now their last hope. This significant choice to go to Jesus throws light upon John's attitude toward the Lord. When he received the Lord's answer to his impatient question, apparently he was satisfied. (Mt. 11:2-7) This contentment with Jesus was communicated to his disciples and in their blackest day they turn to Him.
2. Did they go to Jesus to prod Him into action? In the same way John had sent to Jesus, hoping He would do something immediate about the wretched state of the nation, perhaps these disciples go to the Lord, hoping He might be more ready to do something about John's death. If He had not hurried the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom when the Baptist had challenged Him earlier, perhaps John's tragic end would shock Him into instant action. Would He raise John from the dead, as He had others?
3. Did these disciples believe that the Messiah's kingdom must automatically mean the overthrow of Herod's? Does their move indicate a positive political switch of allegiance from their late master, and a readiness to crown Jesus their king in order to revolt politically against Herod? Were these very disciples of John among those who fomented the grassroots movement to proclaim Jesus the Messianic Sovereign? (Jn. 6:14, 15) What a task Jesus must have had to cool their bitterness and calm their demands for revenge! As righteous Judge of the world and grateful Kinsman and Friend of the great martyr, in this case He could sympathize perfectly with the rightness of vengeance. But here Jesus could not violate His own priorities by turning aside from His goal to save the world, in order to satisfy a definitely secondary priority, that of avenging John.
4. Or did they hurry to warn Jesus who was even then evangelizing in Herod's Galilee, lest He too fall by the butcher's sword? The reality of the danger to the Lord is measured by His instant move to push His popularity to its logical climax and collapse, and subsequently, by His constant movement to outmaneuver His enemies.

5. Whatever their specific motive, they probably felt that Jesus would be understanding in their grief.

**14:13a Now when Jesus heard it, he withdrew from thence in a boat, to a desert place apart.** What a blow against truth and righteousness had been struck: the voice of the Messiah's forerunner and the message of this great prophet had just been forever silenced on earth! This tragedy was not altogether unexpected, since Jesus had forewarned His disciples that all who would be faithful to God may expect similar rejection. (Mt. 5:10-12; 10:14, 16-39) But this is a personal loss to Jesus: His cousin, John, has just been mercilessly chopped down in a tyrant's dungeon! (Cf. Lk. 1:36)

*When Jesus heard it*, He had been evangelizing mainly in Galilee west of the Jordan, as were also His disciples. (See on 14:1.) If John was decapitated in the Macherus prison, several days would have elapsed before common travelers could have brought the news the 100 miles from that fortress east of the Dead Sea to central Galilee. *When Jesus heard it*, He withdrew? The disciples of John, Jesus' own followers, and a shocked nation were impatient for Jesus to denounce that dastardly deed in a declaration of holy war against all wickedness in government and religion. But Jesus is deliberately silent, as far as His official, public pronouncements go. Nothing more striking, nothing more out of step with human politics, could be imagined. Nevertheless, here is written the patience, meekness and wisdom of the Son of God who must firmly resist the almost overwhelming temptation to turn aside from His unique mission, in order to avenge His beloved herald. And yet this silence, so frustrating to those who expected decisively crushing vengeance from the Lord, is the divine self-government that keeps God from bludgeoning every sinner instantly whenever he tramples truth and mercy underfoot. There must be time to repent. If the Apostles and disciples are going to "be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them" (Mt. 10:18), this moment of mercy offered the highest authorities in the land must not be snatched away from them by hasty vengeance, no matter how justified. But the silence of God, seen here in Jesus Christ, must not be mistaken for apathy, because His silence is but that ominous quiet that precedes the violent firestorm of divine justice that must finally break over sinful men. Jesus, further, understood perfectly the principle of escalation: to become even distantly embroiled in a holy revolt against Herod must necessarily enflame to fever pitch the emotions of the nation to the

—Continued on page 245

King Herod Antipas	A KING AND HIS PREACHER John the Baptist	Herodias
<p><b>A. A Guilty King</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. His conscience was awakened by another voice of righteousness proving that God's voice could not be stilled by murdering His prophets.</li> <li>2. Awakened by a nearly forgotten remorse over John's murder.</li> </ol> <p><b>B. A Weak-willed Adulterer</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Divorced own wife without just cause (<i>Ant.</i>, XVIII, 5, 1)</li> <li>2. Seduced and married his brother's wife</li> <li>3. Beguiled by Salome's dancing</li> <li>4. Feared John (<i>Mk.</i> 6:20)</li> <li>5. Fear the people (<i>Mt.</i> 14:5)</li> <li>6. Feared official scorn (<i>Mt.</i> 14:9; <i>Mk.</i> 6:26)</li> </ol> <p><b>C. Openly Confused and Confusing</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Herod desired John's death but feared men</li> <li>2. Herod feared John</li> <li>3. Herod protected him</li> <li>4. Herod heard him gladly although much perplexed</li> <li>5. A rash, foolish oath: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Made in haste in dubious circumstances to a dancing girl while himself perhaps half-drunk</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p><b>A. A Fearless Preacher</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Not only before the nation of Israel, making holiness a way of life among a degenerate people.</li> <li>2. But also before the King <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. No soft, easy sermons</li> <li>b. Rather, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife!"</li> </ol> </li> </ol> <p><b>B. A Strong and Righteous Man</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. By Jesus' estimate (<i>Mt.</i> 11:11)</li> <li>2. Even in Herod's eyes (<i>Mk.</i> 6:20)</li> <li>3. Afraid of no one but God</li> </ol>	<p><b>A. A Vindictive Woman</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Justly condemned for her incestuous adultery.</li> <li>2. Out for revenge on John.</li> <li>3. Cared not what measures she took.</li> </ol> <p><b>B. A Woman of Loose Morals</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Not satisfied with own husband,</li> <li>2. Accepted Herod's advances and hand in marriage (<i>Ant.</i>, XVIII, 5, 4)</li> <li>3. Unrelenting murderess of John</li> </ol> <p><b>C. Openly Corrupt and Corrupting</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Corrupted Herod further after immoral beginning</li> <li>2. Corrupted her own daughter for her own nefarious purposes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Salome, shameless like her mother,</li> <li>b. Danced, though improper for a princess so to expose herself,</li> <li>c. Collaborated with her mother,</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

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A KING AND HIS PREACHER		
King Herod Antipas	John the Baptist	Herodias
<p>b. Could have been broken by repentance but kept to avoid scorn.</p> <p>D. A Bitter Remorse</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The king was exceedingly sorry, but did not repent.</li><li>2. The king lost last voice of God, since Jesus would not speak to him but once, and then through Pharisees. (Lk. 13:31)</li><li>3. The king lost all but the woman who ruined him. (<i>Ant.</i>, XVIII, 7; <i>Wars</i>, II, 9, 6)</li></ol>	<p>D. A Glorious Maryrdom</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Not only preceded Jesus in life, but also in death.</li><li>2. Also preceded Him into the regions of light where God awaited this faithful prophet!</li></ol>	<p>though it meant murder.</p> <p>D. A Disgraced Consort</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Her high-vaulting ambition overreached itself: jealous of the glittering kingship of Agrippa I, she pushed Antipas to seek the title "king." A suspicious Caligula banished Antipas.</li><li>2. Herodias faithfully followed Herod into exile. (<i>Ant.</i>, XVIII, 7; <i>Wars</i>, II, 9, 6)</li></ol>
A KING AND HIS LORD		
<p>Herod's Attitude Toward Jesus</p> <p>A. Avid Curiosity (Lk. 9:9; 23:8)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Perhaps to hear the more humane message of Him who was the opposite of John (cf. Mt. 11:18, 19)</li><li>2. To see miracles (Lk. 23:8)</li><li>3. To have a new confessor?</li></ol> <p>B. Fear of Jesus' Influence, Covert Hostility</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Did he use the Pharisees? Lk. 13:31</li><li>2. His fear was due to the popular influence of Jesus' ministry.</li></ol> <p>C. Totally Frustrated (Lk. 23:7-12)</p> <p>Herod was totally helpless before a Man who had no fear of him and who knew that Herod could not kill Him.</p>	<p>Jesus' Attitude Toward Herod</p> <p>A. He left Herod's curiosity forever unsatisfied.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. By apparently shunning Tiberias altogether</li><li>2. By refusing to do miracles for Herod.</li></ol> <p>B. He eluded Herod's opposition</p> <p>Morgan (<i>Matthew</i>, 187): "He passed with quiet dignity out of the reach of the man, left him to his terror, his fear and his frenzy; abandoned him."</p> <p>C. He never feared Herod</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Neither his influence (Mk. 8:15)</li><li>2. Nor his power (Lk. 13:32, 33)</li></ol> <p>D. He rejected Herod permanently by leaving him to his own self-appointed doom.</p>	

point of violent explosion and national upheaval and, at the same time, involve Rome by whose grace Herod ruled. In the certain war, any hope of establishing a spiritual kingdom on earth would be completely wiped out. In short, it would be totally self-defeating. For the sequel, see the next section which flows directly out of this one.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Explain the intensity of the impression made upon Herod by Jesus' miracles.
2. How long did John the Baptist's ministry continue?
3. When did he preach to Herod? Publicly in the wilderness or privately before Herod himself?
4. Why was John imprisoned? When? i.e., what other major incident(s) helps to coordinate our data and establish this general period? Where was he imprisoned, and where do we learn this detail? How long was he in prison?
5. What message did he send to Jesus while he was in prison? How did Jesus answer it?
6. When, how and why was John killed?
7. How many miracles did John the Baptist perform? List them.
8. Which of the Herods killed John? What is a "tetrarch"? In what sense was he called a "king"?
9. Explain how Herod could be so ignorant about Jesus. Then explain how Jesus' name could have become known to Herod.
10. Explain why Herod could feasibly expect John to rise from the dead. Would Herod have believed in life after death, if, as some believe, he were a Sadducee?
11. Who was Herodias? What was her character? What was her role in this drama? Who was "Philip" her former husband, i.e., what was his exact relation to Herod Antipas? Why was this marriage to Antipas unlawful?
12. Who were the guests at the birthday dinner party of Herod?
13. List the OT passages that Herod could have cited for repenting of his oath.
14. State whatever principles of right and justice apply to Herod's case, that should have caused him to break his oath rather than keep it in this case.
15. What happened to the body of John after he was beheaded?

16. What does the action of John's disciples after John's death indicate about the relations between John and Jesus, especially after John had sent Him the great question about Jesus' Messiahship?
17. According to the Synoptics, where were Jesus and His Apostles when word came of John's murder? What were they doing? How did Jesus react publicly to the news?
18. Much intimate detail of Herod's private life is reported in this section. Where could the Apostles and Jesus have learned this information, without making use of special inspiration that would reveal these otherwise unknown facts?
19. Luke (9:9) reports Herod's desire to see Jesus. When and where was this desire fulfilled?

## Section 34

### JESUS FEEDS THE 5000 AND WALKS UPON THE WAVES

(Parallels: Mark 6:30-52; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-21)

TEXT: 14:13-33

13 Now when Jesus heard *it*, he withdrew from thence in a boat, to a desert place apart: and when the multitudes heard *thereof*, they followed him on foot from the cities. 14 And he came forth, and saw a great multitude, and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick. 15 And when even was come, the disciples came to him, saying, The place is desert, and the time is already past; send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves food. 16 But Jesus said unto them, They have no need to go away; give ye them to eat. 17 And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes. 18 And he said, Bring them hither to me. 19 And he commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass; and he took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitudes. 20 And they all ate, and were filled: and they took up that which remained over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. 21 And they that did eat were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

22 And straightway he constrained the disciples to enter into the boat, and to go before him unto the other side, till he should send

the multitudes away. 23 And after he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into the mountain apart to pray: and when even was come, he was there alone. 24 But the boat was now in the midst of the sea, distressed by the waves; for the wind was contrary. 25 And in the fourth watch of the night he came unto them, walking upon the sea. 26 And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a ghost; and they cried out with fear. 27 But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. 28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee upon the waters. 29 And he said, Come. And Peter went down from the boat, and he walked upon the waters to come to Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, Lord, save me. 31 And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and took hold of him, and saith unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? 32 And when they were gone up into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 And they that were in the boat worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. If Jesus loved people as much as you say, why would He want to get away from them, as He obviously intended to do on this occasion?
- b. Why would so many people follow Jesus such a long distance from home without bringing any food along? Is it reasonable that they forget this item essential to existence?
- c. How do you harmonize the apparently contradictory reports of the Synoptic writers who say that the crowds ran on foot to where Jesus was going and actually got there ahead of His debarkation at the place (Mk. 6:33), whereas John (6:5) clearly states that when Jesus had already gone up into the hills and sat down with His disciples, then He looked up and saw the crowds coming to Him?
- d. Matthew (14:13) says that Jesus took His disciples "to a desert place," whereas John (6:10) affirms that there was "much grass" there and Mark (6:39) notes that it was even "green." Make up your mind: how can it be "a desert place" and there still be much green grass?
- e. Jesus' deep need for privacy as well as the Apostles' need for rest

caused Him to leave the Capernaum area abruptly. Many would probably have been angered at the selfish persistence of the people. But what effect did this persistence have upon Jesus? In what likeness did He see them?

- f. How much food did the Apostles think to be needed to feed such a crowd? What is the relative value today of what they considered necessary to purchase that quantity of food?
- g. Can you suggest an explanation why only one lad had food when no one else did?
- h. Why did Jesus command that the multitudes sit down in orderly groups of fifties and hundreds?
- i. Are the Apostles to be condemned for their lack of vision when they faced the prospect of having to feed thousands of people with little or no provisions? If so, on what basis? If not, why not?
- j. Where did the power to meet the need really lie? Was a miracle absolutely necessary? Some feel that the real miracle was the *change in human hearts* as Jesus called the unselfish lad with the lunch forward as an example of the unselfish sharing that the multitudes could imitate. Everyone then took out his own lunch and shared with those who had none, so that everybody ate all he needed to get back home. Do you agree with this solution? If not, why do you feel it inadequate to explain the phenomena reported in the Gospels? If so, how do you answer those who affirm that a miracle has indeed taken place?
- k. If you believe that the people had not brought along their own lunches, then kindly explain where the twelve baskets came from, into which the Apostles gathered the broken left-overs. Where there were twelve such kosher-food baskets, there could have been more, no?
- l. Why would Jesus be so interested in gathering up the left-over fragments? He who has limitless power to provide such miraculous meals would certainly not need to be so frugal, would he? Could it be that Jesus realizes that His power is limited, and so He is here saving up the scraps against a future shortage just in case His power should fail? Why do you answer as you do?
- m. What principles of crowd control do you see displayed in Jesus' tactics in this incident?
- n. What importance would you attribute to this event when considered in context with the circumstances leading up to it and the aftermath that follows it?
- o. Why do you think Jesus refused the popular crown that was offered

Him on this occasion? Could He not have kept this movement under control and led these blindly enthusiastic followers to understand His real purpose? If Jesus could not have kept such a movement under control, then what does this say about Him? Does this not make the damning admission that, after all, Jesus is not like God—omnipotent? Examine the alternatives that lay open to Jesus, forcing Him to make the choice He did.

- p. If Jesus is God, why did He have to go pray most of the night? What did He hope to gain from prayer? If He is God, to whom was He praying?
- q. What do you envision as the reason why the multitudes were planning to take Him by force to make Him their king? How could they have done this?
- r. After the feeding of the 5000, Jesus rushed His twelve Apostles away in a boat: how do you explain this?
- s. After rowing most of the night against the heavy wind and waves, why did the disciples keep rowing instead of turning back? What lesson do you see in this for your own life?
- t. Why did the disciples, when they saw Jesus walking on the water, think that what they saw was a ghost? Are they superstitious?
- u. Why did the disciples cry out in terror? Had they not yet learned not to fear?
- v. Why do you suppose Jesus began to walk past the boat, instead of coming directly up to it? (Mk. 6:48)
- w. What do you think motivated Peter to want to meet Jesus out there on that rolling water?
- x. Do you think Jesus rebuked Peter for wanting to walk on the water? If so, on what basis do you say this? If not, then why did He rebuke him?
- y. Is it psychologically reasonable to accept the idea that this seasoned fishermen who had spent his adult life out on this lake should so completely panic when he began to sink, that he would forget how to swim? (See John 21:7.)
- z. What part did doubt play in causing Peter to sink?
- aa. How do you harmonize the apparent contradiction between the statement of Matthew (14:33) where he reports the disciples' reaction as one of worship and confession, with the declaration of Mark (6:51, 52) where this latter writer declares that "the disciples were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened"?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Upon their return from their evangelistic tours the Apostles met with Jesus to report all that they had done and taught. However there were so many people coming and going that the Apostles and Jesus had no opportunity even for meals. So when Jesus received the news about the death of John the Baptist, He told them, "Come on, let's go off by ourselves to an unfrequented place to rest awhile." Accordingly, He took them and privately withdrew from the area around Capernaum, setting sail in the boat toward the east shore of the Lake of Galilee (which is another name for Lake Tiberias). Once across, they retired to a remote area near a town called Bethsaida Julias. Ashore, Jesus climbed the hillside and sat down there with His disciples. (Incidentally, the Passover festival of the Jews was soon to take place in Jerusalem.)

Meanwhile, many of the people saw them going and recognized them. Consequently, when the rest got word of His departure, they hurried around the lake, coming by foot from all the towns. Some arrived ahead of Jesus and His disciples. They all came because they were impressed by the miracles that He had been doing for the diseased people.

By this time the crowds began to arrive where Jesus was. Looking up as He came out of His retreat, His gaze took in this great throng of people approaching. The sight caused Him to be filled with compassion for them, because He saw them as a flock of sheep without a shepherd. Then He turned to Philip with the question: "How can we buy bread to feed these people?" He said this to test Philip, because He Himself already knew what He would do.

Philip answered, "It would take over six months' wages and it would never be enough for each of them to get even a little piece!"

So the Lord welcomed the people and began to teach them many things about God's Kingdom. He also cured those who needed it.

The day began to draw to a close. So, in the afternoon, the Twelve approached Jesus with the proposal: "This is a deserted spot and the hour is now late. Dismiss the crowds so they can go to the surrounding farms and villages to find themselves lodging and buy food: there is nothing around here."

But Jesus' reaction was: "They do not need to leave: you give them something to eat!"

But they responded, "Shall we spend our two hundred denarii for bread to give them something to eat?"

So Jesus opened a new approach, "How many loaves do you have on hand? Go look!"

When they had found out, one of His disciples, Andrew—that's Simon Peter's brother,—reported, "There's a lad here who has five barley buns and two little fish. But what's the use of that to feed so many?"

"We have no more than those five buns and a couple of fish," the others commented, "that is, unless we are to go and buy food for all these people!"

"Bring them here to me," was Jesus' reply. "Direct the people to sit down for a meal on the grass, grouping themselves in parties of about fifty each."

Now there was plenty of green grass around there, so the disciples organized that vast crowd to sit down in groups of fifties and hundreds. Just a total of the men numbered five thousand!

At this point Jesus took the five buns and the two fish in His hands. Looking up toward heaven, He thanked God for the food, asking His blessing upon the meal. Then He broke the buns and began distributing them to the disciples, who, in turn, served them to the crowds who were reclining there. He then divided the two fish among them all, as much as they wanted. They all ate their fill and were satisfied.

Afterwards, Jesus directed His men, "Go gather up the left-over pieces, so that nothing gets lost or wasted."

So they picked up the leftovers, loading twelve picnic baskets full of the broken pieces of the barley buns and fish over and beyond what had been consumed by the crowd! Now those who ate numbered about five thousand, not counting the women and children! And when the people realized the miracle Jesus had done, they began commenting: "This man is the Prophet, the Coming One!"

For this reason, because He sensed that they were about to come take Him against His will to make Him their king, Jesus immediately ordered His twelve disciples to board the boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side of the lake, i.e., over to Bethsaida, while He sent the crowds home. After He had said goodbye to the people, Jesus got away again: He went off up into the hills for private prayer.

When night fell He was there alone, since His disciples had gone down to the lake, boarded the boat and pushed off toward Capernaum on the other shore. Even though it was now dark, Jesus had still not rendezvoused with them. The sea grew rough, because it was blowing up a real gale out of the northwest. The boat by this



time was roughly halfway across, battered by the waves. Jesus was alone on the land, but He was aware that they were straining at the oars against a strong headwind. When they had rowed about three or four miles, sometime between three and six o'clock in the morning, He came to them, walking across the lake. They sighted him approaching the boat. Although He meant to go along beside them, when they caught sight of Him, they were terrified, for they thought Him a phantom. In fact, they cried out, "It's a ghost!," for they all saw Him and were gripped with terror.

But He immediately began talking to them, saying, "Cheer up: it's me! Stop being afraid!"

Peter tested Him, "Lord, if it is really you, call me to come to you on the water!"

Jesus shouted, "Come on!"

At this, Peter climbed out of the boat and walked toward Jesus atop the waves. But when his attention was diverted by the wind-tossed whitecaps, he panicked. Starting to sink, he shouted, "Lord, help me!"

At once Jesus reached over and grabbed Peter, saying as He hauled him out, "O man of such limited confidence in me: why did you doubt?"

Then the other disciples were glad to take Jesus into the boat. When He and Peter climbed into the boat, the wind dropped. The men in the boat were utterly astounded. Although they worshipped Him, confessing, "You really ARE God's Son!," they still did not understand what the feeding of the five thousand meant, for their minds were slow to learn.

In no time at all the boat beached at the land they were making for.

## SUMMARY

Just at the moment that Jesus' disciples began reporting back to Him the happy news of their successful ministry in His name, the disciples of John the Baptist brought Him the heart-rending news of John's murder. To gain both rest and solitude for body and soul, Jesus sailed with the Twelve east to the deserted country south of Bethsaida Julias. But the multitudes, electrified by the momentous events then occurring in Galilee, followed them. Jesus' compassion for people would not permit Him to leave them again without helping. After He had spent the day teaching them and curing their illnesses,

the disciples pointed out the shortage of both food and time to procure it unless Jesus dismissed the crowds immediately. Instead, He chose to feed the assemblage miraculously with a lad's lunch. The effect on the already excited throng was the confirming of their conclusion that Jesus was truly the coming Messiah. To head off a run-away attempt to make Him a worldly messianic king, Jesus divided the Apostles from the tempestuous crowds and ordered them to leave by boat. Then He dismissed the enthusiastic multitudes to go home and cool off. Finally, Jesus hiked off alone in another direction, into the hills, to pray.

Meanwhile the Apostles battled the stormy sea, trying to row across the Galilean Lake with but little progress. Noting their distress, the Lord walked out across the lake to them. The specter terrified the men, but He spoke to them, restoring their calm. Peter made bold to meet Jesus on the water, but lost confidence and had to be rescued. Together, Jesus and Peter boarded the boat. The astounded Apostles worshipped Him, still unaware of the full impact of His identity even after the miracle of the multiplication of food.

## NOTES

### I. JESUS' PROBLEM

To appreciate adequately this crucial moment in Jesus' ministry, we must grasp the factors that made it what it was:

1. Jesus and the Apostles had just finished wide-ranging evangelistic efforts in Galilee. (Mt. 11:1; Mk. 6:12, 13, 30, 31; Lk. 9:6, 10) Hence, they needed privacy for rest and discussion of their work, results, mistakes and successes.
2. Passover crowds started gathering in Galilee, massing around Jesus, not only because of the excitement aroused by the just-finished evangelism in Galilee, and the effect of the miracles (cf. Jn. 6:2), but also because of the shocking news of John's murder. (Jn. 6:4; Mt. 14:13 see note.) Hence the need to escape to rest from the insistence of the ever-present crowds.
3. The need had also arisen to react to Herod Antipas' suspicions, based as they were on his information about Jesus' popular ministry and that of His disciples, rather than that of the murdered John the Baptist. (Mt. 14:1f, 13; Mk. 6:14; Lk. 9:7-9) While

personal fear of Herod does not motivate Jesus' withdrawal, prudence dictated that He forestall any decisive action by Herod to hinder His mission. Fear is not involved, because after the popularity-bubble burst, He could move more freely throughout Herod's jurisdiction both in some traveling in Galilee as well as His later Perean ministry.

4. Jesus probably sensed a grassroots movement afoot to establish Him as Messianic King over Israel, principally among the Zealots (Jn. 6:15) and augmented by the multitudes generally (Jn. 6:14), a movement that came to a head immediately after the supernatural feeding of the 5000. These suspicions, if relayed to Herod, would have stirred that ruler to fear a popular revolt that must inevitably involve Rome by whose grace he held his throne. (Cf. *Ant.* XVIII, 5, 2) His disciples, however, must be saved from the influence of such wrong-headed thinking.
5. The need for privacy with God. (Mt. 14:23; Mk. 6:46)

## II. JESUS' PLAN

While the Synoptics indicate the above-mentioned variety of motives for Jesus' movements, Foster (*Middle Period*, 151, 160f) is probably correct in laying emphasis on Jn. 6:6 as the key to understanding His tactics, not only with reference to the immediate problem of food for the crowds, but also in dealing with the larger problem of His popularity: ". . . he himself knew what he would do." This comes into sharper focus if we see the deliberate steps Jesus took to bring these unwieldy forces under His control. Each step is a pressure-point intended to concentrate the attention of everyone on Jesus and push each one to some point of decision:

1. **PRESSURE:** Jesus took a leisurely, easy-to-follow boat trip in full view of the crowds, sailing east toward Bethsaida Julias rather than south or southeast, almost suggesting thereby that they follow Him.
  - a. By sailing unexpectedly He drew the crowds into a deserted place where no food was readily available, a fact that would later become another pressure-point.
  - b. So doing, He sifted the most interested followers from the less ambitious who remained at home. If Josephus' figures are even roughly indicative of the total Galilean population which he

establishes at over three million people (240 villages the smallest of which numbered 15,000 inhabitants), the crowd that actually followed Jesus around the lake would hardly have filled one small Galilean village! (Cf. *Wars*, III, 3, 2; *Life of Josephus*, 45)

- c. By deliberately sailing to a deserted place, He frustrated any efforts of the Zealots to build a revolutionary mob spirit in the more populated areas.
  - d. The large result of the miracle that followed was the building of faith in Jesus in the heart of those who could be saved for His spiritual Kingdom, by being able to withstand the blow He must give to the materialistic designs of the popular, but wrong-headed nationalistic liberation groups and parties. The total effect of the miracle prepared superbly for His discourse on the Bread of Life (Jn. 6:25-66) in which He applied maximum pressure on everyone to leave Him if they were not interested in letting Him be their true nourishment.
2. **PRESSURE:** Taking the initiative, Jesus pushed Philip: "How are we to buy bread so that they may eat?" (Jn. 6:5) This question, connected by John with the arrival of the multitudes at the beginning of Jesus' working day, pressures Philip to begin thinking about the problem and perhaps discuss it with the others in order that, when the need actually arises, they might arrive at the correct solution.
  3. **PRESSURE:** Jesus taught the crowds the rest of that day until evening, healing some, but apparently giving no opportunity to go for food.
  4. **PRESSURE:** When the worried disciples bring the plight of the famished crowds to Jesus with their suggestion that He dismiss them as the only working alternative, Jesus throws the problem back into their laps. "YOU give them something to eat." (Mt. 14:16)
  5. **PRESSURE:** When they argue their shortage of money for an adequate meal for all, He ordered them to check out their actual resources. (Mk. 6:38)
  6. **PRESSURE:** In seeking any available food, the Apostles drew the attention of the entire crowd both to the need for food and encouraged them to expect Jesus to do something about the need. But the Apostles, too, are under pressure to obey Jesus by going through that crowd calling out, asking if anyone had perhaps a handful of food, to enable Jesus to feed that multitude, because the Twelve themselves probably did not know Jesus' plan.

(Jn. 6:6)

7. **PRESSURE:** When Andrew turned up only five buns and two fish, he was doubtful of the significance of his find (Jn. 6:8, 9), and the others repeated their only apparent alternative: buy bread. (Lk. 9:13) Hereupon, Jesus sent the Apostles to bring the food to Him, a mission that required faith in His wisdom. (Mt. 14:18)
8. **PRESSURE:** In order to draw full attention to what He was about to do, He ordered the Apostles to organize the crowd into orderly groups for a picnic on the grass. (See note on 14:19.) The effect of this command is most fully felt when all that anyone could see was some sandwich ingredients in the hands of the Lord.
9. **PRESSURE:** When the hushed expectancy of the crowd permitted Him to speak again, in a dramatic gesture full of significance, He blessed the food, began breaking the loaves and fishes, and distributed it among the Twelve for redistribution among the multitudes.
10. **SOLUTION, OR RELEASE OF PRESSURE:** They all ate to the full.
11. **PRESSURE:** Jesus ordered the Twelve to gather up the leftovers to avoid waste, but the psychological effect on all pushed each to decide about the magnitude of the miracle, and, hence, of Jesus' power, since even the estimated size of the group, easily figured by tallying the orderly groups, adds to the psychological pressure too. (Jn. 6:12; Mt. 14:21)
12. **REACTION:** Discussion and conclusion of the crowds about Jesus: "He is the coming Prophet: let us make Him our King!" (Jn. 6:14, 15)
13. **PRESSURE:** Jesus then made the disciples embark for the west shore of the lake, although the crowd was growing restless with ignorant messianic enthusiasm. This tested the Apostles' obedience severely, since they must leave when popular excitement was the highest, and the moment to declare the Kingdom the nearest. In fact, John (6:17) suggests that they did not immediately comply, but dallied offshore, waiting for Him to sail with them. When He did not show up, they started across.
14. **PRESSURE:** Jesus dismissed the crowds and walked away from His Galilean popularity forever, leaving them to go their separate ways. He had deliberately rejected their crown, their ideals and their popular support.
15. **PRESSURE:** The next day, Jesus mercilessly pressured the people to decide about Him and His Word as their only hope of Life

and Strength from God, (Jn. 6:25-66) Even the Apostles faced the choice of desertion. (Jn. 6:67ff)

From the foregoing evidence, it becomes clear that the climax and collapse of Jesus' great Galilean ministry was not a crisis in which He became the helpless victim of circumstances. These pressure-points are all His doing; He is the Lord and Master of His circumstances, carefully guiding even the smallest detail so that all the various factors should collaborate to arrive at the result HE desired. (Cf. Notes on Mt. 11:25, 26)

14:13b **Now when Jesus heard** about the murder of John the Baptist, as well as for the other reasons mentioned in the other Gospels, **He withdrew from thence.** *From thence* means from Galilee on the west side of the Lake of Galilee, since the following geographical limitations locate His movements toward the **desert place apart** on the Golan side:

1. **To a desert place apart**, when compared with populous Galilee, clearly points to the less densely populated zone east of the lake. (Cf. *Wars*, III, 3, 3)
2. Although John had recorded a conversation Jesus held with the Jews in Judea west of the Jordan Valley (Jn. 5), here he simply expresses himself like an old inhabitant of the Bethsaida-Caper-naum area: "After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee." (Jn. 6:1) For a non-Galilean, such a reference would be ambiguous: "WHICH other side?" he would have to ask. But for John, "the other side" is the east side, where else?
3. Luke registers their general destination as a town named "Bethsaida." (9:10) Since they embark on the western, or Galilean, side of the lake where another Bethsaida is located near Capernaum to which they would return after the miraculous feeding (Mk. 6:45; Jn. 6:17), the "Bethsaida" on the other side is Bethsaida Julias, developed from a local fishing village into a beautiful city by Philip the Tetrarch. (*Ant.*, XVIII, 2, 1) This Gaulonite city must not be confused with the Galilean fishertown home of the Apostles, Peter, Andrew and Philip. (Jn. 1:44; 12:21) The name "Bethsaida" simply means "House of Fishing," a Semitism for a place where fishing takes place. Since the Galilean lake was famous for its fish (*Wars*, III, 10, 7-8), it is not at all surprising to find several "Bethsaidas," or fishing villages, around the lake, either separate or connected with some larger town or city.

Thomson (*Land and Book*, II, 29-32), on the other hand, argues

not for two Bethsaidas, but for one major settlement by that name, however located on both banks of the Jordan River where it enters the Lake of Galilee. Accordingly, when viewed from the site of the miracle, the disciples could actually have sailed generally toward Bethsaida (both towns), and still be roughly en route toward Capernaum, by hugging the shore while waiting for Jesus to arrive to be taken aboard at some point along the coast.

In answer to Thomson, it might be asked whether it be possible, that, in the same way in which Jericho has occupied several sites not far from each other over the centuries, Bethsaida too was originally located on a site west of the Jordan near Capernaum,—the birthplace of several Apostles,—whereas Philip the Tetrarch moved its location to a site east of the Jordan and dedicated it to Caesar's daughter, Julia, hence establishing it in his realm? History is not ignorant of such city movings for topographical, political or military reasons. (Cf. "Neapolis" or "new city" in the history of that word! Naples is the new Parthenopea in Italy; there is the Neapolis in Macedonia, Ac. 16:11; and Neapolis, or Nablus, is Shechem in Palestine. All refer to the "new city" constructed in the area of an older one.)

Further, Jesus' command to the disciples to cross over "to the other side to Bethsaida" (Mk. 6:45) is understandable only if that town in question is actually on the western shore of the lake. Therefore: two towns of the same name, however located on opposite sides of the point where the Jordan empties into the lake at its north side.

4. The landing point where the disciples with Jesus beached on the day after the miraculous feeding is described as "when they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret" (Mt. 14:34; Mk. 6:53), i.e., on the western side, and "on the other side of the sea" from where those who remained on the site of the miracle. (Jn. 6:22, 25) Gennesaret was opposite the eastern side.

**He withdrew from thence in a boat to a desert place apart.** McGarvey (*Lands of the Bible*, 327f) describes the area east of the point where the Jordan enters the Sea of Galilee, as follows:

East of the Jordan, at its entrance into the lake, there is a plain called *Buti'ha*, whose shore-line curves around the northeastern part of the lake about four miles, while its width, from the shore

back to the hills, is somewhat more than a mile. The plain is larger than that of Gennesaret, but much like it in shape and surface. . . . On the east bank of the Jordan, and at the foot of the hills which bound the plain in that direction, are the ruins of Bethsaida Julias. . . . At the southeastern end of this plain, the hills which bound it approach within less than half a mile of the lake-shore, where they form an angle with those which extend due south along the eastern side of the lake. At the foot of the high hill at this angle is located the feeding of the five thousand, for here alone all the characteristics of the spot indicated in the sacred text are found. Here is the smooth, grassy plain on which the vast multitude could sit by fifties and hundreds while the disciples served them with the bread and fish. Here is the lake-shore, close at hand, whence Jesus and the twelve had gone forth when the multitude met him, and where the boat lay into which the twelve entered when the feeding was concluded. Here also, rising abruptly from the spot, is the mountain into which Jesus went up after he had dismissed the multitude. A spot farther east or north would not meet these requirements, while one farther south would fail to meet some others. It would not be "a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida"; nor could the people whom Jesus had left on the western shore have gone to it around the head of the lake while he and the twelve were crossing in their boat. Finally, if the place had been farther north, the disciples, in starting for Bethsaida or Capernaum (Mk. 6:45; Jn. 6:17) could not have been said to have gone "to the other side," seeing that they would have been going only from the head of the lake to one side of it, and not from one side to the other.

See also Mt. 14:34 where their return to the west side at Gennesaret is spoken of as their having "crossed over." (Mk. 6:53)

The point of the above is to absolve the Gospel eye-witnesses from critical attacks that would accuse them of confusing names and locations, leading to the insinuation that the "real editors" back of the present Gospels were neither eye-witnesses of the facts nor even remotely familiar with the geography. Further, the traditional location of the supernatural multiplication of the loaves and fishes at a site south of Capernaum on the road to Gennesaret is entirely incompatible with the information given above. (Cf. *Rand-McNally Bible Atlas*, 376, 386)



**To a lonely place apart** (*kat'idian*) is the same expression Jesus used to describe the kind of rest needed for which they embarked on this voyage across the lake. (Mt. 6:31, 32) Since the expression means "privately, by oneself" (Arndt-Gingrich, 371), the first impression is that Jesus intended to avoid all multitudes, despite the view of many that He deliberately sailed slowly across the north end of the lake in full view of any interested watchers who could easily follow Him around by land to meet Him on the other side. Which view is correct? Did He change His mind upon seeing the crowds whose arrival He had not desired, hence postpone His sincerely desired retreat? Or did He actually plan to offer some rest to His disciples, while AT THE SAME TIME use a baiting tactic that would draw the crowds away from the Capernaum-Bethsaida area? If so, then "rest awhile" must mean literally "rest a short while." (*oligon*) In fact, the moments of privacy in the boat had to suffice, because, until the problem of the crowds was permanently settled, there could be no real leisure for the task of developing the Twelve.

**But when the crowds heard (it)**, what did they hear? McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 130) thinks that they learned of the death of John the Baptist, not Jesus' departure: "When Jesus heard of John's death, He departed . . . when the people heard of John's death, they followed Jesus." However, Luke, in his parallel expression (Lk. 9:10, 11), connects what the crowds heard, not with a message about John's death—about which Luke tells nothing,—but with Jesus' withdrawal with His Apostles. So it is better to see the crowds as learning of Jesus' movements by word of mouth from those who saw Him sail. (Mk. 6:33) Matthew's descriptive expression, "a great throng," (v. 14) raises the problem: how is it that so many people were free to go traipsing about over the countryside in pursuit of local attractions? This 5000-plus crowd of men is particularly free from normal business pursuits because "the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand." (Jn. 6:4) Shortly thereafter the entire group would be journeying to Jerusalem for that festival. That this was to be no merely local picnic is spelled out in Mark's vigorous language: "They ran there on foot from all the towns . . ." (Mk. 6:33) Even so, to hear Josephus set the population of Galilee at 3,600,000 people (*Wars*, III, 3, 2; *Life*, 45), would lead one to conclude that only a small group from Galilee eventually followed Jesus around the lake, i.e., only 1/600th of the total population.

**They followed Him**, "because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased." (Jn. 6:2) That they hoped for more of the

same is evidenced by the number of sick they brought with them. (Mt. 14:14; Lk. 9:11) Although there may have been fishing boats tied up at Capernaum and Bethsaida, the entire crowd remained on land, running around the north shore of the lake, fording the Jordan near Bethsaida-Julias, and continuing on around the lake-front plain, Jesus' obvious destination. The five-mile run from Capernaum would be nothing for people planning to walk the 100-mile jaunt to Jerusalem for the Passover!

## II. JESUS' PROVISION

14:14 **And he came forth, and saw a great multitude.** Matthew telescopes the information, because . . .

1. He omits the fact that some of the faster runners in the crowds arrived on the scene before Jesus and the Twelve could go ashore. (Mk. 6:33) This would not mean that the entire 5000-plus crowd stood panting on the beach as Jesus disembarked. In fact, Mark only says that "many saw them . . . ran . . . and got there ahead of them." Lenski (*Matthew*, 563) rightly objects that "we have no right to reduce 'a great multitude' to a few fast runners who arrived ahead of the rest of the crowd." These earliest arrivals apparently were also privileged to be with Him during that semi-private period before the excitement of teaching and healing began with the arrival of the main body of people.
2. He omits the fact that, immediately upon disembarking, "Jesus went up into the hills, and there sat down with his disciples" (Jn. 6:3), which suggests that He spent some time up there with them before "lifting up his eyes, He saw a multitude coming to Him." (Jn. 6:5) This impression of time spent alone with His disciples before the bulk of the crowds arrived is further confirmed by Jesus' return to the hills "again" (*pàlin*) by Himself. (Jn. 6:15) Coincidental confirmation of this retreat is the time required to bring the slower-moving sick people into that uninhabited area for Jesus to heal them. (Cf. 14:14; Lk. 9:11)

From the foregoing it becomes clear that Jesus, IMMEDIATELY UPON DISEMBARKING, did not see a great throng, as some translators render it. (Cf. RSV, Jerusalem Bible, NEB, et al.) Others, more sensitive to the above-mentioned problems of harmonization, render the phrase (*kai exelthòn eîden*) as follows:

1. Either as a temporal participle of nearly contemporaneous action, but in contextual relation to Jesus' successful retreat upon the hill: "And when He came out, He saw a great multitude . . ." (New American Standard) "When Jesus emerged from his retreat he saw a vast crowd." (J.B. Phillips)
2. Or as a circumstantial participle which does not define any time sequence or causal connection or even the means by which the action of the principle verb (*eîden*) occurs, but simply adds an associated fact. Equivalent to a coordinate verb with "and," it may be resolved: *kaî exelthôn eîden* = *kaî exélthe kaî eîden*: "And Jesus went forth, and saw . . ." (KJV), or "Jesus got out of the boat, and when he saw . . ." (TEV) Cf. Burton, *Moods and Tenses*, p. 174; Robertson-Davis, p. 382; Blass-Debrunner, p. 217f. In this sense, then, Matthew telegraphically states two facts which are not immediately connected, being very loosely related.

So, if we connect *he came forth* with Jesus' disembarking, we must not believe Matthew in contradiction with John' who is more complete in recording what occurred between the time of the disembarking and the arrival of "a great throng," and, consistently, we must object to all translations of this verse that, while objectively possible within themselves, ignore the problems of harmonization. On the other hand, if we connect *he came forth* with Jesus' return from His retreat in the hills, then the problem of His seeing "a great throng"—precisely "as He went ashore," no longer exists.

Notice the close psychological progression of events:

1. **Jesus saw a great throng** coming to Him. This is the moment of decision: shall He place His disciples' need for emotional rest and physical refreshment and recital of their efforts, ahead of the needs of helpless, leaderless people, or must He continue pouring Himself out for them? If Jn. 6:6 be the key to the understanding of Jesus' plans for this entire day, then perhaps this decision was already forming: "He Himself knew what He would do." But even this decision is but the practical application of a higher commitment: "Christ pleased not Himself." (Ro. 15:3) **He saw the multitude**, because He had eyes to see, a sensitivity to feel, a conscience that would not let Him forget how many eternally precious people out there in that group would be lost. Despite the fact that only He could truly appreciate them for what they were—people who were shepherdless sheep because they would reject His spiritual goals and the means He taught to achieve them—still He saw His

duty clear.

John informs us that it was precisely this moment when "seeing that a multitude was coming to him," that Jesus tested Philip's grasp of the situation by raising the question of food for everyone. (Jn. 6:5-7; see note at Mt. 14:16.)

2. **He had compassion on them**, "because they were like sheep without a shepherd. (Mk. 6:34a; see fuller notes at Mt. 9:35-38; cf. Mt. 15:32.) Rather than treat them as bothersome intruders who had thoughtlessly interrupted His sorely needed rest and retirement with the Twelve, as also His sorrow over John's assassination, "He welcomed them"! (Lk. 9:11) Rather than let their persistence rule Him, He took charge of the situation, took decisive action, and remained in control of both Himself and others. Tragically, they had lost their other great shepherd, John the Baptist, and would soon be on their way to a Jerusalem that sheltered the hirelings and false shepherds, the haughty scribes, Pharisees and corrupt priests who despised the ordinary people and, when attempting to instruct them, only led them further from the truth. How badly they lacked instant help! and that from a true Shepherd who could minister to their hunger of soul! No wonder people flocked around a Leader so sensitive and responsive, who would not avoid helping them, so obvious to Him was their distress! Had not Jesus possessed a warm, shepherd's heart, the story would have ended right there. His eye was neither on the clock nor His attention fixed on His comforts.
3. "He began to teach them many things" (Mk. 6:34), speaking "to them of the kingdom of God." (Lk. 9:11) Although His announced topic is manifestly quite general, its very mention was enough to spark revolution, because it was the hottest topic of discussion in Galilee. However, in light of Jesus' contextual situation, it is quite probable that He used His opportunity well to cool tempers ready to march against Herod for that tyrant's part in the assassination of John the Baptist. He may well have hammered hard on the kind of Kingdom God has in mind for His people. It is, of course, not His fault that His ideas did not get through to the majority of His audience. (Cf. Jn. 6:14, 15) But, in the same way He thought it worth the effort to try to get people to understand His great Sermon in Parables on the Kingdom, but failed to penetrate their prejudices (see on Mt. 13), so also here He thought it definitely worth the effort to try again to salvage the saveable.
4. **He healed their sick**, never forgetting their bodies while ministering

to their spiritual needs. Many had followed Him only for instant cures, and He knew it. But this did not hinder Him from sharing the generous love of God with them, despite their calculating selfishness, their ignorance of His real blessings and their ungratefulness. (Cf. Ro. 5:6-11) We follow Him, not only because of the supernatural evidence of His identity these miracles provide, but also because He kept giving help where most of us would have already driven off that unthinking mob of insensitive, unthankful people! He acted in character as God would.

The fact that the prevailing excitement had not caused some to forget to bring along their sick for healing, while contemporaneously forgetting any food preparations, may indicate something about the time when they left home, i.e., during the morning when it may have been supposed there were plenty of time to procure food when needed.

**14:15 And when even was come**, as an expression, does not define the time of day, because, after what must have been a long process of distributing the miraculously multiplied food to the 5000, Matthew (14:23b) again adopts this same expression (*opsias genoménes*), at which time John (6:17) notes: "darkness had already come." Critics, noting Matthew's repetition in both 14:15 and 14:23b, could accuse him of imprecision. Matthew's idiom, however, intentionally sets the stage for the disciples' dramatically urgent advice, and mirrors precisely the Hebrew distinction between "the two evenings." Inasmuch as agreement is wanting among the Jews themselves about the precise limits of "the two evenings," only approximations may help us here:

1. The first evening began after noon and lasted until about three o'clock.
2. "Then began the period known as 'between the evenings,' which would be longer or shorter according to the season of the year, and which terminated with 'the second evening.'" (Edersheim, *Life*, I, 681)
3. The second evening began at "the time from when the first star appeared to that when the third star was visible." (*ibid.*; cf. Keil-Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, II, 12 on Ex. 12:6; also *PHC*, II, 226)

It is important to repeat that other Jewish authorities think of sunset as the dividing point between the two evenings. However, Josephus (*Wars*, VI, 9, 3) provides us a testimony

contemporary to the time of Jesus that circumstantially corroborates Matthew's language, since the Jewish historian pictures Passover slaying, which according to the Law must be done "between the two evenings" (Ex. 12:6), as beginning at three o'clock and lasting until eleven p.m. (See also Gesenius, *Hebrew-English Lexicon*, 652.)

In light of the above-mentioned data, therefore, it may be supposed that the boat-trip began from Capernaum in the morning. Then the multitudes, in order to hear Jesus, left home hurriedly without food. Now, after a morning of messages and healings, noon came and went without any respite. Thus, the disciples' observation, *The time is already past*, refers to the dinner hour. Evidently, since they themselves had already missed some meals because of the crowds, they knew that, unless something was organized rather soon, not only they, but the people themselves would be facing a trip back home on an empty stomach.

**The disciples**, i.e., the Twelve (Lk. 9:12) **came to him**. If it be correct to interpret John's organization of the events to mean that very early in this episode Jesus planted in Philip's mind the problem of food to which they all began searching for a solution, then this verse (14:15) represents their frustration and inability to come up with anything short of miraculous. Further, their conclusion is not hasty: if Philip shared Jesus' conversation with them, they would have been thinking about it all morning, and especially so as "the day began to decline." (Lk. 9:12) Their arguments are those of good sense, discretion and consideration, but not of faith:

1. **This is a lonely place:** no grocery stores or restaurants or even homes to offer some simple hospitality. "Desert," as some translate it, means "deserted," not sandy wasteland. See on 14:19.
2. **The hour is already past** to do what? For the noon meal? The Greek expression (*he hōra ēde parêlthen* = Mark's *ēde hōra pollē*) need not be pushed so far as does the RSV's "the day is now over," since the "hour" involved may be nothing more than the usual dinner hour, so that, from that standpoint, Mark's expression, "It is already a late hour," refers primarily to the time to eat and only secondarily to the conclusion of some period of the day. (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 631, 904) The Apostles' concern is that the people start for home with some hope of arriving in time for the evening meal. Some exaggerate the need of these people who are NOT starving, even though understandably hungry-

In fact, they are accustomed to fasting, many of them twice a week, and traditionally, in connection with the annual feast of atonement. (See notes on 6:16, 17.) They had eaten the day before this day, and would eat on the following day, so would not have been nearly as hungry as the 4000 Jesus fed later. (Cf. Mt. 15:32; Mk. 8:2, 3)

3. Solution: **Send the crowds away:**

- a. "to go into the country" in hopes of buying some food from farmers. (Mk. 6:36; Lk. 9:12) **Buy themselves food;** i.e., so WE will not need to buy them food with our limited means.
- b. **to go into the villages** round about, and **buy food for themselves** from shopkeepers not yet closed for the night by the time they arrive.
- c. "to lodge" in the event they are too far from their own town. (Lk. 9:12)

This solution was not at all unreasonable, because, if we have correctly located the site of the Miracle of the Loaves and Fish on the Plain of Buti'ha, or even nearby, the crowds had only about four or five miles to walk to make it into Bethsaida Julias before the stores closed. Since Peter, Andrew and Philip, as well as James and John, were former residents of the area, they would know how and when food could be purchased and how much time would be required to do so (1) if they themselves were to go and bring it back; and (2) if the crowds merely picked up some groceries on their way home.

Just how much presumption is involved in their advice to Jesus? Their command, "**Send them away,**" may be less imperative in spirit than the verb-form seems to imply. (Cf. Blass-Debrunner, sec.387, p. 195; Burton, *Moods and Tenses*, sec. 182f; Robertson-Davis, sec. 407, p. 312) Did they suppose that anything were "too hard for the Lord?" The presumption is not in the verb-form but in the attitude. They are probably not ordering Him, but in coming to advise Him, because they feel a need He is apparently ignoring, they are presuming to lead the Lord who "knew what he would do."

14:16 **But Jesus said unto them, They have no need to go away,** even though your arguments for their doing so are quite plausible. **YOU give them something to eat,** is an order that deliberately throws the Apostles upon their own resources. This sudden pressuring them to provide what they seemingly could not, was intended to push them to think: "But it would take a MIRACLE to feed this crowd! Say, that is what you have been empowering us to do during our own evangelistic efforts! Sure, why not? Only a lack of vision and faith

on our part would hinder it, if you desire that the miracle be done." From this standpoint there is a direct comparison between their failure properly to respond here, and their failure to heal the epileptic, demonized boy later. (Cf. Mt. 17:14-21 and parallels.) **You give them something to eat**, makes all the group immediately responsible for the problem, and indicates the moment at which their faithfulness and helplessness begins to reach its climax. In fact, up to this point, apparently only Philip had been specifically under pressure to seek a solution. Now, however, every single Apostle is being tried.

Clearly, then, Jesus' demand is neither unfair nor unreasonable, because it pointed to some overlooked source of supply. After all, they had all just returned from a successful, miracle-working evangelistic tour that had stirred all Galilee to rally around Jesus. (Mt. 14:1; Mk. 6:12-24; Lk. 9:6-9) So, when He turns this practical problem over to them for solution, they should have forgotten neither the implication of everything they had just accomplished in His Name on their personal tours, nor that of the turning water into wine at Cana. (Jn. 2:1-11) So, Jesus' surprising demand was no mere stratagem whereby attention would be drawn solely to Himself. Rather, it was a practical method for them to rise in great faith to multiply the loaves and fish themselves—by His power working in them as before! Or, at least, they could rise out of their blindness and frustration to exclaim in faith, "Lord, if you desire, you can feed them all!" So, He successfully tested their understanding and confidence, and sadly found them staggered at the thought of feeding such a mass of people, because their vision of His power was too limited.

The disciples' response merely repeated Philip's earlier suggestion: "Shall we go and buy 200 denarii-worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" (Mk. 6:37) But not even Philip considered the sum sufficient to "buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." (Jn. 6:7) Does the 200-denarii figure represent the actual state of their common treasury? (Judas Iscariot carried the bag, Jn. 12:6, which contained gifts made for the financial support of Jesus' ministry, Lk. 8:3.) Yes, it would be a reasonable amount for the apostolic group to be carrying at the time, since a denarius represented a day's wage for a working man (cf. Mt. 20:2), and, when divided among the Twelve plus Jesus, the 200 denarii amounted only to the equivalent of just a little over two weeks' wages per man. So it was no great sum. That this figure actually pinpointed their on-the-spot financial condition is suggested also by their report: "We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people."



(Lk. 9:13)

On the other hand, their discussion about their financial resources for buying bread significantly reveals another side of the usual mode of life among the Apostles and Jesus: Jesus did not turn stones into bread everyday even to keep His Apostles alive. They lived on the financial support for their ministry that others provided, or on the hospitality offered, or they went without. This regular *modus operandi* used in their own operations may have unduly influenced their thinking, even in a situation where they could have justifiably used God's miraculous power for the definite benefit of others in such a way as to bring Him glory. Mention here of their life-style does not justify their doubts or lack of vision; it only attempts to understand their otherwise inexplicable lack of ideas in the face of the crisis into which Jesus thrust them by ordering them to provide food for the crowds.

**They need not go away** seems to point to Jesus' loving unwillingness to send them away hungry: "Why I do not send them away will become evident when I show them that I care, not only to bring them sermons, but also to provide them daily bread." However, strictly humanitarian considerations, such as the emergency involved in the urgent need to feed the 4000 (Mk. 8:1-3), may be inadequate to motivate the miracle that follows here. Nor is it only Jesus' generous unwillingness to calculate whether the people are hungry enough to justify exerting some supernatural power to feed them. In fact, He could have dismissed them without losing one iota of public respect for His character. Rather, His planned miracle (see Jn. 6:6) is aimed to start the sifting process which would separate the spurious disciples from the genuine. Bruce (*Training of the Twelve*, 119-121) points this out:

No better method of separating the chaff from the wheat in that large company of professed disciples could have been devised, than first to work a miracle, which would bring to the surface the latent carnality of the great number, and then to preach a sermon which could not fail to be offensive to the carnal mind.

The Twelve were stymied by the problem. The multitudes could not foresee His plan. Therefore, Jesus was willing to submit Himself publicly to a new testing of His power, because His very success in passing the test would, in turn, test the people themselves on what they understood about Him from what they saw.

When the disciples express their financial inadequacy to feed the crowd, Jesus pushed them to investigate their actual food supply: