

27:35 And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments among them, casting lots. With great simplicity Matthew omits the ugly details of the crucifixion. But an understanding of his hideous form of capital punishment will explain the contempt and aversion early Christians faced as they preached "Christ crucified." (Cf. I Cor. 1:18ff.; Gal. 5:11.) Study these texts of Jesus' contemporary:

Illustrations of crucifixion: *Ant.* XI,1,3; 4,6; XX,6,2; *Wars* II,5,2; 12:6; 13:2

Crucifixion's brutality: *Ant.* XII,5,4; *Wars* I,4,6; V,11,1; II,14,9; VII,6,4

Crucifixion perpetrated by Jew against Jews: *Wars* I,4,6

Release from crucifixion: Josephus' *Life*, 75

Interest in the painful details is not totally dwarfed into insignificance by the moral issues that were resolved at Calvary, because (1) other Gospels record more of these details, and (2) the details themselves render far more vivid the cost of our salvation. This hideous death involved painful wounds, forced immobility, difficult breathing, exposure to the elements, insects, taunting by enemies, all contributing to a slow, agonizing death. However, in contrast to the commentaries, the spartan brevity of the Gospel writers turns the attention away from these physical tortures to the spiritual issues at stake here. Jesus' suffering was unique in that He who had known the closest possible comradeship with God must submit to the torments of the damned.

First they stripped Jesus of His clothes. Next came the actual nailing Him to the cross. This was done while it was yet lying on the ground. The belief that Jesus carried only the horizontal cross-member while the vertical pole awaited Him on Golgotha raises other questions: would Jews permit the upright poles of crosses, normally a Roman method of execution, to remain permanently erected so near the Holy City, near a public road? If so, how many? It is simpler to see that His entire cross was brought from the Praetorium. (See on 27:32; John 19:17.) Some anatomists believe that the nails were driven through His wrists rather than through the palms, because the body weight would have pulled against the nails and torn out away before long. But was the nailing of the hands to keep them in place or to support the body? A wooden support on which the crucified could sit seems to have been the only other relief (Alford, I,293; Farrar, *Life*, 639). Apparently Jesus' feet were not merely bound to the cross, but also nailed (Luke 24:39).

Then the cross was raised and dropped into a hole dug to receive the lower end of the upright timber. The height of the erected cross

needed to be only slightly taller than a man. Disputes about the form of the cross are futile, as the Romans would probably spend little effort to build this rude wooden device not intended for beauty or comfort but for disgrace and death. However, its form permitted the affixing of the accusation "above His head" (27:37). The fine, polished-wood beams of crosses today represent the reality about as unconvincingly as our lives reflect that of Him who died there.

He made intercession for
the transgressors (Isa. 53:12)

No sooner had Jesus been nailed to the tree than He prayed His unforgettable Intercessory Prayer: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34; cf. Isa. 53:12). Here the soldiers first experience a direct, personal contact with Jesus' magnanimity. Not an outburst of fury against them but a pained prayer of pardon for them! His spirit found an excuse for this outrage perpetrated against God, not only by the soldiers who were simply following orders, but especially by those who turned Him over to them (John 19:11), and generally everyone whose sins put Him there. They did not dream that they were crucifying "the Lord of Glory" (I Cor. 2:8), "killing the Author of Life" (Acts 3:15-17) and "fulfilling the prophets (Acts 13:27). Because the Son's suffering was a crime against the majesty of God, He begged the Father to hold back His wrath, lest the divine purpose be compromised by an untimely rescue. If God were ever tempted to stomp the world out of existence and rescue His dear Son, this was the day! (Cf. Stephen's expression: Acts 7:60.) By His own readiness to forgive, He cleared His own heart of all vindictiveness. This was no blanket pardon that ignores each man's attitude toward God. Rather, because individual pardon is not given without personal repentance, His prayer is tantamount to asking God to give men a merciful opportunity to repent.

They parted his garments among them, casting lots. That Jesus was stripped completely is a shamefully real possibility. Nakedness would disgrace Him in His suffering. (Cf. Rev. 16:15.) However, Edersheim (*Life*, II, 584), believed that "every concession would be made to Jewish custom, and we may thankfully believe that on the Cross He was spared the indignity of exposure. Such would have been truly un-Jewish."

The *garments* of the condemned became the meager spoils of the four soldiers ordered out on this crucifixion detail. In Jesus' case the

royal garment and the crown of thorns were now gone (27:31). He had only His own five articles of clothing to divide among four soldiers. After His belt, sandals, cloak and head-gear, all of approximately the same value, had been distributed, one valuable article remained: Jesus' one-piece, continuously woven tunic (*chitòn*: "tunic, shirt"). Since this could not easily be divided without ruining it, the men decided that a decision of chance would determine its new owner. *Casting lots* is the normal way of obtaining something by a means completely out of human control (Luke 1:9; Acts 1:17, cf. v. 26; II Peter 1:1). By turning Jesus' garments over to new owners, they treat Him as a criminal as good as dead. However, shocking to the Psalmist or us, these soldiers' deed was but their normal practice, hence not intentionally malicious toward Jesus personally. In fact, the clothes of the two robbers were not unlikely distributed in the same manner. But even this crude bit of official business attended to by dice-rolling military men was foreseen in the divine purpose (Ps. 22:18). The prophecy's literal fulfillment is the more remarkable because it was executed by men totally unaware of its existence. Unintentionally, they too point to Jesus as the Man intended by the prophet.

Mark notes the hour of crucifixion as "the third hour when they crucified Him" (Mark 15:25), or nine o'clock a.m. as the Jews reckoned time.

27:36 **And they sat and watched him there.** Although this squad of soldiers can now relax somewhat, their purpose for being there was not only to attest to the death of the crucified but also to guard against any last-minute attempts to rescue any of the crucified (*watched - guarded, etéroun*). Perhaps even at this point when the physical exertion of the crucifixion was completed, they took a break for a drink and, as a crude joke, toasted the health of the King of the Jews, deriding Him (Luke 23:36f.).

Pilate's revenge

27:37 **And they set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.** Because the crucifixion was a public affair, its purpose was to discourage the spectators from crimes against the state. The crudely lettered *accusation* was borne to the cross either as a placard around the neck of the condemned or carried by one of the soldiers. Specifying the crime for which the condemned is executed, it drove home a grim warning to others who might be

tempted to make the mistake of committing a similar crime. This argues that accusations were probably nailed to the thieves' crosses too. To give the inscription the widest publicity possible, it was written in the common languages of the era, Greek, the universal tongue, Latin, the official language, and Aramaic, the local dialect.

There is no contradiction between the Gospels over the exact reading of the title's inscription, because

1. The basis of each version may be a free rendering by each author as he translated it out of Hebrew, Greek or Latin. Perhaps the title varied somewhat in each of the three languages. Should the Gospel writers be blamed for these variations?
2. Matthew calls it *his accusation written*; Luke, "an inscription" and John, a "title." Pilate's wording may have expressed the *accusation* even more fully than the composite of all the Gospel writers' summaries.
3. Even if each language repeated all the elements verbatim, our authors preserved the essential message unchanged in meaning. There is no contradiction where no author denies the wording of the others, and when each seeks only to quote the substance of the accusation without quarrelling over details given or omitted by the others. They simply do not tell all they know. Even with minor variations, the central message can correctly be recovered: "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

Since this ambiguously expressed title was dictated by Pilate himself, some see it as the ironic expression of the haughty prefect's cynicism. Certainly an *accusation* per se was no mere second thought by the wily Roman, especially if such titles were common practice. Pilate may have ordered it nailed to His cross to clear his record with Caesar, since the basic charge of blasphemy for claiming to be the Son of God would not interest Roman jurisprudence. In theory, it named Jesus' crime. In reality, its wording gave Him a title. No crime whatsoever is indicated. Admittedly, Pilate was crucifying the Nazarene, but he nonetheless ennobled Him to the rank of king! He had cleverly transformed the *accusation* into a vindictive insult to those who had forced him to authorize the execution of this innocent man.

Because Jesus had interpreted for Pilate the true meaning of His claim, the latter comprehended the unpolitical nature of Jesus' Kingdom. Against this spiritual *King of the Jews* the charge of political insurrection remained unproven. So, the governor's inscription, which

unconditionally affirms His kingship, becomes Jesus' definitive clearing of the political charges. This *accusation* was Pilate's final protest of Jesus' innocence and, by reflection, his public exposure of the rulers' bitter jealousy. For Pilate to crucify Him with two malefactors does not negate this view, because this guilt by association is not intended by Pilate to humiliate Jesus, for He must die anyway, but to embitter the Jews in their moment of victory.

Although Pilate could not have intended it this way, the official title, *the King of the Jews*, when considered as a phrase in Matthew's Gospel, even if unexpectedly and subtly yet truly and profoundly reflects the divine purpose. How little they knew: He was not merely *King of the Jews*, but the Lord of the universe and King over all men (28:18; Rev. 17:14). Even so, He arose out of Israel and rules over all who become part of the true Israel of God (Rom. 9:5; Gal. 6:16). It is not improbable that Jewish readers of Matthew would notice the not insignificant coincidence that the *Gentile* wise-men asked, "Where is He that is born *king of the Jews*?" and the *Gentile* governor proclaimed: *THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS*. These two astonishing facts with which the amazing life of the Nazarene begin and conclude become unexpected signposts leading one to take the evidence for His identity seriously. Was Israel blind to its true *King*? (Cf. 27:54.)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Describe the crucifixion, using all the facts available in the Gospels. How was Jesus crucified? Who actually did it? Who was with Him? Who were the spectators? Where did they stand or sit?
2. Describe the division of Jesus' garments among the soldiers.
3. What prophecy was fulfilled in the peculiar disposition made of Jesus' clothes?
4. Why did the soldiers sit down and watch Jesus? In what sense "watch" Him?
5. For what purpose was the sign attached to the cross?
6. Quote the inscription Pilate ordered attached to the cross above Jesus.

Reviling abuse and shame
heaped upon Jesus

TEXT: 27:38-44

38 Then are there crucified with him two robbers, one on the right hand and one on the left. 39 And they that passed by railled on him,

wagging their heads, 40 and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself: if thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross. 41 In like manner also the chief priests mocking *him*, with the scribes and elders, said, 42 He saved others; himself he cannot save. He is the King of Israel; let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe on him. 43 He trusteth on God; let him deliver him now, if he desireth him: for he said, I am the Son of God. 44 And the robbers also that were crucified with him cast upon him the same reproach.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Men rightly marvel at the sad beauty of Jesus' last words on the cross. Study them and pause to reflect how few they are. Then think on the words that Jesus, hanging there in His pain-wracked body, did NOT say.
- b. Why do you think two robbers were executed with Him?
- c. Why do you suppose the robbers reviled Jesus too? Did they know Him? If not, what could they have possibly had against Him to justify their railing?
- d. How would you harmonize their reviling with Luke's report of the penitent robber?
- e. In what way was Jesus severely tempted on the cross? Was Satan there that day?
- f. Do you think that the crowds or their rulers would have really believed Jesus, if He had performed the supreme miracle of ripping out the nails and leaping down from the cross? Why do you say that?
- g. In what sense is it true that those who mocked Jesus were saying more truth than they knew? That is, in what way do they unintentionally glorify Jesus?
- h. In contrast to the political charges the authorities had leveled against Jesus before Pilate, what do these openly religious accusations spat out at Him at the crucifixion reveal about those who tried to crucify Him on purely political grounds?
- i. Is there any evidence in the scoffers' words that they had any misgivings about crucifying Jesus or that they had possibly made a tremendous mistake? Do you think they are putting up a bold front to keep their courage up and their doubts down?
- j. Since Jesus never once relented in His conviction that He was

the Christ, what possible conclusions could His enemies have drawn about Him?

- k. Even if in quite another sense, we too are like the two robbers, *crucified with him* (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20). What is our commonest reaction to the shame, the scoffing and the pain that go with it? What should our reaction be?
- l. From Jesus' refusal to grant their demand by descending from the cross and their conclusions about it, what may be learned (1) about the program of God; (2) about the validity of human resentment when God denies man's requests?
- m. From Jesus' silence in the presence of their demands, what may be learned about Him?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

They crucified two bandits with Him, one on His right and the other on His left. The people stood there, staring. Passers-by jeered at Him, shaking their heads and sneering, "Aha! You were the one who was going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days, were you? Save yourself! If you are God's Son, step down from the cross!"

Similarly, even the rulers, the chief priests with the theologians and elders, sneered at Him, commenting to one another, "He saved others, but he cannot even save himself? Let him save himself, if he is the Anointed of God, His Chosen One! Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down from the cross now! If we could see him do that, we would believe in him! He trusts in God, does he? Let God rescue him now, that is, if He wants him! After all, he did say, 'I am God's Son.'"

The soldiers too made fun of Him, by coming up and offering Him a drink of their sour wine, saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" In fact, there was the inscription over Him, which read: "This is the King of the Jews."

Similarly, even the bandits that were crucified with Him also insulted Him. One of them hanging there, abused Him, "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us too while you're at it!"

But the other checked him, "Have you no fear of God at all?! Both you and He are facing death and judgment before God. But with us it is a question of common justice, since we are getting what we deserve for what we did. But this man has done nothing improper. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingly power."

"I solemnly assure you," Jesus answered, "you will be with me in Paradise this very day!"

Standing by Jesus' cross were four women: His mother and His maternal aunt, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw His mother there and His dearest disciple, John, nearby, He addressed His mother, "Lady, he is now to be your son." Then He said to the disciple, "She is now your mother." So from that time on, the disciple took her into her own care and keeping.

SUMMARY

Passers-by, clergy, soldiers and fellow-sufferers alike taunted Jesus, daring Him to save Himself because of His claim to be the Messiah. Jesus remained silent until one of the bandits repented and asked to be part of Jesus' Kingdom. This request Jesus granted. Then He turned His mother over to John to care for.

NOTES

He was numbered with
the transgressors (Isa. 53:12)

27:38 Then are there crucified with him two robbers, one on the right hand and one on the left. After Jesus was crucified, His guards sat down to guard Him there (27:36). It would appear, therefore, that, although the *two robbers* were part of the procession from the Praetorium to Golgotha (Luke 23:32f.; John 19:18), they were crucified after Jesus (*Then, τότε*) by two other quaternions of soldiers, as if the raising of each cross required the combined strength of the men. However, it is probable that none of the soldiers rested until the crucifixion of all three was complete.

In the purpose of God Jesus was crucified between two sinners, *one on the right hand and one on the left*. Although men intended it quite otherwise, this providential arrangement pictures the true significance of the cross; our King Himself is the dividing line that separates the living from the dead, the sheep from the goats, the believing from the lost. (Cf. 25:33.) But He identified with us in our sins by dying among common sinners.

That these *robbers (leisti)* are not revolutionaries or insurrectionists like Barabbas (see on 27:16), but common bandits (cf. *Wars*, II, 12, 5; 13:2; 14, 1) is suggested by two considerations:

1. To preserve the calm against predictable violence, were a Jewish folk hero to be crucified by Roman power, they could never permit that two real patriots be executed with Jesus. (Cf. notes on 27:16-21.)
2. The self-incrimination of the repentant *robber* (Luke 23:41) is less understandable, if he considered crucifixion the just sentence for promoting a religio-patriotic revolution against Rome. Contrarily, if his own conscience condemned common banditry and highway robbery, his self-accusation makes better sense.

Luke's word, "criminals" (*kakourgoi*) apparently confirms this view (Luke 23:32f., 39). Therefore, to crucify Jesus between common criminals is to amplify His guilt by association, insinuating that He is no better than they.

All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their head
(Ps. 22:7)

27:39 And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads. If the crosses were located near a main road for maximum publicity of this exemplary punishment, then *they that passed by* would be many. By this characteristic gesture of *wagging their heads* (cf. 109:25; Isa. 37:22; Jer. 18:16; Lam. 1:12; 2:15), they unintentionally fulfill prophecy (Ps. 22:6, 7). Milling around the cross and snarling at Him like so many wild animals, they show their inhumanity. (Cf. Ps. 22:12f., 16). *Railed on him* (*eblasphémoun autòn*), from the Christian standpoint, means they insulted the deity of Christ. But, because they repudiate His claims as false, in their own view they are hurling the abuse that He justly deserved. Nevertheless, they are inexcusable, because His divine credentials were completely adequate to convince the good and honest among them.

40 and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, save thyself: if thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross. Because they misapply His cryptic "Temple prophecy" to the Jerusalem sanctuary, they presume that anyone who could replace that grand structure in just three days, could surely perform the smaller wonder of rescuing himself from a cross. Consequently, they wrongly interpret His inaction now as proof He had made exorbitant, unjustified claims.

But even as they poured ridicule on Him, by crucifying Him they were bringing about the true meaning of the very prophecy they

misinterpreted, for He spoke of the temple of His body. God would rebuild *it in three days*. Jesus Himself was God's true dwelling among His people. Although they repudiated *this* Temple by crucifying Jesus, God would raise up that Dwelling of God, of which the Jerusalem temple was but a dim, feeble symbol. But by crucifying Jesus, they guaranteed the Temple's desolation, since their rejection would bring God's wrath upon them in that one generation. Thus, they would themselves "destroy this temple [in Jerusalem]" but after three days Jesus would resurrect a far more glorious Temple, the true dwelling place of God in the Spirit!

In the person of these worldlings, their lord, Satan, is back and launching one attack after another (Luke 4:13). *If thou art the Son of God* echoes Satan's original seduction and repeated here for the same reasons (cf. 4:3; Luke 4:13). They, like him, know of only one style of Sonship, that of self-interest, personal rights and self-vindication. They argue that a true *Son of God* would never agonize on a cross!

In the Jewish accusation note the absence of the article. Even without it, His claim to be *the Son of God* (*huiòs toû theoû*) is one of the bitter bones of contention for which they crucified Jesus. (Cf. also 27:43; see notes on 26:63ff.) Yet they fully grasped His claim and crucified Him for it.

Apparently the presence or absence of the definite article made no significant theological difference for the Jews. (Cf. 26:40, 43; John 19:7 without article; however, 26:63; Mark 14:61 and Luke 22:70f. have the definite article.) They crucified Jesus for claiming to be *huiòs theoû* or *ho huiòs toû theoû*. This animus had begun early (John 5:18). They understood the meaning of His words and repudiated it, but their understanding should be definitive enough for Christian theology too: He claimed to be, not a son of a god, but *the Son of God*. (Cf. Luke 1:35 in Greek.) Moreover, titles or names are definite whether or not they have the article (here: *huiòs theoû*). This grammatical understanding of the article also affects the centurion's view, as he heard the Jews use these terms.

MANY BULLS SURROUND ME;

STRONG BULLS OR BASHAN ENCIRCLE ME.

ROARING LIONS TEARING THEIR PREY

OPEN THEIR MOUTHS WIDE AGAINST ME. (Ps. 22:12f.)

27:41 In like manner also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said. Abandoning the dignity of their age and office, the revered leaders of Israel lower themselves to show their contempt *in like manner*, i.e. like uncultured, undisciplined passers-by. The unsanctified fellowship of the nation's leaders appeared at Golgotha in person, their old, common fear now replaced with common childish glee and wisecracking. Perhaps they had originally intended not to attend the crucifixion, but when the offending title on the cross came to their attention and no appeals to Pilate could get it corrected, they determined to counteract its forceful influence by discrediting Him personally. To sway the impressionable crowds even then milling around Golgotha, they could transform the Nazarene's death into even more effective propaganda against Him and His movement.

FOR THE TRANSGRESSION OF MY PEOPLE
HE WAS STRICKEN . . . (Isa. 53:8)

27:42 He saved others; himself he cannot save. He is the King of Israel; let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe on him. They triumph over their former fears that He would use His undeniably miraculous power to save Himself. They can afford to do it now because He is so obviously helpless to do so just when He needed it most for Himself. They admit that *He saved others*? They objectively admit nothing. Just as they do not believe that *He is the King of Israel*, so they debate this proposition too: "*He saved others*? Everyone talks about how *He saved others* from the common trials of life, from various sicknesses and even from death. The truth of these tales would be instantly and most certainly verified, if this miracle-worker could free Himself from His own woes!" Although intellectually unable to account for the source of His power, they treat His miracles as spurious, judging everything in the light of His present failure to perform in this supposedly critical, definitive test.

It is at this point that the chasmic distance between our Lord and all human demagogues is most noticeable; these authorities had attempted to save their institutions, their positions and themselves from the certain dissolution they see must result from Jesus' self-giving ministry (John 11:47-53). Nevertheless, by trying to save what they deemed the most important things in their lives, they lost them (16:24ff.). By sacrificing Himself, He won everything.

He is the King of Israel: the Messiah. He had tacitly accepted this title as royal authority was attributed to Him during the Triumphal entry. For maximum effect Jesus' detractors deliberately aired these popular views to show their groundlessness when applied to one who is now so obviously unable to realize all the glorious hopes predictable of a true *King of Israel*. *Let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe on him.* These hypocrites express their openness to become His disciples upon His immediate descent from the cross as the decisive, unmistakable credential they had always been asking for. (Cf. 12:38ff.; 16:1ff.; Mark 8:11f.; John 2:18; 6:30.) The power of this diabolical temptation lies in the self-assertive desire to perform His most telling miracle to date, which, in the estimation of sinful men, would shake these hypocrites like nothing else. But this is precisely the moment *not* to perform the self-vindicating miracle required. He must keep His mind on the true challenge: *Let him come out of the tomb alive and victorious and we will believe on him.* The true test of His identity is not their proposals, but the successful accomplishment of God's will!

27:43 He trusteth on God; let him deliver him now; if he desireth him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The enemies maliciously worded their blasphemous railing to call to mind Psalm 22:8, perhaps just to explode the false martyrdom of Jesus and disprove His claims. To the words of the Psalm they add the word, *now*, demanding that God instantly test the worth of Jesus' confident assertions by revealing their basis in some tangible way. They could safely apply Messianic prophecies to Him, since, in their view, He was indisputably incapable of fulfilling any Messianic texts like Psalm 22:8. It was the resurrection that would turn their own sword against them. The unhurried God could not be bullied into an untimely miracle that would compromise His eternal plan. Even so, the temptation is real: Jesus' personal confidence in the faithfulness of God is put to the supreme test. (Cf. Ps. 22:4f.; John 11:42.) This will give special poignance to His later cry of loneliness (27:46).

I am the Son of God. (See notes on 27:40; 26:63ff.) Their underlying argument is that God really cares about His true *Son* and would never leave Him to die; never subject Him to such an ignominious death as crucifixion. Jesus, however, is left to die. Therefore, He was not a true *Son of God*. Nevertheless, for good and sufficient reasons, God's mighty love made Him sacrifice this His only *Son* (John 3:16). Similarly, God's love for His saints does not always compel Him to deliver them from pain or death. Even their death can praise Him, as did the compelling example of Jesus.

The apparently unassailable logic of the Sanhedrists had as its special target the conviction of the masses who passed by. Their arguments would make sense to anyone who could be stampeded into deciding instantly before all the evidence was in. After all, if Jesus *could* not come down from the cross, or if God *would* not rescue Him, would not that prove Him an imposter?

27:44 And the robbers also that were crucified with him cast upon him the same reproach. *Robbers:* see note on 27:38. There is no evidence that these bandits simply shared the crowd's malice toward Jesus. They may have known little about Him. Perhaps they angrily blame Jesus because His crucifixion was the reason they were being executed sooner than expected. Although the two reproach Jesus, only the impenitent one blasphemed. (Matthew: *oneidizon*, "reproach, revile, heap insults upon," Arndt-Gingrich, 573; Luke: *eblasphēmei*.)

There is no inconsistency with Luke's account of the penitent bandit. Matthew and Mark simply report how the two robbers began insulting him together. Luke does not assert that only one of them offended Jesus. Rather he tells that, when one of them did so, his fellow scolded him. Apparently, the marvelous conversion of the penitent robber began sometime during the three hours together with Jesus on the cross before the unnatural darkness. As time dragged by, the penitent's slow death forced him to reflect upon the state of his own soul, upon his own real guilt as opposed to Jesus' guiltlessness and upon His marvelous self-control during agonies that the dying thief understood only too well. (Cf. Luke 23:40f.) His reason calmed him. The other bandit, however, kept up his tirade, demanding: "Save yourself and us" (Luke 23:39)! Unrepentant, he wanted to escape his apparently sealed destiny and so incited Jesus to use His great, pretended powers to effect their release. The other bandit shamed him into silence by defending Jesus, "Both you and He must soon stand before God. He has no sin to answer for, but does not the threat of divine justice warn you not to aggravate your guilt by mocking your fellow-sufferer?"

This *robber's* lone voice raised in protest against Jesus' unjustifiable crucifixion is the only one recorded. No longer justifying himself, he cast in his lot with a King whose only visible throne was a rough-hewn tree like his own. It is not known what this *robber* knew previously about Jesus' mission and message. Nevertheless, while others remained unmoved even after Jesus arose from the dead, this man witnessed the King Himself being conquered by death and *still surrendered* his believing heart! No wonder that Jesus graciously assured

him far more than he asked, a place with Him that very day in the invisible world where only believers enjoy the presence of God! (Cf. Luke 23:46; II Cor. 12:2f.; Rev. 2:7.)

Peter's comment on Jesus' self-possession is most eloquent (I Peter 2:23f.). His silence is evidence of self-mastery and power over temptation. By His acceptance of whatever God's grace sent, He demonstrated total trust in God's provision (6:25ff.). In this most desperate situation He lived out His own doctrine of non-retaliation (5:38ff.). By this extremely convincing example He showed what it means to save one's life giving it away (16:24ff.). He did not respond to their cruel jibes, because it was a moral impossibility for Him to satisfy their demands and save a lost world too. He ignored their challenge because His mighty love and His will to save them held Him nailed to the cross.

But why should God remain shockingly silent and seemingly unperturbed, when, alone, His own dear Son was brutally tortured and killed by religious bigots who dared God to intervene? For those who have eyes to see it, He bared His patient heart fully as much by His refusal to interfere now as by His other revelations elsewhere. But the Father was not wholly absent or dispassionate. (Cf. 27:45, 51.) The living God sometimes appears silent and unfaithful to His promise to save, seeming to deny the rightness of the plan He Himself taught and the confidence of His children. But Jesus did not waiver. His death becomes an act of faith in the love of God, notwithstanding this seeming indifference of Heaven.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Describe the kind of "robbers" who were crucified with Jesus.
2. What was the prophecy fulfilled by His being crucified with them?
3. List all the various titles for Jesus mentioned in this section as these are hurled at Jesus to taunt Him. (You may include those reported by Mark and Luke too.)
4. What prophecy was fulfilled by the reproaches of the people?
5. List the various insulting statements by which the crowds taunted Jesus, explaining what they meant by them.
6. Explain what Jesus' refusal to accept the crowd's challenges proves about His true identity.

DARKNESS AND DEJECTION

TEXT: 27:45-50

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? 47 And some of them that stood there, when they heard it, said, This man calleth Elijah. 48 And straightway one of them ran, took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. 49 And the rest said, Let be; let us see whether Elijah cometh to save him.

THE SADDEST MOMENT IN HISTORY

50 And Jesus cried again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What do you think caused this great darkness? Why do you decide this way?
- b. How much territory do you think the darkness covered? How would you decide this?
- c. Do you see any relationship, on the one hand, between the darkness on the day Jesus died and His cry of abandonment by the Father, and, on the other hand, the outer darkness and separation from the presence of the Lord to be suffered by the damned? If so, what connection is there?
- d. What sacrifice was sacrificed every day at the ninth hour? Do you see any connection between this and Jesus' death?
- e. Why do you suppose Jesus cried out the words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Did He just make up these words? Why would Jesus repeat them at this terrible moment?
- f. If Jesus were somehow deity, how could He cry out to God? If He were deity, is He merely talking to Himself? If He is a man talking to God, then is He not merely human? How do you solve this puzzle?
- g. Since Jesus spoke in Aramaic, someone shouted, "He calls for Elijah." On what rational basis could this confusion arise?
- h. Why did Jesus drink the wine offered Him now, when He had refused the wine mingled with gall earlier? What is the difference?
- i. When someone offered Jesus a drink, others tried to hinder him.

Why would anyone object to giving the thirsty man a drink on that occasion?

- j. Can we, who so placidly read the account of Jesus' crucifixion, really understand what that simple word "crucified" meant to Jesus who endured it?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

About noon an unnatural darkness similar to a solar eclipse came over the whole country and lasted until three o'clock in the afternoon. About three, Jesus shouted, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" (This means: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?")

Some of the bystanders who heard it commented, "Hey! this man is calling Elijah!"

After this, since Jesus knew that His task had now been completed, in order that the Scripture might receive complete fulfillment, He said, "I am thirsty."

Now there was a jug full of a diluted sour wine drink, so someone immediately ran to it, took a sponge and soaked it with the wine, put it on a hyssop stick and held it up to Jesus' mouth to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let's see if Elijah comes to save him!" whereupon the first man retorted, "Let me do this, let's see if Elijah is coming to take him down!"

When Jesus had drunk the sour drink, He gave a mighty shout, "It is finished! Father, I intrust my spirit into your hands!"

With these words He bowed His head, yielded up His spirit and breathed His last.

SUMMARY

Three hours of darkness marked the last half of Jesus' crucifixion, at the end of which He quoted the appropriate words of Psalm 22:1. Here, too, His words were twisted into an appeal to Elijah. Thirsty, Jesus asked for a drink. They gave Him the cheap, soldier's beverage. Refreshed, He triumphantly announced the successful completion of His mission, calmly committed His soul to the Father and surrendered His life.

NOTES

The darkest day in world history

27:45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. Jesus had now been on the cross almost three

hours, from roughly nine o'clock until noon when the ominous darkness began (Mark 15:25). Although Luke's language suggests a natural solar eclipse (Luke 23:44f.; *eklipdōntos*), this is excluded by two physical factors:

1. Passover's usual full moon (Exod. 12:18; Lev. 23:5). Every Jewish month begins with a *new* moon. Passover occurs two weeks after the new moon, or at the time of a full moon. But a *full moon* demands a specific relation of the moon and sun to the earth whereby the moon can reflect the sun's light without obstruction. On the contrary, a solar eclipse is created by the moon's obstructing the sun's light. The relative positions of sun, moon and earth during an eclipse are more like their conjunction around the time of a new moon. Hence, a *natural* eclipse could only have occurred two weeks before this Passover when Jesus died.
2. Even though a solar eclipse may take four hours from the first moment that the moon begins to cover the sun until it reveals it completely again, the usual duration of a total eclipse lasts rarely longer than 9 *minutes*, hence far shorter than the three hours indicated by the Gospel writers for this unnatural darkness.

Because the sun could be darkened by ways other than by a natural eclipse, Luke's language, therefore, may be justified by supernatural power: God could easily have produced a strange darkening resembling an eclipse. God was not entirely absent; rather, by His withdrawing the world's light, He manifested His presence and concern. But evidence of His presence did not stop here (27:51ff.).

Did the *darkness* extend over the entire earth or only of some significant area of Judea or Palestine? The *cause* of the darkness determines its extent. Since the sun's light failed (Luke 23:45), it would normally affect all the earth's entire daylight hemisphere. Thus, it is clear that *all the land* (*pâsan tèn gên*) may well mean that more than just the entire region surrounding Jerusalem was enveloped in *darkness*. (Cf. Mark 15:33 = Luke 23:44.) Neither is impossible with God. But the former seems better supported.

What meaning should be given to this phenomenon?

1. Neither in prophecy nor in Jewish traditional expectations was the *darkness* a sign directly or specifically connected with the death of the Messiah (Edersheim, *Life*, II, 605).
2. It was not Nature protesting against the wickedness of Jesus' execution nor mourning His wretchedness. This view fails to explain

why Nature waited three hours to act. Further, it animistically gives personality to what are but elements in the natural world, the impersonal creative expressions of God's word. Even so, God could utilize these natural elements as a superhuman, audiovisual means to protest violently against the death of their Creator. (Cf. 27:51-53.) It is *as if* heaven and earth were in convulsion, mourning Him who created them. In the timing of these phenomena coincidental with the death of Christ, there is a hint that all creation depends on Him, for He sustains it by His mighty word and that earth's destiny ultimately rises or falls with Him (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:17; II Peter 3:5-7).

3. In apocalyptic language the turning of the sun into darkness is a popular symbol for a radical change in world affairs, because these changes often involve great judgments of God (Isa. 5:30; 13:10; 50:3; 60:2; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:14f.; Amos 5:18, 20; 8:9f.; Rev. 6:12ff.; cf. II Peter 2:17). *Though these and such poetic allusions as Jeremiah 15:9 or Job 9:7 are not pertinent to the Messiah's death nor to be taken literally*, nevertheless, a people imbued with these concepts, by an association of ideas would be prone to think first of God's judgment as the ultimate cause of this literal effect in nature.
4. Did God screen the last tormented hours of His Son's life from the curious stares of jeering crowds? Was it also relief from the sun during its hottest brilliance?
5. Was this a miraculous heavenly sign Jesus' enemies had demanded? (Cf. Exod. 10:21ff.) Although this could have happened by natural causes, the marvelous coincidence with Jesus' suffering points to a supernatural origin. In context with the other-worldly events on that day (27:51-53), the darkness may have been only a prelude aiming to capture the attention of the most calloused, stirring them to reflection on the odd coincidence between the death of that Galilean Prophet and these signs from heaven. Who indeed was He for whom these portents speak?
6. Because Jesus' cry of abandonment came in close connection with the end of the darkness (27:45f.), the darkness is suggestive of the "outer darkness" and utter separation from the presence of the Lord to be suffered by those who do not let Jesus' suffering be the price of their redemption. (Cf. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; II Peter 2:17; Jude 13; II Thess. 1:9.)

Because the crowd seems to be considerably less vociferous at the end of the phenomenal black-out, the terror of the darkness must have quieted the bitter enthusiasm of a majority of the mockers. Mostly His friends and the soldiers remain. Luke 23:48 may mean that many simply did not dare leave in the darkness.

. . . Stricken, smitten by God and afflicted . . .
(Isa. 53:4)

27:46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? The Lord had been hanging on the cross nearly six hours from midmorning until midafternoon, around three o'clock. (Cf. Mark 15:25, 33.)

Matthew quotes Jesus verbatim in Aramaic, then translated the meaning into Greek for his non-Aramaic readers. In what sense did God forsake Jesus? His choice of words, Psalm 22:1, is not coincidental, but intentional and highly revealing.

1. It can be validly argued that David simply prophesied Jesus' suffering on the cross; as does Lenski (*Matthew*, 1118): "For it is not due to the fact that David wrote this line that Christ made it his cry on the cross, but because Christ would thus cry out on the cross David wrote it as a prophet." However, other equally reverent views are also possible.
2. It is not the cry of personal guilt nor because God did not approve of Jesus' obedient life and ministry. Otherwise, why justify Him so completely by the convincing stamp of approval given in the resurrection?
3. Nor is this an abandonment of Jesus' humanity by His deity, the splitting of His divine-human personality. (Cf. Phil. 2:5-11.) His unique unity of mind, purpose and nature with the Father is not now interrupted (John 10:30). Only He who has fully experienced the comradeship of equality with God can know what it means to suffer its loss by being so completely forsaken by Him. Jesus does not sense a loss of part of Himself, but of the fellowship of *God*.
4. Rather, the source of this unaccustomed inaccessibility to the divine Throne lies in His very humanness, for it is as God's creature, as Man, that He cries out. (Cf. John 8:29.) Incarnation means He completely shared in our humanity (Heb. 2:14; 4:15). Is it a human cry crushed out of ANY GODLY MAN who struggles with

the torment over the injustice of his suffering, life and death, evil and good? Otherwise why express Himself in the precise words of the Psalmist's complaint (Ps. 22:1)? He really felt the intensely depressing loneliness all of us feel at such an hour, and this cry gives appropriate words to His pain. Jesus knew in that moment what we go through: He has been there (Heb. 5:7-9; I Peter 2:21)! But there is much more.

5. His cry reveals a psychological abandonment by God that was morally necessary to render Jesus' victory more glorious and meaningful to man. As *Man at His weakest*, stripped of any help unavailable to any other man, He defeated Satan and all he could hurl at Him in this last supreme effort (II Cor. 13:4; see notes on 4:2f.). All who are tempted must see that in Jesus of Nazareth God's adversary has been met and defeated by One who, though *deserted to die*, remained completely able to parry his every temptation with unconquerable determination and courage! By His having to undergo all the fury and hate of God's enemy as do we, He became the more amply qualified to be our Lord and Savior. But so much more conclusively He also condemned yielding to sin and wiped out every whining justification on the ground of the weakness of our human condition or that we feel abandoned by God to our fate. He has been there and won! His classic victory has shown us all how.
6. The awful accumulation of sin of the entire human race was being borne by Him who considered intolerable the slightest suggestion of sin. This takes us into the very essence of atonement. Far more than any other, *THIS Man* must feel the awesome loneliness and isolation of the sinner, not through any fault of His own, but because He deliberately chose to become the sin-bearer of the entire human race (Isa. 53:6; Matt. 20:28; Rom. 5:6ff.; II Cor. 5:15, 21; Gal. 2:20; 3:13; I Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10; I Peter 1:19). In this cry for the hearing of the whole human race of which He is the only completely voluntary member, He shouts the true meaning of unrepented sin and its consequences: a holy God cannot look upon evil (Hab. 1:13). Nothing could remove the sin Jesus bore, except His own death. His God-forsaken humanness gives real meaning to His sacrifice. Until this was completed, perhaps the Father was forced by His own character and love for Jesus to turn His gaze from His own dear Son. The only Man who deserved to live is facing the wrath of God, the curse and sentence of death,

the wages of sin. He underwent the ultimate horror of separation from God that we might not have to (Heb. 13:5)! He bore our curse and our burdens alone (Isa. 53:4-6, 10). His grief, pain, loneliness and desolation were real. And should He NOT cry out? Was this not the very definition of hell: to be segregated from the light of the Father's face, tormented by Satan's worst and responsible for the accumulated sin of all of Adam's race?

His cry, *My God*, expresses no conflict with the divine purpose, but a first-hand experience of the price demanded by His total cooperation with the divine plan. Even near the extreme limit of His strength and oppressed by His sense of being forsaken, His *My God* breathes the same unwavering confidence and obedient spirit of His earlier "Not my will but yours be done." He is determined not to surrender His godly trust. This *God* is not deity of others, but *His God*. Whatever theological impact His sense of abandonment by God has, His life ended like His suffering began, in prayer, "Father . . ." (Luke 23:34, 46), conscious of His communion with *God*. (Cf. John 16:32.)

For the sensitive Hebrew, this significant choice of words would communicate His application of the entire Psalm 22 to His own life situation. Hebrews entitled literary works by their opening line. Genesis is entitled *Bereshith* = "In the beginning . . ."; Exodus becomes *Veeleh shmoth*. "These are the names . . ."; Leviticus is *Vayyikra*, "And he called . . .", etc. Psalm 113 is called "Hallel" from its opening word. A dying Christian, unable to finish the phrase, "Nearer My God to Thee . . ." would communicate to those at his bedside that he was thinking of that great hymn. In a similar way, Jesus, whose whole soul was permeated with Scripture, may have been expressing Himself in the words of Psalm 22 precisely because of the appropriateness of the Psalmist's words to communicate His immediate situation. The attentive believer could discern how truly and completely Jesus was experiencing even the loneliness of abandonment by God Himself. And yet, in the presence of despair and tragedy, He shouted with poignant power to uncomprehending disciples everywhere that in God's Word lie power, hope and security. Man can live confident of every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, but he can also die that way!

Just as He withstood Satan's original temptations by unshaken dependence on God's Word, so He beat Satan down at the final challenge in the same way. If in the shadow of the cross, He sang the Scripture (26:30), should it be thought strange that this godly

Man should rivet His attention on the purpose of God by hurling at His own unrelieved pain and the injustice of His suffering the words of God expressed in this Psalm? Like Jesus' suffering, the Psalm begins in despondency and depression. But the final word sings of invincible faith in the glorious victory of God: "... dominion belongs to the Lord and He rules over the nations" (Ps. 22:31)! To express the greatest moments of our lives is there any language like that of Scripture whereby we identify with something eternal, objective and grander than our poor feeble words can conceive? How much more so for the Son of God who thought those words first?!

This cry, according to Matthew's text, begins in Hebrew, *Eli*, and concludes in Aramaic, whereas Mark, according to the best manuscripts, reports Jesus' words all in Aramaic. (Cf. *A Textual Commentary*, 70,120.)

At the ninth hour every day the second daily sacrifice was offered in the Temple. (Cf. Acts 3:1; Num. 28:1-8; 29:6; I Chron. 16:40; II Chron. 2:4; 13:11; Ezra 3:3; 9:4f.; Ps. 141:2; Dan. 8:11-13; 9:21; 11:31; 12:11.)

27:47 And some of them that stood there, when they heard it, said, This man calleth Elijah. Who said this? Definitely Jews, because a Roman soldier could hardly be expected to know of the Jewish scribes' erroneous expectation that this undying prophet would return to earth (17:10; cf. II Kings 2:11; Mal. 4:5f.). Several motives for their reaction are possible:

1. Perhaps because His mouth and throat were dry, as shown by His later request for a drink, and His breathing difficult as His chest muscles strained, the hubbub and noise combined with the similar-sounding words to hinder many from hearing the words clearly.
2. Perhaps because the words are Aramaic, some Hellenistic Jew who understood little Hebrew or Aramaic could mistake the word "Eli" for a prayer to "Elijah" (*Elei*) not understanding the rest of the sentence. But the bilingual Jews present could have corrected the misconception based on mere linguistic error.
3. More likely it was the malicious irony of prejudice. What bilingual Aramaic-speaking Jew would have mistaken this citation of Psalm 22:1 for an invocation of the prophet Elijah? It is plausible that those who heard the original cry understood it all too well. But their unbelieving bias against Jesus made a crude pun of it by turning *Eli* into *Elias* thus devising but another form of heartless

ridicule. They had insisted that God save Him. Now, when God would not rescue Him, they ridicule as if Jesus had turned to Elijah. If Elijah was scheduled to come before the Messiah, Jesus Himself could not be the Messiah. By implication, He is ridiculed as appealing to the forerunner of the very Christ He claims to be (cf. 11:11, 14; 17:10-13).

My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth . . . (Ps. 22:15).

They gave me vinegar for my thirst (Ps. 69:21).

27:48 And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. This sentence of Matthew does not appear to fit the context of the preceding verse. What does the reaction of the man, who ran *straightway* to prepare Jesus a drink, have to do with His cry of abandonment (v. 46) or the conclusion that He was appealing to Elijah (v. 47)? John's account removes this obscurity: *straightway* after crying out His sense of abandonment. Jesus also said, "I thirst" (John 19:28f.).

The fact that *straightway one of them ran* sounds like instant military obedience to orders (from the centurion?). Crucifixion was normally an ordeal that lasted a day or two, depending on the endurance of its victims. Because terrible thirst also characterized this torture, that a *sponge* and vessel of *vinegar* were present argue that this was the normal way the soldiers *gave drink to* the executed. Drinking from a cup would be difficult for the crucified to manage, hence the other method: a *sponge filled with vinegar* fastened to a *reed*. The commonness of the method appears to argue, therefore, that giving Him a drink was not unusual but a normal kindness offered any dying man. John reported what kind of stick it was, i.e. hyssop. Since the crosses need not have been tall to accomplish their purpose, the soldiers could almost reach Him to give Him a drink (Luke 23:36). So, a short hyssop stick to reach the lips of the crucified.

As its name implies, the *vinegar* drink was sour (*oxos*) in taste. But the soldiers who brought it for their own lunch called it *posca*, the regular diluted sour wine of the military. "It relieved thirst more effectively than water and, because it was cheaper than regular wine, it was a favorite beverage of the lower ranks of society and of those in moderate circumstances" (Arndt-Gingrich, 577; cf. Ruth 2:14).

Although He had turned down drugged wine before. Jesus accepted this wine because of His severe thirst and since this wine was not anesthetic. Instead, it gave Him the needed clarity of mind and voice for the last effort of His life. Just as Jesus would not begin His suffering drugged by myrrhed wine, so now He would not leave it so weak He could not talk. He would go out with power. The drink provided the energy for what He must do next.

Could a Hebrew reader miss the connection between this and Psalm 22:15 or 69:21?

27:49 And the rest said, Let be; let us see whether Elijah cometh to save him. Despite the uncanny midday darkness just concluding, these skeptics continue to scoff at the possibility of a spectacular intervention of the supernatural to rescue Jesus ("to take him down" from the cross, Mark 15:36).

27:50 And Jesus cried again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit. *Again* (= 27:46) The drink cleared His throat and refreshed Him sufficiently so that, summoning what remained of His dying energy and with a voice still strong with life, He could shout triumphantly the victory cry of the completed mission: "It is finished" (John 19:30)! Who would NOT shout, if He was sure his entire life work on earth was perfectly completed, the aim and purpose of Scriptures fulfilled, the redemption of man realized and God's will done?!

Articulate to the very last, He appropriately *yielded up his spirit* in the unshaken confidence and prayer of a loyal Son in full, familiar fellowship with God, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46; cf. Ps. 31:5)! He lay down His life calmly, without reluctance, sure.

That He *yielded up his spirit* is fact, but what this means our limited experience of death may not permit us to know.

1. It seems to be a quibble to say that none of the Gospel writers say, "He died," but used, rather, the euphemism, *He yielded up his spirit* (*apheken tò pneōma*) whereby Jesus' death *per se* is thought to be His own voluntary act. However, when the identical idiom is used to describe the death of other people, would it mean they too laid down their lives, i.e. died as an act of their will (LXX of Gen. 35:18; 1 Esdras 4:21; cf. Acts 7:59)? Further, the Epistles do not consider "He died" a misleading expression, but utilize it almost exclusively. Consequently, it is questionable whether the Gospel writers intended that this euphemism bear the theological sense of "He caused Himself to die."

2. The question is complicated by the fact that this expression may be no more than an apt euphemism for "He expired" or "He breathed His last" (*exépneusen*, Mark 15:37 = Luke 23:46). Does this expression mean that death was taking charge of His body, so He committed Himself, i.e. His personality, His mind, will, emotions, conscience and imagination, to God? (Cf. I Peter 4:19.)

It would seem, therefore, that this prayer alone, not His death itself, was His own deliberate act. It is His prayer which expresses in what sense He *yielded up his spirit* when He simply surrendered His life, His real self, back to God the Giver. (Cf. Acts 7:59; Eccl. 12:7.) It cannot mean that, unwilling to wait until natural causes took their course, He willed Himself to die in a self-chosen moment by a death *bordering on suicide*. Although these supernatural options were potentially available for the unique Son of God, His experience of death would be less like our own, if He saved Himself from a prolonged natural death, unless we could do the same. His laying down His life to take it up again refers not merely or specifically to this instant of death,—although, of course, it includes it—but, rather, to that absolute freedom of choice whereby He submitted voluntarily to His entire passion. (Cf. John 10:17f.; 19:30.) To think that Jesus died of natural causes does not detract from the grandeur or voluntary character of His death, because the Son of God could have foreseen these natural causes and prepared for them in harmony with every phase of His atonement. So, although the moral and juridical results of His death are vastly different from ours, the Scriptures do not describe its cause on any basis other than its physical similarity to ours. (Cf. Heb. 2:9-17; 5:7ff.)

Jesus died after only a few hours on the cross. Pilate was surprised that He were already dead, since, as implied by the Jews' request for the summary execution of those crucified (John 19:31), sometimes several days passed before death overtook the crucified. Therefore, Jesus' relatively rapid death may be attributed principally to the terrible scourging from which many men died before getting to the cross. Exhaustion played an important part, because, if Jesus' discomfort on the cross was augmented by His inability to breathe except by repositioning His body, His ability to do this was limited to His physical strength already weakened by scourging, hunger and fatigue, ending in suffocation. It is certain that the spear would and did not kill Him, because when that happened, He had already died (John 19:33f.). Some suggest that heart failure or rupture would

explain both His death and the issuing of blood and water. However, medical authorities are not agreed on the exact cause of His death. The fact that He died is authenticated by His executioners, so we need not go further. To investigate the physical cause is a matter of medical interest, not a dogma of faith.

Do the poetic expressions of Psalm 22:14 and 69:20 help define the solution? Other expressions from these Psalms are taken literally, why not these? Perhaps only in the sense that what was true of the Psalmist could be infinitely more appropriate of the Christ. The Psalmist spoke more truth than he understood. (Cf. I Peter 1:10ff.; Luke 10:24.) Even so, such exegesis involves a figurative application to the Psalmist, but literal one to Christ. The bare, literal fulfillment is not all that God wants man to see. In this sense it is not shallow sentimentalism to think that "Jesus died of a broken heart," because the literal fact points to the higher reality: it hurt Him deeply to bear the guilt and penalties of our sin! Our sinfulness killed Him. Beyond His chosen mortality, is it impossible that the psychological burden He bore literally crushed the life out of Him? Until we understand the psychosomatic equation of our own being, we shall not begin to be able to analyze what happened when Jesus died. Here is where analysis must give way to humble gratitude and worship.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. At what hour did the unusual darkness occur? How long did it last?
2. What is the only saying of Jesus quoted by Matthew verbatim?
3. What did Jesus mean to communicate by this? To whom was it addressed?
4. What, if anything, does Psalm 22 have to do with the crucifixion? Give details.
5. How did someone give Jesus a drink?
6. What did they offer Him to drink? Why offer Him this?
7. What objection was made to this kindness and why? What is the meaning of "Let be"?
8. About what time did Jesus die?
9. Explain what is meant by "He yielded up His spirit."
10. What sacrifice was killed at the Temple at the ninth hour? What else occurred normally at that same time in the Temple?

MIRACLES ACCOMPANYING THE DEATH OF CHRIST

TEXT: 27:51-53

51 And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake; and the rocks were rent; 52 and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming forth out of the tombs after his resurrection they entered into the holy city and appeared unto many.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why attribute to God what an earthquake may have actually done, i.e. the ripping of that veil? What causes earthquakes anyway? What happened that day anyway?
- b. Assuming that the veil of the temple was miraculously torn "from the top to the bottom," what do you suppose was the purpose of God for this gesture?
- c. What kind of impression do you think the rending of this great curtain must have made on the priests, not to mention the one who might have been burning incense before it at the hour of prayer? (Cf. 27:46 with Acts 3:1; Luke 1:9f.)
- d. Since the veil of the temple was visible to none but priests who could have witnessed it, would priests be likely to tell the story of the end of that from which they derived their livelihood? If so, excluding inspiration for the moment, how could this great secret still leak out and be recorded by Matthew?
- e. What divine purpose do you discern in the opening of the tombs and the resurrection of the saints after Jesus' own resurrection?
- f. Who do you think these saints were?
- g. What became of them after their resurrection? Did they have to die all over again? Where did they go?

PARAPHRASE

At this point the great veil in the sanctuary split in two from top to bottom. There was an earth tremor and boulders cracked. Even tombs were opened. The bodies of many holy people who had died were resurrected to life. They left their tombs after Jesus arose from the dead and went into the Holy City and appeared to many people.

SUMMARY

Miracles accompanied the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus: the great Temple curtain that veiled the Most Holy Place was ripped in two from the top by unseen hands! An earthquake split great rocks. Many saintly people who had died were resurrected and after Jesus' resurrection made their appearance in Jerusalem before many witnesses.

NOTES

27:51 And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake; and the rocks were rent. The heavy *veil* in question was located in the sanctuary to curtain off the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (Exod. 26:31ff.; 36:35; II Chron. 3:14; Heb. 9:2f.; see also *Wars*, V, 54f.). In the tabernacle first, then in the temple, it served to distinguish the area of the common priests from the symbolic dwelling place of God. So long as this great veil remained intact, the atonement of man's sin was possible only through intercession by sinful high priests and imperfect sacrifices, on the Day of Atonement. Access to the glory of God and the fellowship with Him through prayer were barred by this veil too. (Cf. Heb. 6:19.) Incense and prayer were offered outside it. (Cf. Acts 3:1; Luke 1:8-21.) Jewish tradition (*Mid.* 4,7; *I.S.B.E.*, 2938) declares the *veil* consisted of two exceedingly heavy draperies about 50 cm. apart. For this to be *rent in two from the top to the bottom* would be little short of a mighty miracle.

So, when the great veil came ripping in two and fell apart, the Holy of Holies lay exposed. However, since great golden doors stood behind the veil (I Kings 6:31f.; *Wars*, V, 5,4f.), the priests could not yet gaze with impunity into that dark, bare room. The ark of the covenant had been gone for centuries. Where once the Glory of Israel spoke to His people from between the cherubim, there was now nothing (*Wars*, V, 5,5; *Mish.*, *Yom.* 5,2). Until that great *veil* was replaced, the priests could verify that one more symbol of the great separation between man and God broke down seemingly of its own accord. Ever more clearly "Ichabod" was being engraved upon the Temple; its glory was at last departing never to return. Pagans had gazed upon the emptiness of the Holy of Holies before (*Ant.* XIV,4,4; *Wars*, I,7,6; cf. VI,4,7 also *Ant.* XII,5,4?). Now, however, the Temple's obsolescence is being dramatically revealed to men just at

the hour that the Nazarene, Jesus of Nazareth, expired. Matthew's Gospel practically shouts to those who knew the facts best, "Priests of God and men of Israel, is there any connection between these events?"

The ominous rending of this massive curtain, particularly *from the top to the bottom* at the moment of Jesus' death, would suggest that God Himself opened the way for man to enter boldly into His presence and He did it through the perfectly atoning sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 6:19f.; 9:8, 11, 12, 24ff.; 10:19ff.) Further, this great *veil was rent* at the afternoon hour of prayer near the ninth hour when the officiating priest was in the process of offering incense at the incense altar located just in front of the *veil*. (Cf. Acts 3:1; Luke 1:8-21.) The last daily sacrifice of the Old Covenant, whereby Israel consecrated itself daily to the Lord, was being sacrificed that afternoon. Unexpectedly, the old, symbolic ministry of the entire Levitical system, having fulfilled its purpose, came to the end of its usefulness, finding its perfect completion in Jesus. Godet (*P.H.C.* XXIV, 596) wrote:

As the high priest rent his robe in the presence of a great scandal, so God rent the veil which covers the Holy of Holies, where formerly He had manifested Himself. It implied a desecration of the most holy place, and consequently of the Temple, with its courts and altar and sacrifices. The Temple is profaned, abolished by God Himself. The efficacy of sacrifice has henceforth passed to another blood, another altar, and a new order of priesthood.

This event has tremendous significance for understanding millennial questions. Shall the Jerusalem Temple be rebuilt here on earth and its worship restored? By ripping apart that mighty *veil*, God proclaimed the end of that typical ministry because of the arrival of a superior ministry that was perfect and final, when Jesus our divine High Priest entered *once for all forever* into the true Holy of Holies, the presence of God, to intercede with his own blood for us. *The veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom*. What God has rent asunder, let not man join together!

Even without special revelation Matthew could have learned of rending of the great veil from a "great many of the priests who were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). Indeed, could their conversation be explained by their insight into the meaning of this very sign?

The rocks were rent not improbably as a result of the *earthquake*.

1. In this *earthquake* some discern a symbol of the shaking that began with the death of Christ, a shaking of all that is impermanent or contrary to the Government of God in the moral world until only that which is eternal shall remain. (Cf. Hag. 2:6f.; Heb. 12:26f.)
2. Beginning from the starting point of literal *earthquakes* unquestionably caused by the Lord, it was possible for Jewish poets and prophets to develop poetic imagery based on fearful convulsions in nature whereby the covenant God of Israel revealed His majesty, might and holy wrath against sinners (Exod. 19:19; Ps. 68:8; 114:4-8; II Sam. 22:8; Ps. 18:7; 77:18; Isa. 5:25; 13:13; 24:18f.; 29:6; Jer. 10:10; 49:21; Joel 2:10f.; Nah. 1:5f.; Hag. 2:6; cf. Acts 4:31; 16:26; Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13; 16:18). Thus, for people prepared in this way by their literary heritage, it would be a short mental step from God the cause of the literal to His moral reasons for doing it.

Because Matthew points out that the Romans discerned the connection between "the earthquake and the things that were happening" (27:54: *idòntes tòn seismón kai tà ginòmena*) and the fact that they reacted positively to what they saw, it would appear that *anyone* should be able to see a significant connection between these natural phenomena and Jesus' death. Although earth's natural course regularly continues without interruption when other mortals suffer, here, however, it is brusquely interrupted just at the moment of THIS MAN'S death, and becomes one more portent that points to His world-shaking significance.

27:52 and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming forth out of the tombs after his resurrection they entered into the holy city and appeared unto many. Since many *tombs* were carved into the stone face of cliffs, even the opening of the tombs could be produced by the tremor as the rocks were rent. But here its effect stops. Other power is required to give life to the dead.

The fact that the saints are raised, not at the time their tombs are opened, but *after his resurrection* implies that their own resurrection is a result of His and dependent upon it. Death has been self-defeated by the death of our Lord. Life was not merely guaranteed for others but actually produced by His own resurrection. These resurrected saints become an earnest of what shall occur when Phase II of Jesus' earthly victory shall occur at His Second Coming.

A simple reading of the text argues that they arose when He died, hence before He arose.

1. But, if they rose first, they unquestionably remained in their graves until *after his resurrection*, since *coming forth out of the tombs* is connected with *entering into the holy city*. But even if they arose first, like Lazarus and many others, Christ remains the first-born from the dead, the first-fruits of them that slept (I Cor. 15:20; Col. 1:18). He alone is the first to rise by His own power to die no more and guarantee life for all men by the power of His own immortality. These *saints* were raised only by virtue of His death and resurrection. In this sense His uniqueness is not affected by the hypothesis of their prior resurrection.
2. A better view, better supported by the grammar, is to see the words as constituting one complex idea: "they arose and, coming out of the graves after His resurrection, entered" (*egérthesan kai exelthòntes . . . metà tèn égersin autoû eisêlthon*). The resurrections and appearances in Jerusalem all occurred after Jesus arose.

Lenski (*Matthew*; 1130) and Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 976) argue that only their entrance into the holy city occurred after Jesus' resurrection, whereas "they left their tombs at the moment of Christ's death." But to connect *after his resurrection* with their entrance into the holy city ungrammatically divides a participle (*exelthòntes*) from its main (*eisêlthon*) and links it with a verb from which it is separated by *and* (*kai*).

The solution to the problem of when they arose is perhaps only literary in character, in that Matthew summarized the effects of Christ's death in one place and proceeded to report the resurrection and Great Commission together without returning to report the *saints'* resurrection in its chronological order. This is accepted literary style well documented in Scripture, but gives rise to the debate.

They appeared unto many: who are the *many*? Believers? Enemies? Since Jesus Himself appeared only to preselected believers (Acts 10:40f.), perhaps these saints were sent to appear to His enemies. Their appearance in *the holy city*, Jerusalem (4:5; cf. Isa. 48:2; 52:1), points to the directness and power of the evidence. Here, the nation of Israel was gathered for the Passover. Thus, critics at the very heart of Judaism could easily examine the facts: "The amazing resurrections occurred after the Galilean from Nazareth was crucified! Could

there be any connection?" Would not this proof that God had visited His people serve to prepare minds for the Gospel of a risen Christ preached just over a month later?

What happened to these resurrected *saints* after their appearances during the post-resurrection period is not stated. Their spectacular resurrection was incomparably surpassed by the world-shaking tidings that are the heart of the Gospel: Christ Jesus arose! Possibly they eventually joined Jesus for the ascension. (Cf. Eph. 4:8a [= Ps. 68:18]: "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives. . . ." Were these resurrected saints His "captives" to embellish His triumphant return to glory?)

God had neither totally abandoned Jesus nor absented Himself from the crucifixion, merely because He did not intervene to save His Son. He too was there. These miraculous events could not occur unless God had cared enough to intervene in this way. These supernatural acts say, "Notice, I am here!"

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What unusual events accompanied the *death* of Jesus?
2. Locate the veil of the temple, indicating its function there.
3. At what hour was this great curtain torn?
4. What other events usually occur at that same period in the Temple?
5. When, precisely, did the resurrections cited occur?
6. What unusual events occurred after Jesus' *resurrection*?

THE WITNESS

TEXT: 27:54-56

54 Now the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake, and the things that were done, feared exceedingly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God. 55 And many women were there beholding from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: 56 among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. List every fact in the entire crucifixion to which the centurion and his men were witnesses, that could have contributed to convince them of Jesus' true identity.
- b. When so many other people were present from whom one would more likely expect such a grand confession of Jesus' identity, does it not appear a bit suspicious that it was actually the despised Gentiles who confessed Him? Does it make sense to you that the confessors should be uncultured Roman soldiers, rather than men of thought and culture trained in righteousness by the Mosaic Law?
- c. Why do you think so many women were present?
- d. What fact would explain why Mary, Jesus' mother, is not named in Matthew's list, whereas John affirmed that she was definitely at the cross, and Jesus addressed her directly?
- e. Can you explain why Jesus' friends would remain at a distance? Would there have been more than one reason? If so, what were they?
- f. John affirms that the women named stood close to the cross, whereas the Synoptics all describe them as "looking on from a distance." Who is right? How would you resolve this obvious divergence?
- g. "The mother of Zebedee's children" had asked Jesus that James and John be placed on His left and right in His Kingdom. What do you think went through her mind as she saw the King hanging on a cross between two bandits, one on His left hand and one on His right?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

The centurion was standing facing Jesus. When he and the men, who were guarding Him, felt the earthquake and saw what was taking place, especially how Jesus died, they were deeply shaken. The centurion gave glory to God by exclaiming, "Unquestionably, this man was innocent! He really was God's Son!"

When all the people, who had gathered to witness this spectacle, saw what took place, they returned home, expressing their deep grief. All those who knew Jesus and the numerous women who, when He was in Galilee, regularly followed Him and looked after His needs, stood off at a distance, watching it all. Among those who had come up with Him to Jerusalem were Mary of Magdala, Mary

the mother of James "the Little" and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons, Salome.

SUMMARY

The officer and men in charge of the execution reacted to the dramatic events that occurred in connection with Jesus' death, especially the way Jesus Himself gave up His life, by confessing Jesus' innocence and deity. Other spectators expressed their deep grief, while Jesus' acquaintances remained at a distance, watching the scene.

NOTES

All the ends of the earth will remember
and turn to the Lord,
And all the families of the nations
will bow down before Him,
For dominion belongs to the Lord
And he rules over the nations (Ps. 22:27f.).

27:54 Now the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake, and the things that were done, feared exceedingly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God. Although the centurion's expression is most memorable, apparently several of the Romans were deeply affected by *the things that were done*. Matthew reports the fine confession as the conviction of several soldiers (pl. *légonies, saying*). Independently of the degree of information and understanding each man had about the true *God*, they discern in the fearful events surrounding the death of *this* man something more than a routine execution. Does raw superstition ordinarily praise God (Luke 23:47)? Or is this the Evangelist's evaluation, i.e. the Romans unconsciously glorified God by their confession? The centurion stood facing Him, so was in an excellent position to observe everything (Mark 15:39). There is little opportunity for deception in his case. Most impressive for military men who have witnessed many men die is the lordly composure and self-mastery evident in the way **THIS MAN** concluded His life (*houtós*, Mark 15:39). Whereas they themselves had mocked Him before (Luke 23:36f.), they had time to gain a healthy respect for someone so self-disciplined even in death as not to reply to the vile outpourings of venomous minds, but pray for the offenders instead (I Peter 2:23ff.).

Son of God: did the *centurion* really attest to the divine identity of Christ, or did his words represent a heathen notion: "a son of the gods concerning whose undeserved death the gods were angry?" A primary consideration for determining the *centurion's* meaning must be the language that he had been hearing all morning. Further, was this *centurion* involved in guarding Jesus during His trial before Pilate? (Cf. John 19:7.) If so, what other impressions of Him had begun to form at that time? Unquestionably alert at the cross, he heard the native leaders hurl this very charge at the Man on the central cross: "He said, 'I am the Son of God'" (*theoû eimi huiòs*; 27:40, 43, see notes.). This was the claim that sealed His fate. We may grant that the *centurion* probably did not use their words with the full theological grasp of the Jewish leaders themselves. Nevertheless, if he had been reflecting on this underlying charge, even if it was not actually expressed in the title on His cross, then it would not be at all surprising to hear him conclude that the Jewish leaders were wrong. He was the Son of God after all.

The Romans had also heard Jesus utter two prayers unquestionably addressing God as "Father" (Luke 23:34, 46). Contrary to the Jewish verdict, the Man on the central cross is not merely "innocent" (*kikaïos*; Luke 23:47), but also truthful about what He claimed to be, superhuman. To stare death in the face and keep up the false pretense is abnormal unless significantly true. Nevertheless, His dying words commended His spirit to the Father whose Son He claimed to be. This too convinced the soldiers Jesus was righteous. Perhaps no single fact produced this conviction, but the combination of events rising to a dramatic climax: His character under fire, His readiness to die for His convictions and the portentous, unearthly circumstances surrounding His death, led them to conclude He was God's Son. Even in death He powerfully convinced them and they became the first Gentiles to be led to confess the truth about Jesus. Lenski (*Luke*, 1156) is right: "Why reduce these confessions to the lowest possible level? If they amounted to next to nothing, why were the inspired writers allowed to set them down for all time?"

This *centurion* was not known to be a God-fearer from the beginning, like his fellow officers at Capernum (8:10) and Caesarea (Acts 10:1f.). Nevertheless, to maintain that he was a polytheistic pagan is to affirm more than is known, especially since he had heard much that day.. Most remarkable is that they make this startling admission, *even though Jesus did not utilize the power typical of a Son of God to save Himself from execution.*

Love that would not go away

27:55 And many women were there beholding from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him. Jesus' friends now stood *beholding from afar*, for many reasons; a few perhaps for fear of being implicated with Jesus, others out of sheer decency to Jesus because their grief would increase His burden, others because helpless to prevent this tragedy, others because uncomprehending and yet rooted there by love stronger than fear. Practically everyone would keep his distance so long as the soldiers guarding the crosses maintained a security zone around the crucifixion area. Until the other two criminals died, the soldiers would cordon off Calvary. And so long as Jesus' powerful enemies monopolized the perimeter around the cross, His friends would maintain their distance.

The Gospel writers emphasize the presence of devoted Galilean women who had followed . . . ministering to Him, especially "when He was in Galilee" (Mark 15:41). These constituted an essential support group, preparing food, washing clothes, etc., so that Jesus and the apostles might labor unhindered. The normalness of this service is more evident when it is remembered that of the women named by the Gospel writers, three are mothers or aunts of a number of the apostles and Jesus. (See on 27:56.) Such wealthy women as Joanna and Susanna distinguished themselves by contributing heavily to the group's financial support (Luke 8:1-3). Even though inexcusable, the absence of the men is somewhat understandable, since they could be accused of a violent rescue plot, whereas the women, normally, would not bear arms. But where were the Eleven? Although John was there, the others are conspicuous for their absence. We may charitably imagine them silently *beholding from afar*, so that John, Mary and a couple of women could venture near the cross unchallenged.

27:56 Among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the author of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. His mother had also been present (John 19:25ff.). *Mary Magdalene* was the grateful disciple from Magdala in Galilee (Luke 8:2), absolutely not to be identified with the woman of Luke 7:37. *Mary the mother of James and Joses* was presumably wife of Clopas, brother of Joseph, hence Mary's sister-in-law. If Salome was *the mother of the sons of Zebedee*, then she was Mary's sister (John 19:25). No doubt these dear women all possessed courage and love, but the latter two, probably Jesus' aunts, had also a kinswoman's right to be there. For fuller notes on these women, see Special Study, "The Brethren of the Lord," my volume III, 185ff., esp. 188.

These four women stood much closer to the cross earlier (John 19:25). It is entirely possible that they arrived near the cross shortly before Jesus' death. (Study John's sequence: John 19:25-30.) However, that they were closer earlier and have now moved away from the cross to watch the end, may be perceived from two considerations suggested by McGarvey (*Evidences of Christianity*, 44):

1. Since John's account omits the great darkness, Jesus' consignment of Mary to His disciple very likely preceded it. Without some clear gesture visible to all, it would not be clear precisely to whom His words "Woman, behold your son!" and "Behold your mother!" were addressed. Because His hands were nailed to the cross, the only gesture possible was a nod of the head or a movement of His eyes as He spoke to each one. These would not be visible once the darkness began, hence must be sought for during the first three hours of daylight.
2. If the women arrived at the cross early, before His enemies began defiantly jeering at Jesus, then as this painful scene degenerated, making it both dangerous and painful for Jesus' disciples to remain near, they would naturally desire to withdraw to a safe distance where we find them when Jesus expired.

Further, if the onset of the alarming darkness caused the soldiers to clear the area around the cross for security, the women would have to keep their distance with the others. This is where we find them in the Synoptics. If, when Jesus consigned His mother to him, John immediately guided her away from this terrible place, this would explain why Mary is not named at this later time. John, however, returned to see the end (John 19:35).

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Who or what is a centurion?
2. Quote the testimony that the centurion and his men bore to Jesus.
3. What is meant by the Romans' exclamation? List everything they could have witnessed that day which would lead to the astonishing conclusion involved in the exclamation.
4. Of what force or value is this Roman testimony, especially in a Jewish Gospel like *Matthew*?
5. Name the disciples present at the crucifixion.
6. In what way(s) had the women contributed to Jesus' ministry?

7. Explain the probable kinship of two of these women to Jesus.
8. Give a reasonable hypothesis why Jesus' mother is not named in Matthew's list of women.

Jesus is Buried

TEXT: 27:57-61

57 And when even was come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: 58 this man went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded it to be given up. 59 And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed. 61 And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why did Joseph of Arimathea approach Pilate for permission to request the body for burial? What further interest would Pilate have in this question?
- b. Why did it take particular courage for Joseph to request the body of Jesus? What could it possibly have cost him?
- c. What do you suppose brought Joseph, a secret disciple, out into the open in this bold way?
- d. How many disciples of Joseph's caliber do you think moved in the circles of Jewish high society?
- e. Why was everybody in such a great hurry to bury Jesus' body?
- f. Do you think Joseph's solution to bury Jesus in his own new tomb was a temporary or a permanent one in Joseph's mind?
- g. Why did they roll a great stone to the door of the tomb? Why not just shut the door?
- h. Why do you think the women followed Nicodemus and Joseph to the tomb?
- i. Why were there only two women at the tomb? Were they helping in some way or just watching? If the latter, what good would this do? Of what special importance to us is their being there watching?
- j. Do you think *you* could have buried Jesus? *Would* you have done it?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

The time was already after mid-afternoon. Since it was Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, a man of means named Joseph of Arimathea came forward. An honored member of the Sanhedrin, he was a good, upright man who had dissented from that council's plot and its execution. He lived in the expectation of personally seeing the beginning of God's Kingdom. He too was Jesus' disciple, however secretly, because he was intimidated by the unbelievers in Israel. He found the courage to go straight to Pilate and request that he might take away Jesus' body.

Pilate was surprised to hear that He were dead so soon. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus were already dead. When he heard the centurion's report that He was dead for some time, Pilate ordered that the body be consigned to Joseph.

So Joseph purchased a linen sheet and lowered the body from the cross. Nicodemus, the man who had called on Jesus by night, arrived too, bringing a 33 kg. (75 lb.) mixture of myrrh and aloes. They took His body and wrapped it along with the spices in the clean linen sheet, like the Jews usually prepare their dead for burial.

Now in the area where Jesus was crucified there was a garden in which Joseph had recently carved his own new tomb right into the rock. It was so new that no one had been buried in it yet. So, because it was the Jewish Friday and the Sabbath was beginning, and since the tomb was conveniently close, they laid Jesus' body there. They rolled a heavy stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.

Two women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and Nicodemus. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, the mother of Jesus, were there sitting across from the tomb, observing how and where His body was laid there. Then they went home and prepared spices and ointments. Then they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

SUMMARY

Two secret disciples of Jesus came out into the open: Joseph of Arimathea, a godly Jewish senator, and a rabbi, Nicodemus. Joseph boldly requested Pilate's permission to bury Jesus and received it. Nicodemus brought the necessary burial spices. Once the body was ready, they laid it in Joseph's new tomb nearby. The two Marys watched the men work, then went home to prepare other burial spices, then rested on Saturday.

NOTES

. . . With the rich in his death . . . (Isa. 53:9)

What was to happen to Jesus' body when His leaderless disciples were caught completely unprepared to deal with the problem? God provided an unexpected solution.

27:57 And when even was come, there came a rich man from Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple. Because these events occurred after three o'clock on Friday afternoon (27:46; Mark 15:42), the "dawning" of the Sabbath at sundown was not far away. So, *when even was come* (*opsias genoménes*) would mean "the first evening," according to the ancient Hebrew idiom for the middle of the afternoon, as opposed to the second evening at sundown. (See Exod. 12:6 in Hebrew: "between the two evenings.") It is highly doubtful (1) that any orthodox Jew would begin to bury at sundown when Jesus' death made this possible three hours earlier; or (2) that getting burial permission from Pilate, going to the cross, taking Jesus down, embalming and entombment could all have been accomplished in just a few minutes. It is more likely that Joseph and Nicodemus acted according to the usual custom of burying the dead shortly after death. Consequently, we may see them beginning sometime shortly after three o'clock (Cf. 9:23f.; 27:46, 50.)

Even if pagans commonly left victims of crucifixion hanging until they rotted or were eaten by scavengers, Jewish law demanded that they be removed the same day of the execution lest they desecrate the land (Deut. 21:22f.; cf. Josh. 8:29; 10:26f.; Wars IV,5,2). Traditional preparation for the Sabbath, too, would render it doubly important that the bodies not remain on the cross, desecrating also the Sabbath. So the Jews asked Pilate to order that death be accelerated for the crucified so they could be removed (John 19:31ff.).

Although burial preparations begun on Friday could proceed on the Sabbath (Edersheim, *Life*, II,786; cf. *Shabbath* 23.4f. cited by Barrett, *John*, 465), Jesus' friends would be actuated by the same logic as His enemies to terminate them whereinsofar possible before the Sabbath began. (See on 27:61.) To avoid the indignity of the common grave of criminals for Jesus, they must act rapidly. But who could care appropriately for this? From an unexpected quarter, *there came a rich man . . . named Joseph, also . . . Jesus' disciple* (*ematheteùthe tô Iesoû*, "discipled to Jesus." Cf. 13:52; 28:19; Acts 14:21). He hurried to Pilate, arriving shortly after the Jews

obtained the governor's permission to kill the condemned men. (See on 27:58.)

Arimathaea, if identified with Ramathaim, birthplace of Samuel (I Sam. 1:1), lay about 14.5 km. (9 mi.) northwest of Jerusalem. There is another Ramathaim about 73.5 km. (45 mi.) northwest of Jerusalem. Others place *Arimathaea* on the Jewish side of the border between Judea and Samaria about 35 km. (24 mi.) northwest of Jerusalem. (Cf. Luke 23:50.) Although he was from *Arimathaea*, he had since moved to the Jerusalem area, perhaps more easily to serve the Jewish Senate. The permanence of this move is suggested by his having built his tomb there. Thus, his name, Joseph of *Arimathaea*, only serves to distinguish him from many other men of the same name in Jerusalem.

Joseph's position as honored member of the Sanhedrin makes his intervention here remarkable, because he had dissented from that body's majority decision to crucify Jesus. However, his charitable character makes his deed predictably plausible. (Cf. Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50f.) Matthew omits every other distinctive except the fact that he was a *rich man*, perhaps to permit the sensitive reader to focus on this fulfillment of prophecy (Isa. 53:9). Most of Jesus' disciples were poor, obscure people and such lavish entombment would have been inaccessible for them. Unknown to them, God had reserved a man who had both loving devotion and wealth equal to the task of burying Jesus with dignity.

27:58 This man went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded it to be given up. Crises produce different reactions in people: those who had no hesitancy about admitting their discipleship to Jesus do not even come forward to claim His body, while it is the secret disciples who boldly step in to do this.

Considerable courage was required for this godly Sanhedrinist to approach Pilate, requesting for himself the corpse of someone who was not kin to him and whom his own colleagues condemned and Pilate executed as a criminal. He risked having to explain his connections with the Crucified. Although Joseph's loyalty had been hidden, it was genuine. Jesus' death shocked him into action and gave him the boldness he had not possessed until now (John 19:38; Mark 15:43).

Whereas Jesus' disciples had neither wealth nor connections, Joseph's loving respect moved him to throw his prestige into the balance by exerting his influence as a member of the Sanhedrin to

obtain the body and his wealth to secure an honorable burial. It was at the time of His severest humiliation that these aristocrats first confess Him. In this they join the believing centurion and the penitent robber. Despite His being lifted up, Jesus has already begun to draw men unto Himself (John 12:32; cf. 8:28).

Joseph apparently arrived at the Praetorium so shortly after the Jewish delegation had obtained the order for the bone-smashing, that Pilate was surprised that Jesus were already dead (Mark 15:44). Some consider Pilate's surprise incomprehensible, since he himself had just ordered that the condemned men's death be accelerated. Therefore, because he could assume that the soldiers' obedience to this order would assure the death of Jesus along with the others, his wonder, expressed after his own order, is thought impossible. However, because Pilate's order assumed that all three men were yet alive and must be quickly dispatched, he does not expect anyone to arrive so soon requesting one of the corpses. Perhaps even the Jews who approached Pilate did not know Jesus was dead, hence could not inform him of this. (Alternatively: they knew it but would not inform him, so he would order Jesus' legs broken too.) However, the governor had not yet received a final report on the execution of his order. Therefore, because he must not consign Jesus' body to one of His friends until it be quite certain that He was no longer alive, the prefect rightly demanded the positive certification from the centurion in charge. Only upon receiving the centurion's certification of Jesus' death, did Pilate grant Joseph the right to remove the body (Mark 15:44f.). That men survive for several days on the cross has nothing to do with the governor's surprise, because he had ordered the end of their survival!

That Jesus' body had not yet been removed from the cross need not seem strange. Joseph may have gone directly to the centurion at the cross and informed him of his intention to approach Pilate. The centurion, knowing that Jesus was dead and His side pierced, may have ordered his men to leave the body for Joseph to remove. Their duty ended with making certain the men executed were actually dead. To crush the legs of a man already demonstrably dead would be an unnecessary barbarity. Certainty of His death was assured by the fatal stab of the lance (John 19:31-37).

That these two secret disciples were so prepared for the burial of Jesus should not surprise, because anyone could foresee the political disaster to which Jesus' collision course with the priesthood and the

Pharisees must lead, making them pessimistic, hence, more ready for the crisis of His death than others. Further, Jesus' crucifixion that morning made His death that evening a foregone conclusion because of the Jewish tradition of not leaving bodies hanging overnight. So, both Joseph and Nicodemus found their course charted for them, and began buying the necessary linen and spices that day. Charitable burial of the dead was all the contingency plan they needed to move decisively when the emergency arose. (Cf. Tobit 2:16ff.; 21:ff.)

That Joseph went straight to Pilate even into the Praetorium, thus defiling himself by traditional definitions is unimportant, because by touching a dead body, he would defile himself anyway.

27:59 And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth. We need not suppose that Joseph worked alone. Not excluding servants, he could work with the women, perhaps John and any soldiers yet stationed at the cross. Perhaps Nicodemus' large quantity of spices were delivered by others who could help too. Taking the body down from the cross, it was perhaps first washed then taken to the tomb for final preparations, the linen and the spices.

Joseph had just bought this *clean linen cloth* (Mark 15:46). That he could do so during that Passover is established. (See notes on 26:17.) This *linen* was *clean*, i.e., not defiled by previous contact with something defiling, as another dead body. Nicodemus too came forward with a large quantity of spices: myrrh and aloes for the embalming (John 19:39-42; 100 *litras* = 100 ROMAN pounds = 33 kg = 75 lb.; cf. Ps. 45:8; II Chron. 16:14). This profuse evidence of his final devoted service is not unusual in its richness. (Cf. Mary's generosity, John 12:3; *Ant.* XVII, 8,3: The burial of Herod I, required 500 servants to bear the spices!) The *linen cloth* (*sindòn*) was apparently long enough not only to envelope the full body front and back, but also to be cut into strips (cf. pl. *onthònia*: John 19:40; 20:5-7; cf. John 11:44 *keirìtai*). Then, spices in powder-form were sprinkled liberally into the various wrappings of the *linen cloth* as it was being wound around Jesus' body before being bound (Mark 15:46; John 19:40; cf. John 11:44). Then His head was covered by a large special cloth (John 20:7). Such embalming is totally inconsistent with belief in an immediate resurrection. For these disciples Jesus' death ended His ministry on earth and they express their last devotion in this way.

That these two men coordinated their efforts is suggested by their individual purchases: Nicodemus brought the spices without the linen and Joseph the linen without the spices. Neither item would be considered

appropriate or complete without the other. Perhaps their kindred spirits had drawn them together much earlier, but only the death of Christ brought their secret discipleship out into the open.

The new focal point of history

27:60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed. Joseph's *own new tomb* was located in a garden in the general vicinity of the crucifixion (John 19:41; cf. notes on 27:33). Even though Joseph had lived at Arimathea, he owned this garden near Jerusalem and, not impossibly, planned to be buried there. Its very nearness to the place of crucifixion may have prompted his offer, because time was not materially available for a distant burial. Its nearness to Jerusalem providentially facilitated the investigation of Jesus' resurrection. His *new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock* seems to have been a man-made cave carved horizontally into the stone face of a hill, rather than vertically down into the soil. (Cf. Isa. 22:16; Luke 8:27; Matt. 8:28.) Although it was large enough for at least two people to enter (Mark 16:5; Luke 24:3; John 20:5ff., 12), its doorway appears to have been low, requiring anyone to stoop to look inside (John 19:5, 11). That Luke and John describe the tomb as "where no one had ever yet been laid," denotes the honor Joseph showed the Lord by not hesitating to place His body in a completely new tomb intended for his own use. (Cf. Luke 23:53; John 19:41.) Joseph could not have foreseen that his new tomb would have been utilized so quickly or for something so significant. Nor could he imagine that what he so unselfishly surrendered to the Lord's use would be so amazingly and so soon restored to him for his own use! Is *anything* sacrificed for the Lord's service ever *really* lost? (Cf. 19:29; 13:44; Heb. 10:34.)

Nicodemus' 100 Roman pounds of embalming spices would not exclude the addition of more spices on the part of the women. Concerning these large quantities, McGarvey (*Evidences of Christianity*, 42) rightly noticed that the Jewish custom of burying was not like the Egyptian embalming. (Cf. John 19:40.) This latter view of burial aimed at conserving the body by arresting decomposition, whereas the Jews apparently utilized spices only to mask the odor of decomposition without arresting it. Naturally, the greater the quantity of spices utilized, the more adequately this would function. This

would account for the 33 kg. (75 lb.) of spices brought by Nicodemus as well as the preparation or purchase of additional spices by the women, one on Friday evening and the other on Saturday just after sunset when Sunday began (Luke 23:56; Mark 16:1).

Why was Jesus not buried in one of the two places set aside by the Sanhedrin for executed criminals? (See Flusser, *Jesus*, 161, who cites Mishna. *Sanh.* 6,5.) Is the choice of burial site evidence that the glorious Sanhedrin of Israel was not responsible for the condemnation of Jesus or that He did not get a true trial before the highest council of Israel? If so, then Jesus was condemned by a kangaroo court, not by the true fathers of modern Judaism who must be defended at the expense of the Gospels. But that this thesis is unfounded is proven by the consideration that the decisively daring move made by Joseph of Arimathea pre-empted conciliar action to bury Jesus elsewhere. Further, the prestigious position of Joseph as a "respected member of the council," was his highest credential to convince Pilate to release the body to him (Mark 15:43). That Joseph acted without the knowledge and consent of the council may be assumed without proof, because, if the contrary were true, the Mishnaic citation of Flusser only proves, if anything, that the burial rule was of more flexible application in Jesus' time than Flusser's defense of the Sanhedrin would allow.

27:61 And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre. Mark identifies *the other Mary* as Jesus' mother. (See on 27:56.) These loyal-hearted women from Galilee desired to see both the tomb and how Jesus' body was laid in it, so followed Nicodemus and Joseph (Luke 23:55). Because He was not to have an entombment in the regular cemetery at Jerusalem and since they had not yet seen Joseph's tomb, they needed to know "where He was laid" (Mark 15:47). This information would be needed when they returned to complete the embalming after the Sabbath. Perhaps they originally intended to care for the body themselves, but found that others had come forward with care more adequate than they themselves could have given. They undoubtedly drew much comfort from knowing that their Lord was appropriately buried with respect by two of the nation's leaders. Thus, while Joseph and Nicodemus proceed, the women *sit over against the sepulchre*, watching to see "how His body was laid." However, they did not remain at the tomb for long, because before sunset they left the tomb to prepare more spices and ointments to complete the embalming as

soon as the Sabbath ended (Luke 23:56). That they could purchase whatever was needed that festal Friday is already illustrated at 26:17. However, despite the urgency of embalming a body before decay would render their work impossible, they respected God's will and did no work on Saturday. The women's observing the tomb and the position of the body became a precious part of the evidence for Christ's resurrection, since they knew precisely which tomb had contained the body of Jesus. On resurrection morning they did not return to the wrong tomb and mislead others into thinking He has arisen.

Without detracting one bit of the glory of these faithful women who followed the body to the tomb, where were all the men? Surely after Jesus' death, they might hope that the pressure were over. No one came forward, because fear of the Jews haunted them until after the resurrection. (Cf. John 20:19.) Even if Joseph and Nicodemus were present and personally committed, the women acted themselves with greater courage than most of the men.

Instead of frantic wailing of mourning, Jesus' burial was quiet, serene, and majestic. Two statesmen, who until shortly before were afraid to admit their sympathy with Jesus' movement, now openly, tenderly and magnificently cared for His body. This loving care was completely different from what His enemies could have anticipated. Perhaps they imagined that His body would have been abandoned or tossed into the grave of common criminals. Instead, what had taken place was but the prelude of His glorification.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What time of day did the burial occur?
2. On what day was Jesus buried?
3. What prophecy (or prophecies) were fulfilled in Jesus' burial? Give the reference and a brief quotation to identify the text.
4. Describe Joseph of Arimathea, telling what you know of his character, economic strength and position in the Jewish society.
5. What was Joseph's interest in Jesus?
6. Describe the embalming and burial procedure followed by Joseph.
7. List the people who probably helped Joseph with the burial procedure.
8. Describe the tomb of Jesus, its location, its style, its closure, etc.
9. What were the women doing at Jesus' tomb?

SECTION 75

JESUS' TOMB IS GUARDED

TEXT: 27:62-66

62 Now on the morrow, which is *the day* after the Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees were gathered together unto Pilate, 63 saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said while he was yet alive, After three days I rise again. 64 Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest haply his disciples come and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: and the last error will be worse than the first. 65 Pilate said unto them, Ye have a guard; go, make it *as* sure as ye can. 66 So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, the guard being with them.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose the Jews waited till Saturday to think about guarding Jesus' tomb against the disciples? Did not they risk quite a bit already? At about what time do you think they approached Pilate requesting a guard?
- b. Why did they request the guard just "until the third day"?
- c. How did they seal the tomb? How would this help protect the tomb from unauthorized manipulation?
- d. Why would the Jews have no scruple about setting the guard on duty during the Sabbath?
- e. Why do you suppose Pilate was so willing to concede them a guard at the tomb? What personal interest did he have in guarding the tomb against tampering?
- f. How do these accurate precautions contribute directly to your faith?

PARAPHRASE

Next day, that is, the day after Friday, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered in a group before Pilate to say, "Sir, we recall that this imposter, while he was still alive, said, 'After three days I shall rise again.' Order, therefore, that the tomb be closely guarded until the third day, so that his disciples cannot go and steal the corpse, and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' The last piece of deception will be worse than the first."

"You have a guard of soldiers," Pilate answered, "Go, guard it as well as you know how."

So they went to make the tomb secure by setting a seal on the stone and by mounting a guard.

SUMMARY

Jewish leaders, unwilling to risk a counter-move on the part of Jesus' disciples by spiriting away the body and claiming a faked resurrection, requested official permission to guard His tomb. Pilate sanctioned this move.

NOTES

HISTORY'S MOST FUTILE PRECAUTIONS

27:62 Now on the morrow, which is the day after the Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees were gathered together unto Pilate. That *the Preparation* is not a readying for the Passover but the normal weekly preparation for the Sabbath is authentically evidenced by Josephus (*Ant.* XVI,6,2) and by the practice of the Galilean women (Luke 23:56; Mark 16:1; cf. John 19:31; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54). Modern Greek continues the use of *Preparation* as the normal word for Friday. (See fuller notes on 26:17.) Hence, *the morrow, which is the day after the Preparation* is the Sabbath. It is not clear whether the Jews presented their request to the procurator after sundown on Friday (= Saturday) or after sunrise on Saturday. Since Jesus had expired around three p.m. and was buried shortly before sunset, the guard could move in almost immediately as soon as the prefect gave the word. The Jewish authorities undoubtedly acted as decisively as cunning foresight permitted them to perceive the direction a potential counter-attack of the Nazarene's disciples might take.

The chief priests and the Pharisees were gathered together unto Pilate, perhaps not as a body, but privately lest their going to Pilate appear to be a violation of the Sabbath. Further, that these religious authorities went to Pilate on the Sabbath involves no incongruity for men who already violated every principle of their own jurisprudence to put Jesus on the cross. They could have little scruple about the Sabbath violation involved in standing guard on the Sabbath, since Gentile rather than Jewish soldiers would be employed for this.

However, when Matthew could have written more simply, his involved wording, *morrow, which is the day after the Preparation*,

seems as if he were studiously avoiding the expression "morrow, which is the Sabbath." (Cf. Mark 15:42.) Nevertheless, he could identify the day when the guard was set in two ways: (1) call it "the Sabbath" or (2) call it the day after Jesus died, i.e. the day after Friday. If his primary interest is to establish that the guard was set reasonably soon after the burial, then by choosing the latter expression he assures the reader that the guard was placed soon enough to avoid the theft of the body feared by Jesus' enemies and, thus, to guarantee the reality of the resurrection. Thus, Matthew's complicated expression actually certifies that the authorities would not leave the tomb unguarded for even one night during which a resurrection hoax could be executed. Thus, *morrow* is intended in the Jewish sense, i.e., after sunset on Friday evening (= Saturday).

27:63 saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said while he was yet alive, After three days I rise again.

At first glance it is astonishing that the Lord's enemies recalled a prediction of Jesus that should have emboldened His disciples, and did everything feasible to hinder it, while the disciples themselves neither remembered it nor did anything to enhance it! (Cf. John 20:9; Luke 24:25ff.; cf. Acts 17:3.) But God makes even men's unbelief to praise Him: Jesus' followers, because they did not yet believe He would rise, remained completely out of the situation and did not compromise the evidence. They thus facilitated the enemies' efforts at tightening security around Jesus' tomb to avoid a faked resurrection. These very precautions become our most convincing proof that the resurrection really occurred and that the hypothesis of a hoax is itself false.

How could the skeptical leadership of Israel remember what the most devoted disciples did not? Many, *especially Phrisees*, knew that Jesus predicted it (Matt. 12:38, 40; cf. v. 46). Jesus had predicted it in cryptic language of signs (John 2:18ff.; Matt. 12:38ff.; 16:4) and in frank expressions (16:21; 17:9, 22f.; 20:17ff.). His disciples puzzled over its meaning among themselves (Mark 9:9f.). Precisely because puzzling, the meaning of these prophecies might be debated beyond the circle of the inner group of disciples, and consequently leak out to a wider group, especially to the ever vigilant Pharisees. Again, all of Jesus' great well-known claims to come from God and return to Him supported the resurrection concept (John 7:33, 36; 8:21-30; 10:17-21). Finally, because He had resurrected Lazarus right under His opponents' nose, His predictions of His own resurrection took

on startlingly new power and meaning. Study the Sanhedrin's panic in this light (John 11:45ff., 57). There was no question that He had said it.

Rather, the difference in remembering is psychologically explicable on the basis of each group's reaction to it; the disciples wanted to believe Jesus would never need a resurrection, the enemies wanted to believe He could never accomplish it once they got Him dead. The disciples were stunned by their grief and blinded by their distorted vision of an immortal political Christ, but His enemies dreaded Jesus' influence even while dead.

Precautions against imposture

27:64 Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest haply his disciples come and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: and the last error will be worse than the first. The Jews' suggestion, *Command*, argues that they had no intention of employing the Levitical Temple police to guard an unclean tomb area during the feast. Jewish guards may have had no authority beyond the Temple itself, hence, Roman soldiers were required.

Concerning the phrase, *Until the third day*, McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*, 68) wrote:

Why say "till the third day," if he was to rise *after three days*? We would have said, till the fourth day; for if he was to rise after three days it would not be earlier than the fourth day, though it might be later. Evidently they understood the time included in the expression "after three days" as terminating on the third day. And as Jesus had been buried near the close of a day, and they expected him to rise, if at all, on the third day, they must have counted the small fraction of a day that remained after his burial as one of the three days. Their expression, "till the third day," also shows that they expected him to rise before the third day would end, and that they therefore count a part of that day as a day.

They obviously meant to bracket the period He predicted for His entombment, so if the guard were set on Saturday (= even Friday night), the guard would remain until Monday, i.e. all day Saturday, Sunday and Monday. This, because the Jews were unaware of the

disciples' objective confusion and must utilize the broadest interpretation of the day count supposedly being used by anyone planning a hoax. Their alarm would be in force until Sunday evening (= Monday's beginning).

Lest haply his disciples come and steal him away. These guilty men who had stooped to betrayal to ensnare Jesus and deception to sentence Him to death, now fear that His men would also make use of some trick to recover the advantage. Little did they realize that these very followers, even after personally seeing Jesus risen from the dead, could hardly grasp what to do with this earth-shaking fact until Pentecost, much less make use of it to embarrass the Jews before then. They were emotionally incapable of simulating a resurrection!

The last error (plâne, "deception") proclaimed by the Galileans, that He had risen, *will be worse than the first* proclaimed by "that deceiver" (*ekeînos ho plânos*, 27:63), that He was the political Messiah, the king of the Jews. They imply that they fear Jesus' disciples' potential political power, if they could ever be persuaded that He were risen, whether true or not.

27:65 Pilate said unto them, Ye have a guard: go, make it as sure as ye can. This could be weary indifference, even though the prefect was as much concerned about quelling tendentious rumors as the Jews were. *Ye have a guard (échete koustodian)* is a positive reaction that grants the request: "You have what you requested from me." He does not refer to their own detachment of Temple police. They had come to him requesting something they did not already possess or could have used without his permission. When the Roman soldiers report back to the chief priests after the resurrection (28:11), this only confirms their being at the disposal of the Jews, as Pilate affirms here.

Make it as sure as ye can are words more precious to the Christian than any other order the Roman governor ever gave. They secure the authenticity of the resurrection by guarding against the imposture of stealing the body.

27:66 So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, the guard being with them. This latter phrase suggests that the Jewish authorities were not content to entrust this critical detail to the Roman military, but actually supervised it personally. And would not their suspicions demand that someone be sent into the tomb to assure them that the body were really there before sealing the door? Then, after

stretching a cord across the face of the great stone door from one side of the tomb door to the other, embedding each end of the cord in sealing wax, they pressed an official seal into the hot wax to give the seals authority. The purpose of the seals is not to hold the door shut, but to threaten anyone from opening it without due authorization from him whose seals they were (cf. Dan. 6:17). So long as the seals remained intact, it would prove that no one had bribed the soldiers to open the door. Backing up the seals was the Roman *guard* (*koustodia*, Latin: "custodia").

It should cause no surprise that the historical reliability of this section has been attacked by critics. Certainly, it has tremendous apologetic value, in that it proves that Jesus was really buried and that His body could not have been stolen, because the tomb was guarded against precisely this eventuality. But does this prove that Matthew invented his facts? For a Gospel in circulation among Hebrews who could ascertain the truth through private investigation and interviewing the enemies of Jesus, it would be worse than simply fraudulent, were these fictitious "facts." The fundamental basis of Christianity, the certainty of Christ's resurrection, would be undermined by doubts at its source, the tomb of Joseph.

God would have the last laugh however, because that guard and that seal meant that these non-disciples would be forced to be the very first to bring the astounding news to Jesus' enemies that all their precautions had been futile (Ps. 2:4; 76:10). The disciples had indeed not tampered with the tomb or the body. He arose!

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What day follows the day of Preparation?
2. On what day was the guard placed on watch?
3. Who set the guard at the tomb?
4. Why was the guard placed there?
5. Why was Pilate requested to cooperate?
6. For how long was the guard to watch the tomb?
7. Why and how did they seal the tomb?
8. Explain Pilate's expression: "You have a watch."
9. Show how the Jews' diligence to avoid all deception served to establish incontrovertibly the reality of Jesus' resurrection.

SECTION 76

JESUS AROSE!

(Parallels: Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18)

TEXT: 28:1-10

1 Now late on the sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. 2 And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled away the stone, and sat upon it. 3 His appearance was as lightning, and his raiment white as snow: 4 and for fear of him the watchers did quake, and became as dead men. 5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, who hath been crucified. 6 He is not here; for he is arisen, even as he said. Come see the place where the Lord lay. 7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples, He is risen from the dead; and lo, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. 8 And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring his disciples word. 9 And behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail, and they came and took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. 10 Then saith Jesus unto them, Fear not: go tell my brethren that they depart into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose Matthew bothered to begin this new section with the expression, "After the Sabbath"? Why not begin simply, "Now as the first day of the week was dawning"? Is there something important in mentioning the Sabbath here?
- b. Why do you suppose that the two Marys wanted "to see the tomb"? Had they not already done so before the Sabbath started, when they watched Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus prepare the body for burial?
- c. Do you think they went to the tomb on Saturday evening, i.e. when Sunday was beginning, or on Sunday morning? Defend your answer.
- d. The women were eager to care for the body of Jesus, whereas the men disciples only went to the tomb when called, and then, only two of them went. Why do you think the men acted this way? Does not this show a serious failure of love for Jesus?

- e. What was the purpose of the angel's coming? To let Jesus out of the tomb?
- f. If the guards were frightened so greatly by what they saw, is it not possible to suspect their later testimony, precisely because of the irrationality chargeable to their fear?
- g. Is there any evidence in the text that the soldiers fled from the tomb when the angel appeared? If so, what is the proof? If not, what does the soldiers' continued presence at the tomb suggest about their later testimony?
- h. Other Gospel writers document the presence of TWO angels present, whereas Matthew only mentions one. How do you harmonize this discrepancy?
- i. The guards are scared out of their wits but the women calmly listen to the angel's message. Should it not have been the other way around?
- j. The angel ordered the women to tell the disciples that the risen Christ was going before them to Galilee where they would see Him. Were the disciples expected to rush to Galilee right then, or what? After all, as things turned out Jesus appeared to them that very evening (John 20:19). What do you think the angel expected the disciples to do?
- k. Despite so many predictions of Jesus' resurrection, why did not the disciples remember them until after it occurred? Why must the angel remind them here?
- l. The women departed from the tomb "with fear and great joy." How do you explain this peculiar psychological combination of emotions? Admitting that some women could have experienced one emotion and others another, on what basis can the same person truly experience both at the same time?
- m. If Jesus planned to show Himself alive to the women, why did the angel tell them to communicate to His disciples that seemingly superfluous message that He would appear to them in Galilee? Did not the angel know what Jesus planned, or did Jesus get the arrangements mixed up, or what?
- n. Jesus forbade Mary Magdalene to take hold of Him, yet the other women are permitted to approach Him and take hold of His feet and worship Him. How do you explain this contradictory conduct on Jesus' part? Or is there a difference in the attitude of the women? If so, what is it?
- o. If Jesus planned to show Himself alive to the disciples that very

evening, why did He too tell the women to inform the disciples that He would appear to them in Galilee?

- p. Why do you think Jesus appeared first to the women? Could not Jesus have foreseen that the testimony of women would tend to be discounted in that male-dominated society, even by His own male disciples?
- q. The women ran to His disciples to bring them the glad news of Jesus' resurrection. (a) What would be the effect today, if every disciple were to show the same happy zeal to bring these glad tidings to a world that is perishing? (b) Why do you think we fail to do this?
- r. What does the resurrection of Jesus Christ mean to you?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

When the Sabbath was over at sunset on Saturday, Mary of Magdala and Mary, James' mother, and Salome purchased aromatic oils, so they could go to embalm Jesus' body.

Then, late Saturday night, as it was beginning to get light on Sunday morning, the women, Mary from Magdala and the other Mary, went to see about the tomb very early, while it was still dark.

Suddenly, a violent earthquake occurred, because an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, approached the tomb and rolled the stone aside and sat on it. His appearance had the dazzling brightness of lightning and his clothing was white as snow. The sentries were so terrified by him that they trembled and became rigid with fear.

Carrying the aromatic spices which they had prepared for the embalming, the women arrived at the tomb shortly after sunrise. They were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone from the entrance of the tomb for us?"

But when they looked up, they discovered that the stone—huge as it was—had already been rolled away from the tomb. So Mary of Magdala went running to Simon Peter and Jesus' dearest disciple, John, and informed them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have put Him!"

Meanwhile, the other women went on inside the tomb, but they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they stood there not knowing what to think, suddenly, two men appeared to them in clothes that gleamed like lightning. In their fright the women instinctively bowed down with their faces to the ground. One of the angels appeared

as a young man sitting on their right, dressed in a white robe. This latter angel addressed the women.

"There is no need for alarm," he said, "I know that you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was nailed to the cross. Why search among the dead for Someone who is alive? He is not here, because He came back to life again, just as He said He would! Come see the place where they laid Him! Remember how He told you, while He was still in Galilee, 'The Son of man must be delivered over into the power of wicked men, be nailed to a cross and come back to life on the third day.'"

The women remembered that He had said that.

"Now you must go quickly and tell His disciples and Peter," continued the angel, "He has risen from the dead and that He is going back to Galilee ahead of you. You will see Him there, just as He told you. This is the message I was to give you."

So the women hurried away from the tomb, frightened, yet overjoyed. In fact, they were overcome with trembling and bewilderment. They did not tell anybody a single thing, because they were afraid. They simply ran to give the news to His disciples.

[At this point John reports the arrivals of Peter and John, then of Mary Magdalene to the tomb. The men arrive first and enter the tomb, but apparently met no angels. Mary sees the angels, then Jesus. Cf. Mark 16:9.]

Then, as the women were going away from the tomb to tell the disciples, suddenly Jesus Himself met them and said, "Hello!"

Going up to Him, the women hugged His feet and worshiped Him.

Then Jesus said to them, "You need not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to leave for Galilee. They will see me there."

Returning from the tomb, they told all this to the Eleven and to all the others. Mary Magdalene, for example, told those who had been His companions, as they were sorrowing and weeping, "I have seen the Lord!" She also told them what Jesus had said to her. Now it was Mary of Magdala, Joanna, Mary, James' mother and the other women with them who told this to the Apostles. But when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by Mary of Magdala, this story of theirs seemed to them sheer nonsense. They continued to disbelieve the women.

SUMMARY

On Saturday evening three women purchased embalming spices for use next morning. Then, early Sunday morning before daylight they start for the tomb. Meanwhile an angel comes to open the tomb. His coming shakes the earth and shocks the sentinels. The women arrive at the tomb at daybreak only to find the tomb already open. Mary of Magdala jumps to the conclusion that someone has moved the body. So, without actually examining the question farther, she runs to inform Peter and John. Meanwhile, back at the tomb, two angels inform the other women that Jesus is alive from the dead and that they are to inform Jesus' disciples. On their way to do so, Jesus appears to them and sent a message for His followers to meet Him in Galilee. Meanwhile, Peter and John race to the tomb, but do not see either Jesus or the angels. Mary of Magdala arrives later and sees both. Mary and the other women return to the apostolic group and report Jesus' resurrection, but no one believes them.

NOTES

ON THE THIRD DAY

28:1 Now late on the sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. Although the accounts of the resurrection differ as to details, as sometimes happens in the case of valid testimony, the general picture of the events is substantially consistent. Such differences, rather than undermine the accounts, tend to confirm their authenticity, because exact superficial harmony would be suspicious precisely because contrived. If it could be shown that two witnesses claim to discuss the same event or detail and appear to contradict each other, then a real problem would exist. However, simple differences of detail are but evidence of honest, independent testimony.

A sound juridical approach is to assume the reasonable accuracy and honesty of the witnesses and attempt to see whether their witness can be harmonized into a unified account that is consistent. Otherwise, they get treated as dishonest or mistaken until proven correct, an improbable hypothesis in the light of the ease with which the opposition could have disproven their assertions, had they been honestly mistaken about, or, worse, concocting, anything they testify.

Our approach shall be to find that explanation which permits each witness to be treated as fundamentally honest and which alleviates any supposed divergence between the Gospels. Past attacks on harmonizing approaches assume that the harmonist must prove his theoretic explanation. On the contrary, given our present state of information, it only need be demonstrated that a plausible explanation of the supposed divergency exists to remove the charge of inconsistency or contradiction levelled against the Gospels. After all, were the resurrection the bold invention of shameless charlatans, surely its authors would have taken greater care to eliminate the many problems in the accounts so as to create the kind of strict, even if superficial, agreement that some minds find comfortable. (For an excellent harmonization, see Wilson, *Learning From Jesus*, 516-521; also James Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 155f.; Butler, *Luke*, 576ff.; *John* II, 463ff.)

Late on the sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week (*opsè dè sabbàtôn têi epiphoskòusei eis mian sabbàtôn*). The ASV translation is particularly unfortunate here, because apparently self-contradictory and because Matthew is forced to contradict the other Gospel writers. The problems in this translation turn on two factors:

1. *Opsè* can mean "late."
2. *Epifòskô*, "to dawn," considered as a Hebrew idiom wherein the day begins at sunset, can refer to a time coincident with the closing of the preceding day (Luke 23:54).

If the time in question was *late on the Sabbath day*, Matthew means *sundown*, when Sunday begins, or "dawns," according to the idiom. However, this rendering leaves the impression that Matthew thought the resurrection occurred on Saturday, as opposed to the other witnesses who are certain it occurred on Sunday morning. But if *epifoskòusei* ("dawning") be taken literally, Matthew means around *sunup*, in which case there is no justification for his reference to a time *late on the Sabbath day*, for that day ended at sundown the day before. Matthew certainly would not contradict himself in the same verse. Further, the final translation must recognize that his two expressions are two ways of referring to the same time. Two factors point the way out of the morass:

1. *Opsè* can be translated "after" (Arndt-Gingrich, 606; Blass-Debrunner, §164.4; Rocci, 1383). To render the phrase, "After

the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week" (RSV), better suits the context and harmonizes with the other Gospels.

2. *Epiphoskousei* can be taken in its natural, literal sense, rather than idiomatically.

Matthew treats the period of darkness which came to an end at dawn on Sunday as still belonging to Saturday, but actually after the Sabbath was over. That the moment in question is early Sunday morning is vindicated by the following considerations: (Cf. notes on 27:63f.; esp. on 12:40, my Vol. II, 708ff.).

1. Since the difficult expression can actually be translated and interpreted in harmony with the distinctly clearer testimony of the other Gospels who unequivocally place the resurrection appearances on Sunday morning, why should it not be so rendered?
2. The women who go to the tomb on Sunday morning are *Mary of Magdala and the other Mary*, who was also the mother of James, and Salome. (Cf. Mark 16:1.) Perhaps there were also others, like Joanna. (Cf. Luke 23:55—24:1, 10.) These wonder, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?" (Mark 16:3). Now, if these same women had stopped at the tomb on Saturday evening as they were out buying burial spices (Mark 16:1), they would have encountered the soldiers guarding it. Granted that their timidity might hinder their seeking help from Roman soldiers and that they are probably thinking of assistance from some male disciples like Joseph or Nicodemus or others, yet, *they could not have wondered about any help at all*. Rather, had they seen the soldiers before arriving on Sunday morning, they would have worried about the soldiers' inflexibility that would not permit them to break the seal on the tomb in order to open it, even to embalm the body.
3. Mark has two definite notices of time, whereas Matthew only one. (Cf. 28:1 with Mark 16:1, 2.) Mark narrates facts that occurred on two successive days, on Saturday evening just as the Hebrew Sunday was beginning, then on Sunday morning about sun-up. Mark's distinction should be represented by two separate paragraphs. The assumption that Matt. 28:1 is parallel with Mark 16:1, or worse, derived from it, leads to the conclusion that Matthew thought that the resurrection occurred on *Saturday night*, whereas the other Evangelists place it as quite early on Sunday morning. (Cf. Mark 16:9; Luke 23:56; 24:1.) It also assumes that the women

purchased additional spices around dawn on Sunday morning on the way to the tomb, whereas Mark suggests that they took the spices which they had prepared the night before, i.e. on Saturday night.

4. The purpose of the women's coming is expressed vaguely as being *to see the sepulcher*. But were it limited to that, they could have come on Saturday night. Their intention is more fully indicated by their bringing the embalming spices (Luke 24:1; cf. 23:56; Mark 15:47; 16:1). Therefore, they think that they both *can* enter the tomb with no more serious hindrance than the heavy stone, and that they *should* do so to embalm a corpse. Their pre-dawn departure from their lodging indicates their haste to deal with a quickly decomposing body. So, they obviously know nothing about the seal or the soldiers and they do not expect Jesus to be risen. Luke 23:56 definitely states they rested on the Sabbath. Hence, although they could have recommended the embalming on Saturday night, it would have been an unusual time without adequate motive, since they would have to work on into the night by torch- or candlelight, when on Sunday morning an entire day would be at their disposal.

Matthew simply means that, although the women intended to complete the embalming, they waited until Sunday morning.

As it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. Because some believe that Mark, Luke and John are hopelessly contradictory as to the time element involved, it is altogether appropriate to see that the translation makes considerable difference:

John 20:1: Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene **left for** the tomb early, *while it was still dark*.

Luke 24:1: But on the first day of the week, *at early dawn*, they **went to** the tomb. . . .

Mark 16:2: And very early on the first day of the week they **came to** the tomb *when the sun had risen*.

The Greek verb rendered in **bold face** in every case is *échomai* (= *élthon*), which means "come" or "go," according to context (Rocci, 770; Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 310f.). The rendering to be utilized remains the translator's choice based on appropriateness to the situation. However, some translators ignore the problems

of harmonizing all available testimony and of assuming the witness to be telling the truth until proven false. Consequently, they created contradictions for readers unacquainted with this phenomenon in Greek. The supposed divergency is removed by simply using the other, completely appropriate alternative translation.

28:2 And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. *For* connects the earth tremor directly with the angel's coming, but it is not clear whether it was simply contemporaneous with his coming or caused by it. Because a *great earthquake* is an event which man can neither impede nor ignore, just as at His death, its occurrence at precisely this moment is not merely coincidental and must be judged an appropriate accompaniment—better: announcement?—of Jesus' resurrection. (See notes on 27:51.)

Evidently, the angel *rolled away the stone* before the women reached the tomb, since they found it already removed upon their arrival (Mark 16:4; Luke 24:2; John 20:1). The stone was rolled away, not to let Jesus out, but to let the resurrection's witnesses in! (Cf. Mark 16:5; Luke 24:3; John 20:6ff.) Leaving the sealed tomb was no problem for the Lord of life. (Cf. John 20:19, 26.) In fact, did Jesus arise when the angel came, or had He already left the tomb by simply walking away from it as simply as He entered the closed Upper Room? Precisely when Jesus emerged from the tomb is not stated. Rather, Matthew's silence implies that He had already risen. Matthew does not describe the actual resurrection of Jesus nor affirm that anyone witnessed it. So, those who became "witnesses to the resurrection" are actually witnesses of the accomplished fact, rather than of the event itself. (Cf. Acts 1:22.)

When *the angel . . . rolled away the stone*, he heaved the huge disk down onto the ground before he *sat upon it*. By this superb gesture the angel seems to express the heavenly authority with which the tomb's seals were broken and the great stone door opened. The grip of death is broken by heavenly power. And neither ancient nor modern scepticism have been able to reclose the open sepulcher of our Lord.

The angel is described by Mark and Luke as "two (young) men," because heavenly messengers are often described by their appearance in human form. (Cf. Gen. 18:2, 16, 22; 19:1, 5; Judg. 5:23; 13:6; Acts 1:10.)

Mark and Luke report the presence of two angels (Luke 24:4). It is difficult to decide whether Matthew is simply summarizing by referring to the most prominent speaker of the two, or whether another appeared later. Omitting to mention the other angel does not create a contradiction, since Matthew does not affirm there was *only one* angel. His evident purpose is to report the message the women were to announce. Two possible harmonizations exist:

1. Perhaps the women encounter the first angel outside the tomb where he had frightened the soldiers and rolled away the stone door. He then invites the women into the tomb to verify his word. They enter, but do not find the body. Instead, they encounter another angel seated on the right side of the ledge. Then, perhaps he arose and the women find themselves standing between two heavenly beings and are frightened (Mark 16:5; Luke 24:3ff.). Later, when Mary Magdalene arrives, she finds the two angels both inside the tomb (John 20:12).
2. Matthew does not affirm that the angel met the women outside, whereas Mark and Luke definitely affirm that they talked with an angel inside. Accordingly, the women ignored the fallen soldiers and rushed into the tomb and encountered both angels inside. Only one of them speaks (according to Matthew and Mark), but because the other confirms the testimony of the first, he may be said to have spoken (Luke 24:5). On this view, the angels arrived, one rolled away the stone and sat on it, thus frightening the guards. Then they entered the tomb. The women, upon arrival, found the two angels together inside.

The fact that the women encounter a varying number of angels, in different locations, standing and sitting, etc., is not at all irreconcilable with the sudden appearance of angels elsewhere in Scripture. The apparent contradiction between the Gospels is caused by each writer's reference to a different phase of the scene or to a different principle speaker. No writer claims to tell all he knows about the picture. Cross-questioning of the witnesses and writers is now no longer possible, but the hypothesis of a plausible harmony exonerates them from embarrassment of proven error.

28:3 His appearance was as lightning, and his raiment white as snow. The blinding flash of light from heaven took definite, human form. (Cf. Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4.) Unless this phrase contains Hebrew parallelism, because a distinction is made between *his appearance*

and *his raiment*, the former is thought to refer to his face. His total appearance resembles the angels of the Old Testament (Dan. 10:6) and the glorified Christ (17:2 = Mark 9:2f. = Luke 9:29; cf. Rev. 1:14ff.). The intense radiance reflected the glory of God whom he represented. (Cf. Exod. 34:29f.) *His raiment white as snow* resembles that of heaven's inhabitants (Rev. 4:4), not only the angels (Dan. 10:5f.; Luke 2:9; Acts 1:10; Rev. 10:1; 18:1) but also the saints (Rev. 3:4f.; 6:11; 7:13f.; 19:8) and God (Ezek. 1:26f.; Dan. 7:9).

28:4 and for fear of him the watchers did quake, and became as dead men. Even if these guards were not on the crucifixion detail, barracks rumors could give them reason to be apprehensive about this night duty. Just when it was almost over, there was a sudden, terrific shaft of light from heaven and the ground under their feet waved violently. The sentinels found themselves face to face with the true guard of honor at the tomb of the risen Christ! The shock left them paralyzed with *fear of him*. Any opposing reaction on their part was effectively preempted by a force with which they were psychologically unprepared to cope. Although they *became as dead men*, it is not clear whether they were completely unconscious. Perhaps they were simply immobile, as if dead. This supposition argues that the guard did not flee immediately upon the arrival of the angel, but at some undesignated time later, after the women arrived. (See on 28:11.)

At this point the women arrive at the garden tomb. However, because of the great size of the stone used to close the tomb, they could see at a distance that the tomb door was already ajar. Without investigating further or pausing to reflect that perhaps the tomb's owner had returned to help complete the embalming, Mary Magdalene wrongly inferred that the tomb had been rifled, the body gone. On the basis of this mistaken deduction she left the women at the garden and rushed to inform Peter and John (John 20:1ff.). This detail explains how Jesus could appear first to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9; John 20:11ff.), although she left for the tomb earlier with the other women (28:1). From Luke we learn that, besides Mary the mother of James and Joseph, there were others, among whom Joanna (Luke 24:10). If we may infer that the same women who bought the spices on Saturday night, also brought them to the tomb Sunday morning, then Salome came too (Mark 16:1f.). Disappointed that Jesus had failed, they still loved Him, and would now serve Him for the last time, though He were dead. (For their identification, see notes on 26:56

and the Special Study: "The Brethren of the Lord," my Vol. III, 185ff.)

Because the guards were terrorized into immobility, the women who would have been impeded from entering the tomb before, can now procede.

28:5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, who hath been crucified. Although Matthew named only *Mary Magdalene and the other Mary*, the former is now gone to inform Peter and John. So, by saying *women*, our author incidentally confirms what the other Gospels affirm, i.e. the presence of the others.

The angel intended is the principle speaker. He *answered*, or addressed, their unasked questions and astonishment. *Fear not ye*: addressed to the women, the *ye* (*humefs*) is emphatic. Although fright in the presence of the supernatural is a normal reaction, the women are not to be terrified like the guards. The women are also not to *fear* that something terrible has happened to Jesus' body: His authoritative assurances seek to calm them. *For I know that you seek*: this justifies his calming tone and language. He treats them as friends of his own Lord. That the angel described Jesus as *Him who hath been crucified* sounds oddly out of tune with the resurrection victory. But this old, old story is already a theme sung in glory (Rev. 1:5ff.; 5:9, 12; 7:9; 12:10f.). Further, he addresses women who mistakenly expected to find the Crucified One's dead body in this sepulcher.

28:6 He is not here; for he is risen, even as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

1. The IRREFUTABLE FACT: "*He is not here . . . come, see the place where the Lord lay.*" The heavenly message was backed by earthly proof.

a. This is tangible, circumstantial evidence of the reality. They were to examine the calm order of the linen wrappings and folded face-cloth and conclude that, were His corpse stolen, these items would have been missing. Instead, He Himself had removed the burial clothes, neatly set everything in order and left the tomb, unquestionably alive.

b. *The place where the Lord lay*: what humiliation for the Lord of glory! What infinite grace and love permitted Him to be brought so low! But because He entered into our death, He disarmed our fear of the tomb (Heb. 2:15).

2. The EXPLANATION: *for He is risen*. Were anyone but an angel

speaking, this would be simply a possible, logical implication of the empty tomb. But this is not merely an inference, but God's revelation of a fact. Without the intervention of human beings or angels, He left His grave behind Him forever (Mark 9:31; Luke 18:33; John 10:17f.). It is also true to translate, *He was raised (egérthē)*, since His victory is ascribed also to the Father (16:21; 17:23; Acts 2:24, 32; Rom. 8:11).

Those who attempt to explain the resurrection as a pure visionary apparition that projected messages from the other world to the brain of the early disciples, must face the eloquent fact of the empty tomb. Further, the actual messages that came were not simply to comfort the apostles that everything was going to be all right or simply that Jesus' soul was then living with God and sends His love. Rather, the angels and Jesus Himself transmitted the same central message that His physical body had left the grave alive.

3. The PROPHETIC WORD: *as He said*. (Cf. 16:21ff.; 17:23; 20:19; Luke 9:43-45). Despite His many predictions, the disciples' emotional rejection of His coming death blinded their minds to the truth. What they did not accept, they did not expect. But this deserved but gentle rebuke, however, comforts them, because their unbelief did not keep His often repeated supernatural promise from coming to pass: He faithfully kept His word! (Cf. Luke 24:6.) His resurrection put God's stamp of approval on everything He said or did, but it especially established Him as a true Prophet of God. (Cf. Deut. 18:15-22.)

28:7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples, He is risen from the dead; and lo, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. This story is so well-founded that they themselves may join in telling it too. An evil angel had communicated the message which brought sin and death into the world. Woman had been the first to believe and tell man and pass it on to the human race. Now the Lord's angel commissions woman to be the first to announce death's defeat to man. Let no man or woman consider himself too lowly to be a humble link in God's chain to proclaim the Gospel to others.

But these are not "just incompetent, excited women liable to believe anything!" Their training in righteousness as disciples of Jesus should indicate much about their reliability and basic honesty. These women

proved themselves competent to testify to Jesus' resurrection by closely observing everything that involved His suffering. Their being devoted friends or aunts of Jesus only apparently disqualifies them by compromising their objectivity, for no scientific commission in the world could furnish a more accurate observation of the unique fact to which they testify. For the disciples, the character and stability of these women was already proven. For the enemies, the facts they report were already proven. (See on 28:11-15.) For the readers of the Gospels, the corroboration of their testimony with the many other appearances of Jesus consolidates their case.

The testimony of these women would be discounted by the male disciples, but not on the ground that these women were objectively incompetent. Certainly, Jewish bias against the testimony of a woman entered into the question. However, the men's refusal to believe the women arose, not from investigation of the women's evidence and competence, but from an emotional bias against the objective probability of the resurrection of Jesus. Whatever the origin of their opinion, it was nonetheless a prejudice. Similarly, men today reject the resurrection because of intellectual and moral prejudice against the possibility of the supernatural. Although the Lord Himself would grant "many convincing proofs that He was alive" (Acts 1:3), He rightly criticized the Apostles for rejecting the women's unassailable personal testimony (Mark 16:14). Jesus made the principle of credible witness the basis of His Gospel and a standing rule for all time (John 20:24-31, esp. v. 29; cf. Rom. 10:13-17; II Peter 1:12-18).

Lo, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him. This victory would yet be celebrated together with Jesus alive on earth at the glorious reunion in Galilee precisely on schedule, just as He predicted (26:32)! *He goeth before you* (*proðgei*, present tense) does not mean that He is at this moment traveling to Galilee, but is used more generally to confirm His project: He is actually going there ahead of you, just as He promised. They understood this promise, *there shall ye see him*, as general, referring broadly to all the disciples. (Cf. Luke 24:9: "all the rest.") It does not intend to preclude the appearance of Jesus to the women just a few moments later (28:9). Since nothing is said of His intention to appear to the despondent, broken-hearted disciples that very day, they must simply act on a faith already severely tried. Even so, this precious hope aims to stir a joyous expectation in them.

Jesus' strategy in the choice of *Galilee* may have various motives:

1. If they shared the Jewish belief that the ghost of the departed hovered about the tomb for several days after death, in Galilee there would be no suspicion that the post-resurrection phenomena they observed were this sort of spectral apparition. (Cf. Edersheim, *Life*, II, 631.) His appearances in Galilee, far from the scenes of horror surrounding His death and burial, would, therefore, tend to undergird the disciples' certainty of His resurrection.
2. After expecting the disciples to believe the testimony of those who had seen Him alive, He gave them their second lesson in acting by faith. For them to return to *Galilee* to see Him required believing the testimony sufficiently to make the trip without Him, just trusting Him to keep the well-attested appointment. In an atmosphere of faith it is easy to believe. But the physical act of walking to Galilee took them away from a highly charged ambient where people could expect apparitions to occur. It removed the powerful, psychological atmosphere that permits or induces the hallucination. His appearance in broad daylight at a great distance from places associated with His former appearances would increase their certainty that "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared."
3. The location facilitated His control over the choice of witnesses of His resurrection (Acts 10:40f.). First the Passover pilgrims are allowed to go home to their various lands and nations. Then, in the calm of an obscure mountain in Galilee, He could accomplish so much more by revealing Himself to a severely restricted number of disciples.
4. *Galilee* is home. (See note on 26:32.) In this brilliant touch of psychological appropriateness Jesus is revealed His genius and condescension to their weaknesses and need. His present task was to reconstitute the apostolic group, now fragmented because of His death (26:31f.). Judas was dead, Thomas alone in his dark world, the others with no unifying sense of mission left. Although He would reiterate the commission in Jerusalem both before and after the Galilean appearance (Luke 24:44; John 20:21f.), and although they would all return eventually to Jerusalem to witness His ascension and await the Pentecostal arrival of the Holy Spirit, His principle purpose for the time being for sending them to *Galilee* was to take them back home. He knew that in *Galilee*, they could form a clearer concept of their mission. While standing in and looking at the old, familiar scenes of Galilee, the very area where they had already labored successfully in His Name and by His

power—even in His absence—, they could more easily conceive of the feasibility of world evangelism. In *Galilee* a world mission did not appear so impossible, because they had labored there by His grace. So, even as He had commissioned them originally on a Galilean *mountain* and taught them (Luke 6:12ff.; cf. Matt. 5:1), so now He would take them back to their origins as a group, commission them, placing upon their shoulders even greater responsibilities and promise them even greater power (28:16-20; Mark 16:16ff.). In *Galilee*, they had tried their wings; in *Galilee*, they received their new, permanent commission to world evangelism. In this vividly suggestive, physical environment Jesus taught them to see that yesterday the target was *Galilee*, today it is the world!

There shall ye see him: Even the Jewish authorities knew that belief in the resurrection was not definitively determined by the empty tomb, because a desperate hypothesis of theft could still be concocted to explain that perplexing discovery. The irrepressible excitement of the Gospel was not the product of reports from reliable sources that His body had not been found in the tomb and that mysterious messengers had announced the resurrection as a fact. What convinced these men and women that He had risen was His concrete encounters with them as the Living One. Their close encounters with Him had a place and a date concerning which many, living witnesses could testify when and how these incidents took place. (Cf. I Cor. 15:5-8.)

Lo, I have told you. This solemn observation means that the angel's mission is completed so far as the women were concerned. Now, they must rise to obedience to their mission. Rather than take away man's initiative or responsibility, angelic messages increase it. To doubt the authenticity of his message would not be merely foolish but sinful. (Cf. Luke 1:19; Heb. 2:2.)

28:8 And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring his disciples word. In obedience to the divine message, "they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (Mark 16:8; contrast Matt. 9:31; Mark 1:45). Genuinely shaken by the angelic encounter, they fled from the scene of an event emotionally overpowering for them. Afraid to disobey the messenger of God, they paused to talk to no one until they could relay the good news to the disciples. Otherwise, they might have shouted the glorious news to everyone they met, despite Jesus' desire that this news not be proclaimed officially until Pentecost under the leadership of the

Holy Spirit (Luke 24:47-49). *With fear and great joy* is the paradoxical but psychologically real mixture of emotions felt by people who hear something too good to be true. "Can it be completely believed? And yet, if God's angel has told us, it must be true!" Although these women have stood in the majestic presence of the supernatural, they have heard the supremely joyous news that Jesus is no longer dead but gloriously alive and victorious! (Cf. Ps. 2:11.)

The women *ran to bring his disciples word*, their flying feet expressing their obedient love. Eagerly, they completed their responsibility, although their enthusiastic message was disbelieved (Mark 16:13; Luke 24:10f., 24f.).

Contrary to the view of those who place all resurrection appearances in Galilee, the women immediately found the disciples present in Jerusalem. There is no indication that they had fled home to Galilee or that the women had to run clear to Galilee to announce Jesus' resurrection. Rather, their message is that Jesus would go before them into Galilee, clearly implying that they to whom the message is sent are not in Galilee, i.e., yet in Judea. Many resurrection appearances to the disciples in the Jerusalem area are recorded as occurring on the same day as the resurrection itself. Without some previous arrangement or without adequately convincing motivation, the scattering of despondent apostles excludes their all gathering by chance on a mountain in Galilee.

The irrefutable fact demonstrated

28:9 And behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. Matthew does not state nor imply that Jesus appeared to them the instant they left the tomb, but merely at some unstated time after they had left it. Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, then, shortly thereafter, to these women (Mark 16:9; John 20:11ff.). They were on their way to obey the divine message when *Jesus met them*. The Second Coming shall take place precisely like this appearance: in the midst of duty we shall be surprised by His coming. (Cf. 24:36—25:13.) Although in comparison to the Hebrew greeting, "Peace be to you" (John 20:21, 26), the Greek communicates the happy nuance, "Rejoice," His quite ordinary greeting, *All hail (chairete)*, simply means, "Hello, everyone" or "Greetings, everybody." (Cf. 26:49; Acts 15:23; 23:26; II Cor. 13:11 "Good-by"; James 1:1; II John 10f.)

That Jesus should appear first to the women disciples, rather than to the men, is peculiarly fitting, because of their love. The disciples did not approach the cross nor take care of Jesus' body either before or after the entombment. Their fear, despondency, shock, left them immobile, while these loving women overcame their hurt and did what had to be done each time. The men could also have been given this reward of love, but only the women put themselves in a position to receive it. There is mercy with the Lord: these women were wrong not to believe His promise, and foolish to bring spices to embalm Him, but He forgave their blunder, and appeared to them anyway. All that they had admired in Him before now stands before them alive. Deeper awe and adoration are appropriately due Him, because He has qualified Himself as worthy of worship. (Cf. John 5:23.) They recognize that resurrection has altered the former relationship: they are beings unworthy of His presence. (Cf. Judg. 6:22f.; 13:21f.; Luke 5:8.) He is their exalted Lord and offer Him their hearts' adoration.

Perhaps they also desired to touch Him to assure themselves that He is the same Jesus they had known, loved and followed so long, once dead, but now very physically alive. The Good News was not that His sepulcher was found empty by unimpeachable witnesses. This circumstantial evidence supports the resurrection story, but is not the central truth. It was the personal knowledge of numerous, competent witnesses that Jesus had really died and was buried, but was later verified to be alive from the dead by many personal contacts with Him. These direct, tangible proofs demolish the charges that the early disciples were overly credulous, victims of auto-suggestion, mistaken identity and tense nerves. Here die the theories of mystical, psychic apparitions or fleeting glimpses of the risen Christ. These disciples were then present and debated these questions themselves and answered them. What they saw and personally touched led them to an absolutely unshakable conviction of His triumph over death. Consequently, one cannot resist their evidences today without himself becoming irrational. (Cf. Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-29; Acts 2:32f.; 4:20; 5:32; I John 1:1-3.)

Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene before He met the other women (Mark 16:9; Matt. 28:9). Some feel that, because she was sent on ahead of these women to bring the disciples the glad word (John 20:17ff.), by Jesus' delaying them here they were permitted to hug His feet and she not. This unnecessarily imputes partiality to Jesus.

Although He forbade Mary Magdalene to cling to Him, Jesus permitted these women to *take hold of his feet*. (John: *mé mou hàptou*; Matthew: *ekràtêsan autoû tous pòdas*) It would appear that the difference does not lie so much in the Greek words, as in the attitude of the women themselves. Mary gripped Jesus with a determination driven by desperation not to lose Him again. (Cf. Mark 5:18ff.; Luke 8:38ff.) But, by so doing, she also hindered Him from doing and being what, in His new state of being, must now become normal for Him. "She cannot keep Him on earth any more—she must prepare herself for His return to Heaven" (Butler, *Luke*, 581). In fact, all the disciples must dismiss from their minds the hope that everything would return to the unbroken fellowship of the past months. His mission was not yet complete without His return to Heaven. The loving embrace of His feet by the women is essentially the same act as that of Mary, but it is differently motivated, for she lovingly wanted to keep Him forever. They, however, *worshipped him*, letting Him be God, autonomous of their wishes, desires or will for Him. This same distinction still separates appropriateness from selfishness in discipleship today.

They came . . . and worshipped him. (Cf. 28:17). The disciples' spontaneous adoration of the risen Lord on that first day of the week became the joyfully accepted reason for regular celebration of Jesus' resurrection by the early Church. (Cf. Ignatius: *Magnesians* 9; Barnabas 15:8f.; Justin Martyr, *Apology*, 1,67:1-3,7; *Dialogue*, 41:4; Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2.) What would happen to the modern Church, if the first day of every week should once again produce the resurrection impact on us that it did on those early disciples?

28:10 Then saith Jesus unto them, Fear not: go tell my brethren that they depart into Galilee, and there shall they see me. Because of Jesus' victory over man's ancient, final enemy, death, this brief reassurance would mean so much more. His dispirited disciples can now live under constant tension of threats and intimidation, possibly ending up crucified or hideously butchered (10:26-33). But they shall overcome, not by wishful thinking or philosophical optimism, but with unshakable confidence in His resurrection power that gave them inexpressible joy full of glory.

With all His old gentleness, He showed Himself to be a Brother for the defeated and discouraged: *Go tell my brethren*. Who are these *brethren*?

1. Jesus' own kin, His half brothers, James, Joseph, Simon and Judas (13:55)? He did not consider their being less open to His message and ministry earlier (John 7:5) a hindrance to His appearing to James (I Cor. 15:7). He undoubtedly knew that appearance to them would determine their commitments to His program. James would become the great leader in the Jerusalem Church (Acts 15:13; Gal. 1:19) and Judas would pen the New Testament epistle bearing his name (Jude).
2. Jesus used this heart-warming term to identify Himself to His disciples as their Brother (John 20:17; Matt. 12:49; Acts 1:15; Rom. 8:16f., 29; Heb. 2:11-18). This view does not exclude the former, because the result of a message to His physical brothers would confirm their discipleship. He has just proven Himself Son of God, gloriously victorious over death, and yet He graciously elevated these unworthy earthlings to be His *brethren*! Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 992f.) notes that Jesus did NOT say:

"those habitual quarrelers . . . who promised to remain loyal to me no matter what would happen, but who when the crisis arrived left me and fled; . . . who, with one exception, were not even present at Calvary when I was laying down my life for them." None of that. Instead, "my brothers," those whom I acknowledge as members of my family, those who share the inheritance with me, those whom I love.

This warm human tenderness, so characteristic of Jesus, evaporated the women's nervousness and made them confident that He really is the same kind Master they had always known and loved. (Cf. John 15:14f.)

That they depart into Galilee, and there shall they see me. Did Jesus intend that the disciples depart immediately? Apparently not, because John records two appearances in the Jerusalem area, one of which occurred a week later than this command (John 20:19ff., 26ff.). Nothing is said here about His not intending to see anyone in Jerusalem. He simply arranged to meet them in Galilee and He did so. Even so, why does Jesus tell the women to remind the disciples to depart for Galilee, when He could do it Himself at these two appearances?

1. In line with His original, heartening prophecy (26:32), Jesus Himself reminds them that He has kept His word about his resurrection. This bracing reminder begins drawing them out of their despondency even before He appears to them the first time there in Jerusalem.

2. Jesus is better than His word. Even if they were to expect to see Him in Galilee on the basis of the prophecy and its repetition here, He would graciously grant them a number of appearances even before that long-awaited happy reunion in Galilee.
3. The message is intended not merely for the Eleven or a few women, but for all His disciples or brethren. Even if He showed Himself alive to a few limited groups or individuals in Jerusalem, these appearances laid vital groundwork for appearances to His larger congregation in Galilee.
4. Once the feast was over, the greatest issue for these Galilean disciples might well have been the debate whether to return to Galilee at all. For them the question may have been their loss of face at home. For it was in Galilee, among their own kindred and acquaintances among whom they had evangelized widely in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, that they could imagine themselves most disgraced by the scandal of the cross. But Jesus must order them to return to that very province to face those very people, no longer ashamed, but aflame with a new passion that finds its only adequate explanation in the power of the risen Lord.
5. Jesus must insist on their going to Galilee, since it would be emotionally difficult for them to wrench themselves away from the precious scenes where their Lord had appeared to them. The same impulse to be near Him that drove the women to embrace the risen Lord would inspire them all to want to remain in the Jerusalem area.

Why give these first supernatural revelations and appearances to the women and not the eleven, even Peter and John? These women braved danger to be near Jesus' cross, follow His body to the tomb, return faithfully to anoint it with spices. Was this a form of special appreciation for their loyalty and love? (See on 28:9.)

On the other hand, God has always been using this method. In the face of masculine prejudice against the testimony of "a few excited women who tell tales of a reputed resurrection," God chose to utilize the weak things of the world to confound the mighty (I Cor. 1:27ff.). Whoever thought that a Lamb could overcome the great beasts of the world led by a dragon? Or that a small stone, hewn without human hands, could smash the colossal statue and grow into a mighty mountain that fills the whole earth (Dan. 2)? Or that in place of great, terrible beasts world dominion could be given to one like a mere son of man (Dan. 7)? Or that the first harbingers of the resurrection story could be *female*?! Not hardly what serious scholars, critical analysts

or scientific observers would have expected, but it is very much in harmony with the style of God. (See fuller notes on 21:16.)

For further study of the evidences of Jesus' resurrection, see Seth Wilson, *Learning From Jesus*, 508ff.; Paul Butler, *Luke*, 592ff.; *John*, II, 463.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Define the time of day involved in the expression, "Now after the sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week."
2. Show how Matthew's account of the arrival of the women at the tomb harmonizes with that of the other Gospels.
3. List all the women who went to the tomb, as named in all the Gospels.
4. Describe the arrival of the angel, what he did and what occurred at the time of his coming.
5. What was the reaction of the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb?
6. Quote the message of the angel to the women.
7. The angel affirmed, "He has risen." When did Jesus rise?
8. On what earlier occasions had Jesus predicted His resurrection, to which the angel could now point in confirmation?
9. Cite the message the women were to carry to the disciples.
10. Which of the women was not at the tomb when the angel spoke to the others?
11. What did the angel invite the women to do to satisfy themselves that Jesus had indeed arisen? What special value would this invitation have for them?
12. What was the women's reaction to their experience with the angel at the open, empty tomb?
13. On what mission did the angel send the women?
14. What amazing event briefly interrupted the women's carrying out their mission?
15. What was their reaction to this interruption?
16. What were they to do after this interruption?
17. Defend or deny: "The brethren of Jesus are His disciples."
18. List the prophecy(ies) that were fulfilled when Jesus arose. Do not limit your list of spokesmen for God to the Old Testament prophets.

SECTION 77

JESUS' GUARDS TESTIFY TO HIS RESURRECTION

TEXT: 28:11-15

11 Now while they were going, behold, some of the guards came into the city, and told unto the chief priests all the things that were come to pass. 12 And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave much money unto the soldiers, 13 saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. 14 And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and rid you of care. 15 So they took the money, and did as they were taught; and this saying was spread abroad among the Jews, *and continueth* until this day.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Is there any evidence in the text that the soldiers fled from the tomb in terror, once they overcame their initial fright? In what sense is it true that "some of the watch went into the city and reported to the chief priests"?
- b. Why did the soldiers report to the chief priests and not directly to Pilate? Are these not Roman soldiers?
- c. What do you think the soldiers actually reported? If you had to write the script for their report to the authorities, how would you word it?
- d. Why would the chief priests need to consult with other authorities?
- e. If the authorities were certain Jesus could not rise from the dead, why did they bribe the soldiers to tell a fabricated story? Why not present the evidence to prove Jesus was still dead, without all this difficulty?
- f. Do you think the authorities, upon hearing the soldiers' report, recognized that they were defeated? What does their reaction reveal about their character?
- g. Why do you suppose the soldiers had to be bribed? Were they black-mailing the Jewish authorities?
- h. Why would the governor be concerned that some of his men had slept on guard duty?
- i. Is it not blatantly inconsistent to affirm a fact purportedly observed while asleep? If so, in what way(s) would the soldiers spread the rumor that the disciples stole the body while they slept?

- j. The disciples disbelieved the eyewitnesses who testified that Jesus had risen. How does this disbelief prove that they could not have perpetrated a resurrection hoax?

PARAPHRASE

The women had started on their way, when some of the guards went into the city to report to the religious authorities everything that had happened. After these latter held a meeting with the elders, and discussed the matter, they gave a substantial bribe to the soldiers with these instructions: "Tell people, 'His disciples came during the night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' Should the governor hear about his, we will convince him and you will have nothing to worry about."

So the soldiers accepted the money and carried out their instructions. Furthermore, this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to the present day.

SUMMARY

After the departure of the women and perhaps also of the angels, the guards find their courage and report to the Jewish authorities for instructions. The hierarchy and civil officials prefer to hush up this damaging news by bribery and dishonesty. Jesus' disciples are to be blamed for stealing the corpse, while the guard slept. Further, the authorities promised to persuade the governor too, should the guards run into difficulties because of their story. At the writing of Matthew's Gospel this report was still circulating throughout Judaism.

NOTES

Truth Suppressed by Wickedness

28:11 Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city, and told unto the chief priests all the things that were come to pass. It would appear that, contemporaneous with the women's second departure on their mission, part of the guard arrived in the city. Although the exact timing of the women's arrival and departure is not indicated with relation to that of the men's, there is no need to believe that the women did not also

see the stunned soldiers still at the tomb. Matthew's silence about the presence of the guard while the angel talked with the women is no proof the soldiers were not there. In this case, the soldiers may have heard the angelic message to the women and this would become part of their deeply disconcerting report to the Jewish officials. The stupefied soldiers possibly got hold of themselves when the angel and the women disappeared. So, *while they were going*, the guards perhaps hastily evaluated their own alternatives.

1. All could remain at the tomb until relieved from duty by further orders. But, if the tomb is empty, there is no further purpose to guard it.
2. All the men could abandon their post. In a shameful display of unmilitary conduct some could scatter in fear, while only *some of the guard* had the courage to report to the authorities.
3. While some men remained on duty until relieved, *some of the guard* could leave the tomb to report and update the status of their mission.

Apparently, they chose the third option, because, if they all abandoned the tomb, they would *all have gone into the city*, since their barracks lay inside the city at the Castle Antonia, and not *some of them (tines)*, as Matthew affirms. So, while the women perhaps took one route to find the lodgings of Peter, John and the other disciples, the soldiers took the most direct route to the house of Caiaphas.

That Roman guards reported to Jewish *chief priests* is not surprising, because they were granted by Pilate to the Jewish authorities for temporary service (26:65f.). Further, the very character of their report required that these supernatural events be reported to those most qualified to interpret them and give counsel. To have reported them to the Roman officers would have been to invite unmitigated humiliation, but to go to the Jews meant receiving information and counsel in the explosive situation. Further, had they rashly broadcast the news that Jesus was risen, this testimony could have meant their death too, since to testify to that fact which they were supposed to prevent, would expose them to the unjustified wrath of those most determined to keep it from happening. So, they desperately needed to get advice from the Jews.

What would these unwilling witnesses have reported? Their humiliating shock in the presence of one superterrestrial being? Were they fully conscious, even if immobile, to stare helplessly while the angel

rolled away the stone and sat on it? Were they in a position to see inside the tomb, hence to testify to the fact that it was empty, even though no one had disturbed it or them before that first terrible fright? Did they hear the angel's confident announcement to the women: "He is not here! He is risen as He said! Come see the place where He lay!"? Was this message relayed to the Jews? The fact remained that the seal was broken, the stone rolled away, the tomb was empty, its temporary Tenant gone.

The Pious Pay-Off

28:12 And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave much money unto the soldiers. The emergency assembly thus convoked brought together the ruling body of Israel, present in its constituent members. It matters little whether it was called as an official session of the Sanhedrin or not, for these official advisors are not acting as private citizens, but as Israel's spiritual heads. There is no backing out now. They were all too deeply implicated in this supremely crucial question, and so must decide their future course together. The choice which lay before them was either to admit the obvious or to maintain their dignity only by the most preposterous lie.

Here is invincible blindness: they received the unimpeachable testimony of soldiers who honestly reported undeniable, supernatural events. Punishing the guard was never even discussed: their story was irresistibly convincing. How could they escape the undeniable conclusion that, if what the soldiers testify is true, the Sanhedrin and priesthood of Israel have been soundly defeated? They had done everything humanly possible to insure the absolute certainty of the Nazarene's death. Now they could not claim that He had merely fainted or that, after recovering in the tomb, He managed to escape alone. Their own disbelief excluded the hypothesis of a break-out from within the tomb. The testimony of armed guards among the best disciplined in the world excluded a break-in from without. By all their precautions, they had defeated themselves. They all knew that Jesus had threatened to rise from the dead on the third day (27:63ff.). Incredibly, the authorities persist in denying the possibility that Jesus' highest claims were true.

The authorities were immobilized into inaction, because they knew that producing a fraudulent corpse would be disastrous. The usually

shrewd Caiaphas and his crew could not pass off a mauled, decaying body of just anyone recently dead in place of the executed Nazarene. Such a contrived rebuttal must backfire, because not all of the soldiers had left the tomb over which the Jews themselves had set them. They could easily identify its location and could publicly swear that this tomb previously occupied by only one body was now empty. There could not be the confusion of disciples who might have gone to the wrong tomb and lied about a resurrection, since the enemies knew the correct one and guarded it. The mental paralysis and failure of Caiaphas and his holy brethren demands explanation: they could find no reasonable solution to their dilemma, because they knew that something had really happened at that tomb that spelled disaster for them. Aside from understandable fear that someone would talk, they were forced to concede that what they feared was true.

They gave much money unto the soldiers. These pious men thoroughly grasped the magic influence of money to shut mouths. But the pay-off must be generous, if the Romans must testify to a lie which could cost them their lives. That men as notoriously covetous as Annas would spare no cost to gain their point gauges how determined they were that the soldiers' testimony be heard by no other ear. The Man who had cost them initially only thirty pieces of silver is beginning to cost them much, much more.

Where could Christians have learned about this secret corruption of the guards? Everyone learned what the guards were to say, but who could have leaked the news of the corruption itself? From inside the Sanhedrin from Nicodemus or perhaps Josephus of Arimathea? From some of the priests converted later (Acts 6:7)?

The Official Account

28:13 saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. The authorities must openly admit that the absence of the body is a fact requiring public explanation. A quick examination of the tomb could verify this. But the empty tomb alone does not prove that Jesus emerged from it alive. It is merely circumstantial evidence of a fact, if it can be proved to be a fact on some other basis, as by His presenting Himself alive to competent witnesses. His foes recognized that an empty tomb has another possible interpretation: the body was hauled out dead. So, a face-saving statement could yet be worded so as to counter the damaging report

of a resurrection. The Romans must never again tell the story they had just reported. The only viable solution open to those hardened men living with the concrete realities was to accuse the disciples unjustly of a theft that everyone on the inside knew could not have taken place.

However, the resulting, well-financed lie is blatantly self-contradictory. It reveals more than it conceals:

1. The soldiers would be testifying to a fact that required their own death, "*we slept on guard duty.*" But they were obviously not going to suffer punishment for it, or they would not admit it.
2. The soldiers must swear to a fact supposedly observed while the observers themselves were asleep: they positively identify the transgressors of the tomb as none other than *His disciples*. If they recognized them, why did they not stop them? If they slept, how could they recognize them?
3. The disciples showed no readiness to rescue Jesus from death. They had not expected His death, much less now His resurrection (John 20:9; Luke 24:6, 25f.). Every available indication shows that the disciples knew nothing of the seal or the guards at the tomb and learned of these precautions only after the resurrection. Like Jesus, their Teacher, these men were too honest even to think in terms of molesting the tomb or perpetrating a hoax. Then, when they were notified that the resurrection had actually occurred, they continued to demonstrate their inability to invent the resurrection story, by stubbornly disbelieving the witness (Mark 16:11; Luke 24:11). So far from being visionaries ready to believe any convenient story, their dissatisfaction with numerous, competent witnesses proved them far too skeptical to be psychologically capable of that of which they are accused. Although the Jews could not know this, the modern critics can, if they will.
4. The soldiers could be believed, if they told of their being overpowered by a force superior to their own. But who would believe that they were overwhelmed by an inferior number of unarmed, discouraged men?
5. But even had they dared, the logistics of moving the body from the tomb without detection by even one of the many supposedly sleeping guards is also highly improbable. The night was illuminated by a full Paschal moon and moving a heavy stone door away from the tomb in absolute silence on a still night is virtually impossible. Further, they risked detection by anyone among the thousands of Passover pilgrims encamped all around Jerusalem.

6. Everything about the tomb's interior bespoke calm and order: had men stolen the body, they would not have calmly removed the burial garments and folded them (John 20:5-7). The success of such an operation depended upon speed and stealth. Anything that compromises either must be rigorously eliminated, and yet there lay those perfumed wrappings and the face-cloth, evidence inconsistent with the theory of a hurried theft.

The Insurance Coverage

28:14 **And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and rid you of care.** The eventuality of a military inquest defines these soldiers as Romans, since Jewish guards could have no fear of a military punishment from the Roman *governor*. Sleeping on guard duty was punishable by death, but *everyone knew that these men had not slept*. Their only fault is that they witnessed a politically embarrassing fact. So, should a judicial investigation be made into the soldiers' story, the Jews promised their influence: *We will persuade him*, a promise that communicated more than would be diplomatic to reveal: the only penalty to pay would be another handsome bribe or some dark political threat for Pilate. Corruption through bribery was the standard operating procedure to achieve political power in Palestine (*Ant.*, XVIII,6,5; XX,6,1; 8,9; 9,2; Acts 24:26). However, as Bruce (*Exp. Gr. T.*, I,338) suggests: "Of course they might take the money and go away laughing at the donors, meaning to tell their general the truth. Could the priests expect anything else? If not, could they propose the story seriously? The story has its difficulties." Their dilemma consisted in the impossibility of inventing a plausible story that could stand up against undeniable truth.

The Snow Job

28:15 **So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying was spread abroad among the Jews, and continueth until this day.** Because the soldiers' orders had come from the Jews, they could risk admitting whatever their Jewish superiors wanted published. If they are satisfied, then everyone is satisfied. Matthew does not affirm that the soldiers actively spread the rumor. The soldiers simply *did as they were taught*, while *this saying* made the rounds throughout Judaism.

This saying was spread abroad among the Jews, and continueth until this day. Aside from the expression, "King of the Jews," this

is the only time Matthew, himself a Jew, uses the expression *the Jews*. Squarely facing the prejudiced unbelief circulating among his readers and dealing with it, of all places, *even in his next to last paragraph*, he defused it. Jewish readers could reason thus: "If the author of this testimony were trying to deceive the gullible in Judaism, he would not have dared reveal the origin of this absurd rumor and the facts which explode it. Too many would yet be able to disprove his thesis." Further, even decades after this event, any Jew could know what Matthew affirms: opponents of Christ's resurrection had still turned up no more convincing explanation of the phenomena than the soldiers' tale.

Naturally, this section has come under attack from anti-supernaturalists. The attack objects that the Jewish attempt at a rebuttal of the resurrection is so flimsy that men so astute as the Sanhedrinists could not have originated it nor the soldiers propagated it. Farrar (*Life*, 664, note 1) exposes their inconsistency:

Those who are shocked at this suggested possibility of deceit on the part of a few hard, worldly and infatuated Sanhedrists, do not shrink from insinuating that the faith of Christendom was founded on most facile and reprehensible credulity, almost amounting to conscious deception, by men who died for the truth of what they asserted, and who have taught the spirit of truthfulness as a primary duty of the religion which they preached.

Granted, the false report was a clumsy expedient. But, under the circumstances, what better solution could have occurred to the best minds among Israel's leadership? He who would criticize as illogical the story Matthew attributes to them and discount his report as unauthentic, must furnish a more rational alternative to their best efforts. They were baffled (1) by the fearless, precise, unassailable evidence given by courageous witnesses, and (2) by their own incompetence to explain the undoubted absence of the body from the empty tomb or to produce the corpse as undeniable evidence of the disciples' supposed fraud. Naturally, they would admit no more than absolutely necessary, but some plausible interpretation of the facts must be circulated to reduce the damage to a minimum. They could do no less than admit the absence of the body. The authorities' only solution was brazenly to lie in harmony with their rationalistic evaluation of the risk they faced (27:64). The authorities arrested the early Christians for propagating the resurrection of Christ, but they never

accused them of theft of the body, showing how little they believed their own story. May we not imagine the spies of Annas and Caiaphas surreptitiously listening in on everyone's conversation for some clue to the whereabouts of the Galilean's corpse, or out wildly combing the hillsides and caves of Palestine, searching desperately for any evidence of a recent burial?

Unfortunately, *This saying . . . continueth until this day* provides no direct clue to the writing of Matthew's Gospel, since Justin Martyr (165) reported the continuance of this calumny till his time (*Dialogue With Trypho*, 108,2). In fact, Justin charged that the Jews aggressively sought to check the powerful influence of the resurrection Gospel by propagating this calumny by means of special couriers sent all over the Jewish world. Unable to dispel the power of the facts, these disbelievers settled on a legend which would hide from their descendants what they themselves could not deny was the truth.

But that Matthew alone, of all the Evangelists, reported the Jews' efforts is adequately explained by these factors:

1. Matthew addressed his Gospel to the Hebrew reader, so needed to meet this issue head-on.
2. Other Gospel writers, precisely because Matthew reported it, needed not give this even more publicity, when they too had so much more to tell.

But this passage furnishes another unexpected evidence of the Gospel's truthfulness. Matthew knew that one is known not merely by the friends he keeps, but also by the quality of his enemies. The Jewish lie must stand throughout history side by side with the life-transforming message, the heroic martyrdom, the conscientiousness and morality of these same disciples. The result of the comparison leaves no doubt as to the sincerity, dedication and ethics of the Christians as compared with the best efforts of their detractors to conceive some plausible alternative explanation of the fact everyone admitted: the empty tomb. Further, the disciples did not foster the gradual spread of a vague rumor. Rather, by their fearless proclamation of the risen Christ right in the heart of world Judaism, these eye-witnesses launched their pointed public testimony in the teeth of a vicious storm of persecutions, privations and death. If the enemies desired to demolish the data on which the Christian preaching was based, they could desire no greater or fuller opportunity.

Matthew's testimony also removes the suspicion that Jesus' body was secreted away by some of His enemies. Otherwise, when the early Christians began to shake Judaism to the core by making thousands of believers in the risen Christ, the rulers would have mercilessly exposed the hoax by simply producing the badly decomposed body themselves. That they did not means they could not.

Together with its companion passage (27:62ff.), this section stresses just how much the whole Passion was under the direction of an omnipotent God whose plans could not be frustrated by the most careful planning of rebellious men bent on having their own way. This realization prepares the mind to accept Jesus' universal authority and the Great Commission (28:18f.; cf. 10:28). Turning his attention away from unbelieving Israel that had despised its true King, in harmony with his Apostolic commission (cf. Acts 13:46), Matthew turns to the Gentiles (28:18-20). Further, by showing that God permitted the resurrection's first messengers to be the enemies' own witnesses whose report was never questioned as completely true, Matthew underlines the fact that intellectual knowledge of the greatest fact in the world is insufficient to produce saving faith. Rather, one's heart must be that of a disciple, open to God, willing to be taught, before faith can lead to salvation. (Cf. 13:18-23; esp. Luke 8:15.)

By reflection on the superficialness and absurdities involved in this story which is included as a model of what skeptics are capable, Matthew's readers are emboldened to face with intelligence, skill and courage all other rationalizing attempts to explain the empty tomb.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. State the reaction of the guards when they returned to their senses.
2. To what specific authority did the soldiers report?
3. Why report specifically to them?
4. What was the immediate reaction of this authority?
5. What was the strategem chosen by the authorities to deal with the new crisis?
6. Explain why people hostile to Jesus invented nothing more plausible than the strategem on which their council finally settled.
7. Did this strategem work? If so, to what extent? If not, to what extent did it fail?
8. List the facts that demonstrate the absurdity of the strategem.

SECTION 78

JESUS COMMISSIONS HIS DISCIPLES
TO WORLD EVANGELISM

TEXT: 28:16-20

16 But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them. 17 And when they saw him, they worshipped *him*; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; 20 teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. When so many appearances of Jesus occurred in the Jerusalem area, why is this appearance in Galilee so important as to deserve such special notice to the seeming exclusion of all those others?
- b. Why was it so important for Jesus to order the disciples to return to Galilee and go to a specific mountain?
- c. If Jesus had already appeared a number of times, how do you explain the fact that "when they saw Him . . . some doubted" even yet? Who do you think worshipped Him and who doubted?
- d. Do you not think that Matthew is risking the loss of credibility to insert this compromising phrase, "but some doubted"? Give just one good reason why anyone may believe Matthew, *precisely because he included it*, and for which one could doubt his integrity, had he *not* done so.
- e. Why do you think Matthew reported so few appearances of Jesus risen from the dead? Was he unaware of, or critical of, other reported appearances?
- f. Why do you think it was important for Jesus to claim universal authority before ordering His disciples to disciple all the nations?
- g. Do you see any evidence here to sustain the common assertion that "we are ordered to win the world to Christ"?
- h. As opposed to a thousand other worthy goals or responsibilities, how does the order to "make disciples" indicate the true mission of the Church?

- i. This commission is addressed to the eleven disciples present on the mountain in Galilee. Nevertheless, what evidence does Jesus give here that this commission was not limited to them, but is valid for the entire Church in all ages of its existence and is so fundamental that any congregation of the Church may judge its true success and importance to God by the degree to which it is fulfilling this order?
- j. What does baptism have to do with discipleship?
- k. What do you think Jesus intended to reveal to us by requiring baptism "in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"? What concept(s) is involved in this formulation? Some affirm that He did not intend to dictate "a baptismal formula." What do you think about this, and why?
- l. What does it mean to "teach them all things I have commanded you"?
- m. How does the solemn affirmation, that Jesus is now with us until the end of the world, express the true, fitting, final climax to the fundamental message of Matthew's Gospel?
- n. What does this assurance of Jesus' presence with us until the end of the world, intend to contribute (1) to the life of the church taken as a whole, and (2) to the encouragement of the individual Christian?
- o. What changes do you envision necessary in the life of your church to realize the full impact of Jesus' promise to be with us all?
- p. What personal steps do you see essential in your personal life to act on the promise Jesus made to be with you? Or does this promise mean little to you personally? What could you do, if you really believed it?
- q. How does Jesus' being with us until time's end reinforce His expectation that we baptize and be baptized? What connection, if any, is there between our baptism and His promised presence?
- r. If the Apostles were going to die before the end of the first century, in what real sense could Jesus be with them until the end of the Christian age? In what sense would His promise not refer to them alone?
- s. In what sense is it true that this Great Commission is actually a foregone conclusion for anyone who has been reading Matthew's Gospel carefully?
- t. Even though the Church would take up the torch also, Matthew especially mentioned the Eleven as the particular, primary early

recipients of this great commission? What impact on your soul does it make to realize that Jesus defied the whole, hell-bent world with a few humble Galileans, and won, and just keeps right on winning?

- v. Do you think the modern Church is carrying out the Great Commission? What parts are we doing? What needs reinforcement?

PARAPHRASE

Now the eleven disciples set out for Galilee.

[Perhaps here is to be placed John's report of Jesus' appearance to the seven disciples fishing on Lake Galilee (John 21:1-23).]

They went to the mountain which Jesus had designated. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him. However, some hesitated. As Jesus came up to them, He addressed them, "My Father has committed full authority in heaven and on earth to me. So, go make all nations my disciples, immersing the disciples into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to put into practice everything I have commanded you. Remember, I myself am with you every day—right down to the end of time!"

SUMMARY

Matthew chose to conclude his Gospel with the appearance of Jesus on a Galilean mountain. Jesus' appearance produced two opposite results: worship or doubt. Nevertheless, He claimed universal authority from God, and so ordered the disciples to evangelize the world, baptize the believers and teach them obedience to the whole message of Jesus. He promised participation in this task down to the last day of the world.

NOTES

Rendezvous in Galilee

28:16 But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them. The Twelve have now become *the eleven*. (Cf. Acts 1:25.) Notwithstanding the faithlessness of Judas, God's program marches on. (Cf. Rom. 3.3.)

Just when *the eleven disciples went into Galilee* is not indicated. However, it may be assumed that they observed what remained of the Feast of Unleavened Bread before returning home in *Galilee*. This would allow time for the appearance in Jerusalem (John 20:19, 26). Until this point Matthew left unrecorded the designation of *the mountain where Jesus had appointed them*. Calling it *the mountain* (τὸ ὄρος) does not prove it was a familiar spot, because Matthew designates other hills across the Jordan the same way (14:23; 15:29). The fact that *Jesus appointed them* (ἐτάξατο, "order, fix, determine, arrange") implies that the disciples really needed very express directions to go there, in the same way they required more than one reminder even to leave for Galilee (28:7, 10). It is likely that He indicated His choice during those appearances, a probability that presupposes that the appearances which Luke and John record truly occurred. In this case, we have another incidental confirmation of the Gospel narratives.

Because it was apparently Jesus' purpose not to show Himself alive to all men, "but to witnesses chosen before by God" (Acts 10:40f.), He could not set His appointment with them in some city of Galilee where hundreds of unbelievers could witness this appearance. Rather He must name some remoter location, distant from human habitation where this appearance could occur in privacy. Open fields on the plains would still be watched. Therefore, the strenuous effort to ascend a *mountain* would thin out the idly curious and furnish the desired privacy. Also, if only disciples knew the identity of *the mountain where Jesus had appointed them* and not improbably also the day and hour, then only disciples would converge on the spot.

Jesus knew that from the elevation of a *mountain* the disciples could gaze over Galilee where their first dreams of the Kingdom of God had been formed. There, in His discipleship, their fledgling efforts in His service had been expended. Now He must challenge them to world conquest. This material vantage point offers the psychological advantage of reminding them of what was known, tested and proven in their own personal evangelistic experience, and aids their perception of their own part in world evangelism in the regions beyond. (See notes on 28:7, 10.)

History's Greatest Watershed Issue

28:17 And when they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Although many of these people had already seen Jesus

alive before, this appearance produced a powerful effect. This is not common, oriental obeisance, but a new reverence for Jesus as God. To worship the risen Lord is the natural, appropriate reaction of the believer. (Cf. 28:9.) How much more so now as the disciples, filled with awe and joy, are reunited once again with their victorious Lord *in Galilee, just as He promised*.

That *some doubted* would appear to question the validity of the evidence given that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. Or it could suggest that His previous appearances were finally unconvincing for some of the very eye-witnesses themselves. Despite the seeming adequacy of the proof of Jesus' victory over death given earlier, apparently competent people who were present and therefore able to give valid testimony, hesitated at the insufficiency of the so-called "evidences" that convinced other less critical (= more gullible) people. It would appear, therefore, that Matthew made an unfortunate misstep by including this damning admission on this critical, last page of his work.

One might conclude, therefore, that this phrase is to be dismissed as an ignorant blunder on Matthew's part. No sectarian apologist in his right mind, who intends to establish a conclusion regardless of the evidence, could afford to make the embarrassing admission that Matthew calmly sets down for posterity in precisely this setting where its effect would be devastating.

On the other hand, if it could be shown that we must judge our author at least normally intelligent, hence aware of, and responsible for, the long-term consequences of this phrase: *and some doubted*, then he is innocent of an inexplicable gaffe that spoils the efficacy of his argument, and with it that of his book. Conceivably, what at first glance seemed to be the most compromising remark of Matthew's entire Gospel, surprisingly supports his entire message with uncommon power. McGarvey (*Evidences*, II, 155f.) argued:

The very admission of this doubt is an indubitable mark of naturalness and truthfulness in the narrative; for it could certainly not have been thought of had it not been true; and even though true, it would have been omitted if the author had been more anxious to make the case a strong one than to tell it as it was.

Our only alternative at this point, then, is to judge Matthew so sure of the adequacy of the evidence that Jesus really arose, that no argument to the contrary based on this phrase could ever be raised. His

case is so solid that inclusion of this phrase could never even disturb it.

John confidently dared to admit that, as late as six months before the Last Week, some of the people closest to Jesus did not believe in Him (John 7:5). He boldly documented Thomas' refusal to believe (John 20:25). Mark and Luke admitted that the disciples did not believe the women's eyewitness testimony (Mark 16:11; Luke 24:11). Luke reported that the disciples, locked in a room with the risen Christ and, staring right at Him, "still disbelieved for joy and wondered" (Luke 24:41)!

Rather than doubt the evidence of the other writers, Matthew is so certain of his position, that he can afford to include even less evidence than other Gospel writers. This coincides with his style of apologetic begun with his account of the crucifixion. Just as he cited no Messianic prophecy to support the Messianic claims of Jesus, so now here, to support the truth of the resurrection, he cites only two appearances interspersed with the enemy's frantic efforts to nullify the powerful eloquence of the Empty Tomb. His technique again is "Not too little, not too much."

Granted the appropriateness of mentioning that *some doubted*, we must now ask how it was possible that people who, presumably, were already disciples, would or could continue to doubt at this critical moment, with which Matthew is going to close his book. Worse, how could they doubt, *when they saw him*? The demands of empirical evidences assume that "seeing is believing," but these see and continue to doubt!

1. Some consider it completely absurd that any of the eleven could doubt, after the convincing appearances in Jerusalem (Luke 24:33ff., John 20:19ff., 26ff.). There is hardly room for "some" who *doubted* in the small group of the Eleven. Therefore, those who *doubted*, even *when they saw him*, are held to be other people whose presence on this occasion was simply not mentioned. This event is held to be the appearance to the five hundred of which Paul speaks (Cf. I Cor. 15:6, a suggestion highly probable for these reasons:
 - a. Jesus insisted that messages be sent to His followers to meet Him in Galilee (26:32; 28:7, 10). So, the reminders of this Galilean gathering were known not merely by the Eleven, but by the women who told them and potentially by many other

disciples as well. (Cf. "tell my *brothers* to go to Galilee." 28:10; Luke 24:9: "all the rest" as distinguished from the eleven.)

- b. Since the appearance was apparently the only one prearranged by Jesus' appointment, it facilitated the convocation of many more than the Eleven.
- c. Because after the ascension only 120 disciples gather in Jerusalem, it may be assumed that the larger group of 500 of whom Paul wrote, met Him earlier in Galilee.
- d. Even at Jerusalem, when the disciples are mentioned as key witnesses of His appearance, others besides the Apostles were present. (Cf. John 20:18-26; Luke 24:33.) If Jesus set the appointment during those appearances, these could know about it.

So in Galilee, it is possible that He approached and spoke to some disciples who had not yet seen Him (28:18). Even so, Matthew did not mention the 500, but centers all attention on the Eleven.

- 2. Some see this doubt as the psychological self-protection of *men who now truly wanted to believe*, but distrusted their own emotions' power to compromise their objectivity. So they continued to oppose the resurrection hypothesis until the overwhelming evidence of the facts so powerfully asserted itself that denial became not merely more unreasonable than belief, but unsustainable unless they would deny their own rationality. (Cf. Bruce, *Training*, 494f.) Such doubt expresses "mingled conflicting feelings of reverent recognition and hesitation as to the identity of the person played their part" (Bruce, *Exp. Gr. T.*, I,339). These men would take nothing for granted. Rather, motivated by a holy seriousness, they questioned whether this unusual experience might not have some other explanation. Lenski (*Matthew*, 1170) is undoubtedly right that the psychological and intellectual makeup of the apostolic group was heterogeneous: "the eleven were of different dispositions. Some were receptive, some slow to apprehend, of little faith, easily discouraged and troubled, unable to let go their old notions and to rise to the new spiritual heights." No wonder, then, that they doubted!
- 3. A fallacy lies in thinking that they saw Him *and continued to remain unconvinced during the entire discourse and even after this event*. Matthew's text does not so affirm. Rather, after the phrase in question, Matthew reports that, "Jesus came to them and spake unto them." From this McGarvey (*Evidences*, II,155) concludes that this

shows that at the moment of the doubt he was not very near to them and had not yet spoken to them. There is no difference, then, between the doubt on this occasion and on the first, when they thought for a time that he was a ghost.

- Even so, Matthew does not record their transformation into believers.
4. Another solution is to see that what they doubted was not whether Jesus were risen at all, but the identity of the One whom they now see. Awed, they had reason to doubt whether what they were seeing at first were really Jesus and not something or someone else. They could perhaps sense an alteration in His appearance: greater majesty, more evident glory. For whatever reason, some people had not recognized Him at first (John 20:14; Luke 24:16; Mark 16:12). He could appear and disappear at will, transcending physical limitations (Luke 24:31, 36; John 20:19, 26). Even though He manifested miraculous power during His earthly ministry, that surpassed the laws to which ordinary humans are subject, they could rightly wonder whether this Personage were the same humble, suffering Galilean with whom they had been so long acquainted.

Although Matthew wrote: *they doubted*, he did NOT say, "they disbelieved." The former questions; the latter affirms. Thus, it is possible to conclude that, by approaching and addressing them, Jesus gave them infallible evidence that dissipated their initial hesitation as to His identity and reality. The Apostles naturally would recognize Jesus instantly from their previous encounters with the risen Lord, and *worshipped Him*. The others, not being rushed even by the good example of others, wanted to verify their facts.

The unbelievable patience and justified confidence of Jesus led Him to address His Great Commission to those who doubted just as much as to those who believed. He knew that whatever questions remained would have answers in the grand days that followed: the Holy Spirit would come, they would experience His power in its fulness. So, He treated them even now with the same friendly courtesy, as future believers, believed the best of them, and made believers of them! What a lesson for us who demand that everyone have every doctrine straight before we treat them with courteous brotherliness!

Thus, as to the empirical reality of the fact, the hesitation of those who were slow to be persuaded is as precious as the worship of those already convinced. Their extreme prudence and refusal to be convinced except by the validity of the proof and their resultant, unshaken

certainty after their doubts were resolved by evidence, all prove conclusively that their proclamation of the risen Lord was not the result of self-deception, but because the concrete fact that Christ arose could not reasonably be disbelieved. (Cf. Luke 24:11, 22f., 36f.; John 20:8f., 24-31.) Their doubt is recorded so that we might not have a doubt (Bruce, *Training*, 479,482).

The Universal Lordship of Jesus Christ

28:18 And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. The formal introduction of what follows is reminiscent of the formulations that introduced great discourses like the Sermon on the Mount. (Cf. Matt. 5:1f.; 10:1, 5; 13:3; 18:2f.; 23:1f.) Rather than treat the reader to an extended sermon as in the former cases, the equally satisfying summary Matthew includes is a marvel of brevity and completeness, a fitting conclusion to Jesus' life and ministry on earth, a summary of His doctrine and of His program of world conquest. Even though the content is nothing less than the solemn outline of their duty, His manner is friendly and informal, (*elàlesen autois*), "he talked with them.")

Matthew's Gospel opened with the claim that Jesus was David's Son, hence truly Messianic King (1:1). Now it concludes with His far more glorious claim of unlimited sovereignty as King of the universe. The one leads inevitably to the other. Without formally citing Daniel 7:14, Jesus, "the Son of man" par excellence, majestically claims this cosmic authority with a naturalness that is appropriate only for One whose right it unquestionably is. Without yielding once to Satan's offers of world dominion (cf. 4:8ff.), He overcame and was rewarded with His own, rightful, true sovereignty. (Cf. Acts 10:36; Rom. 10:12; 14:9; Eph. 1:20ff.; Phil. 2:9ff.; Col. 1:18; 2:10; Heb. 1:6; I Peter 3:22; Rev. 5.)

Hath been given points to the Father as the source of His authority. (Cf. 11:27; I Peter 1:21; Rev. 2:27.) As the Word of God, He was equal with God (John 1:1; 17:5; Phil. 2:5). However, during His period of self-humiliation as a servant of God, as man, Jesus qualified Himself to receive the authority and responsibilities entrusted to Him. Thus the original plan of God for man shall be realized (Ps. 2; cf. Heb. 2:5-18; see notes on Matt. 21:16).

The Kingdom of God shall be given those uncompromising saints who, like their Lord, really defeat Satan's offers of "all the kingdoms

of this world" (Dan. 7). We can only do this in the measure we really acknowledge the transforming power and cosmic sovereignty of the risen Christ over our lives and problems. Little will be done to make believers, until disciples believe in that awesome authority and power whereby He is able to subject everything to His control. As long as our Omnipotent Christ is in control, we can never think our task impossible.

The Universal Mission of the Church

28:19 Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, i.e. on the basis of the unlimited power and awe-inspiring, universal authority of Jesus' Lordship, we may do anything He tells us because of His might to strengthen, defend and lead us in triumph (Phil. 4:13). Despite the staggering odds against us and although our lives and ministry be severely limited by the greatest obstacles and gravest dangers or even cut short by martyrdom, we may be confident that He shall make His gigantic undertaking to triumph and we shall reign with Him anyway. A universe under His boundless control cannot be out of order—no matter what happens.

Go ye: the Church must involve herself in aggressive warfare that ignores earth's national or cultural boundaries or else be fundamentally disobedient to a Lord who aims at ultimate, total control of the earth. Earlier, Israel's light in the world was less aggressive. God's people received men if they approached Israel. Now, however, this positive going to them to take Christ's message is a new element.

Merely because expressed as a participle, *Go ye (poreuthéntes)* is no less a command. Since it is subordinate to a principal verb in the imperative mood (*mathêteúsate*), this renders it no less a command than that verb itself. (Cf. e.g. 28:7, [= 10]; Luke 19:5 in Greek.) Had Jesus desired to say, "as you go, preach," He could have expressed Himself differently, (*poreuðmenoi kêrûssete*, 10:7). The ASV is correct in rendering this participle and its main verb, *Go ye, and make disciples*. Often those who argue that the Greek means, "Having gone," as if it were not imperative, are not consistent in using the same logic or grammar with the other two participles in this commission: *baptizing (baptizontes)* and *teaching (didaskontes)*. Although these actions are admitted on all hands to be absolutely essential, the *going* is no less imperative than either of these. So, the

main point of this commission is to bring the message of life in Christ Jesus to all, not to wait to do so if and when we happen to go.

The early Christians did not automatically or naturally grasp the universality of the Gospel (Acts 10:18; 11:19). Because of their nationalistic prejudices, they took their time about evangelizing a different ethnic group or establishing the first racially integrated congregation (Acts 8-11). So, His command, *Go ye*, is not simply appropriate but imperative. Further, that this order was not limited exclusively to the Apostles is clear:

1. The early Christians understood it as applicable to the whole Church. (Cf. Acts 8:2, 4; 11:20.) This understanding may arise from the fact that many non-Apostles were present when Jesus gave this great mission. (Cf. Mark 16:13ff.; Luke 24:13, 33ff., 44-49 with John 20:19-21.) Since Jesus did not apply it exclusively to the Apostles, they could consider themselves responsible to carry out this commission within the limits of their gifts and opportunities.
2. It is implied in "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." What Jesus commanded the Apostles they loyally committed "to faithful men who would be able to teach others also." (Cf. II Tim. 2:2.) The Apostles told the Church what Jesus had told them: *Go ye and make disciples of all the nations*. And so the irrepressibly joyful song is taken up by new voices in new languages.
3. The Lord's vineyard and harvestfields are still plentiful (9:37f.) The field is still the world (13:38). All church members are non-professional missionaries who live in an area of the world that needs the gospel as truly as someone a thousand miles distant. The efforts of missionaries in other areas do not exclude, but rather require, those of Christians in the areas whence the former were sent forth.

For the final time, Matthew briefly highlights one of the sublimest themes of his book, expressed in the grand words of Jesus. Anyone who has been reading this Gospel closely could well suspect that, sooner or later, He whom Matthew presented as the truly Jewish Messiah interested in the salvation and blessing of Gentiles; not merely of Hebrews, would arrive at this point. (24:14; 26:13; cf. Special Study: "Gentiles" at close of this volume.) Consequently, the Great Commission is no new revelation but the well-prepared, foregone conclusion of everything Matthew has included to describe the purpose and direction of Jesus' life and ministry on earth.

Even so, this is neither the first time nor the last that Jesus would direct His followers to evangelize the earth (John 20:21ff.; Luke 24:48ff.; Mark 16:15ff.; Acts 1:4-8). It is highly significant that the Evangelists note on how many different occasions the risen Lord revealed His deepest concern by concentrating so much of His post-resurrection instruction on the disciples' aggressive campaign of witness before the world (Acts 1:1-9).

This King of the universe orders His subjects, not to conquer *all the nations*, but to *make disciples* of them. The goal of the Gospel is not to develop great philosophers, pious religionists, holy mystics or theological lawyers, but *disciples* who learn from Jesus, let Him teach them and submit to His Lordship. Because *disciples* are to be the product of the Church's efforts, Matthew has deliberately chosen to utilize this word, *disciples*, rather than "apostles" throughout his Gospel, to furnish the paradigms whereby the reader may grasp what discipleship implies. Even though the Twelve disciples became Apostles, no one must misunderstand that these great men whom we have come to respect highly for their work's sake were once common *disciples* with problems, ignorance, prejudices, conceit, frustrations and sins. But they were in love with Jesus, submitted to His leadership, committed to His Kingdom. Although they sometimes failed to understand Him, their unshakable commitment to Him and willingness to learn from Him brought them unerringly back on course. All of them risked flunking out of His school, but all of them but one let Him be the Teacher! This alone made the difference between the Pharisees and genuine students of Jesus, between sectarians and Christians, between camp followers and real learners, between the multitudes and these who fought back their fears, crying, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68)! We are to make people believe that Jesus has all the truth and long with all their hearts to submit to the truth and remain in it (John 14:6; 8:31).

There are no exceptions: His gospel is directed not just to Israel, but to *all the nations*. Israel's exclusive privilege has ended (21:43). They are now but one of *the nations*. Consequently, Jesus' early restriction of the Apostles' ministry (10:5) is now completely countermanded. From this time on the Christians preached to every creature, "to the Jew first and also to the Greek," (Acts 13:46; Rom. 1:16; 2:9f.). But the Jews are to be admitted to the Kingdom, not because

of physical sonship to Abraham or by adherence to their cultural heritage, but by sincere discipleship to Jesus and salvation by faith in His grace (Acts 15; Gal. 2:11-21).

All the nations means Jesus demolished such divisive boundaries as culture, class, race, sex or wealth which formerly structured mankind (Gal. 3:28). There can be no untouchables or unlovables unworthy of an equal place in His Kingdom. Now the decisive question is: Is my neighbor a *disciple*? If not, he is a prospect for the Gospel. If so, he is mine to love as a "brother in Christ, a subject of the heavenly King, a member of a new race being formed from every kindred and tribe" (Tolbert, *Good News From Matthew*, 247). This is the spirit of God's intention for Abraham's grand family, that "in you and in your children shall *all the nations* of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). The Church's mission, therefore, is relevantly rooted in God's faithfulness in keeping His promise to Abraham!

The Formal, Definitive Induction into the Kingdom

Baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' command to "make disciples" requires that the only appropriate candidates among *the nations* for baptism be *disciples* of Jesus. They are not undisciplined peoples who have never enrolled in the school of Christ to learn from Him (11:28f.). Nor are they babes who cannot acknowledge His Lordship by believing (Mark 16:16; Acts 16:31) or by repentance (Acts 2:38). To suppose that infants can be inducted into the Kingdom by baptism has historically introduced into the Kingdom generations of people who were never *made disciples*. Similarly, formally correct baptism of unconverted adults continues to swell churches with pagans uncommitted to the Lordship of Jesus. The early Christians rightly thought that "making disciples" was the way people must be saved, and equivalent to conversion, the new birth, becoming Christians (Acts 14:21f.).

That literal immersion in water is the rite intended must be concluded from the consideration that His disciples were thoroughly familiar with John's literal baptizing in water (3:1ff.; John 3:22f.) and practiced it themselves (John 4:1ff.). When they heard Him order them to baptize, they would be immediately reminded of that immersion in water with which they were already accustomed, especially since He did not qualify His words otherwise. That they thus

understood His meaning, the uniform practice of the apostolic Church is convincing confirmation. (Cf. Acts 8:36-39.) That a baptism in the Spirit is not meant is proven by the consideration that when Jesus summarized the glorious mission His Church must undertake, it is most unlikely that He would insert a command expressed in language *symbolic* of something else when all else He said is to be understood *literally*. His command implies that His disciples administer the baptism in question, whereas Jesus Himself would be the administrator of baptism in the Holy Spirit (3:11; John 1:33; Acts 2:33).

Does Jesus hereby make *baptizing* essential to salvation (Titus 3:5; I Peter 3:21)? No more nor less than the belief and repentance that precede it (Acts 2:38). No more nor less than the discipleship requisite to it. No more nor less than His own death with which baptism identifies the penitent believer (Rom. 6: Col. 2:12). And no more nor less than the growth to maturity Jesus requires after baptism (20:20). But by ordering baptism, Jesus tests every man's discipleship as concretely as if He had ordered him to sacrifice his firstborn son or to build an ark or paint lamb's blood on the doorposts of his house. Even so, Staton (*The Servant's Call*, 50f.) warned that "to emphasize baptism to the neglect of 'making disciples' is to disobey the Great Commission. We are to baptize only repentant believers." If a person is quite content to run his own life, he has not acknowledged the Lordship of Jesus. He does not accept the meaning of belief and repentance.

For the Jewish reader, quite noticeable in this command required of *all nations* is the complete silence about circumcision or anything else belonging peculiarly to Judaism. This point was lost on too many Christians during the first two decades of the Church's life (Acts 15. Jerusalem council around 50 A.D.).

Into the name: "God is one and His Name one" (Zech. 14:9). He is not merely the God of Jews only but also of Gentiles (Rom. 3:29f.; 10:12). Immersion *into the name* is more than a formulary repetition of the divine Name over the candidates for entrance into the Kingdom. It is more than our acting as agents on His authority, "in the Name of the Almighty." Rather, *baptizing them into the name* objectively initiates them into a new relationship with the one God whose Name it is, a relationship of Owner and owned. Baptism becomes the moment when the believer is invested with the Name of his new Master to whom and into whose service he is now formally dedicated. If God

promised to meet with His people where His Name is named (cf. Exod. 20:24; Matt. 18:20), then it is no marvel that the Divine Name should be placed on every single believer (Rev. 3:12; 14:1; 22:4) and on the body of believers thus constituted to grow up into a holy temple in the Lord (I Cor. 3:16f.; 6:19f.; Eph. 2:20ff.; I Peter 2:5; Rev. 21:3).

Without officially naming the Trinity, Jesus implied the doctrine by placing each of the three Persons in a unified relationship into which the believer is baptized. Omitting all other beings, angels or men, He unites just these three. (Cf. other examples of this phenomenon: I Cor. 12:4-6; II Cor. 13:14; Eph. 1:3, 10, 13; 2:18-22; 3:14-17; 4:4-6; 5:19f.; II Thess. 2:13f.; Heb. 6:4-6; I Peter 1:2; I John 3:23f.; 4:2; Jude 20f.; Rev. 1:4f.) In so doing, He implied the essential deity and equality of each Person mentioned, hence also the high significance of the new relationship the believer sustains to each one. Expressions such as "baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" or "baptized into Christ" (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; Gal. 3:27) do not deny the Trinitarian formula, because Luke and Paul may not have intended to express the exact form of the baptismal formula used on those occasions. Rather, they affirm the believer's confession that, of all earth's spiritual leaders, only Jesus has Messianic authority to admit us into living fellowship with the Triune God (11:27; John 14:6).

The Daily, Unfinished Task of the Church

28:20 teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. If the former commands express the evangelistic efforts of the Church whereby people are brought into the Kingdom, this latter expresses the edification of the saints whereby they are kept there. The believers, as disciples, must receive further instruction, not merely to recognize orthodox doctrine or adhere to a few formalities, but *to practice everything I commanded you*. (Cf. I Tim. 1:5; James 1:22f.; 2:8-26.) With the Lord, there can be no genuine Christianity that stops at mere mental mastery of material and does not also lead to lives transformed into the image of Christ, making us partakers of the divine nature (Eph. 4:11-15; II Peter 1:3-11). The test of discipleship is how much of Christ's word bears fruit in us (John 15:1-17), which is evidenced by our obedience (John 15:10, 14). Our rule of faith and practice must be:

1. *everything*, i.e., nothing omitted by convenience or neglect. (Cf. Acts 20:20, 27)
2. *I commanded*, clearly revealed truth, not human opinions or inferences (II Peter 3:2; I Cor. 14:37).
3. *you*, my witnesses, empowered by the Holy Spirit (John 15:26, 27; Acts 1:8; 10:41, 42), i.e. the Apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42; II Tim. 2:2; I Cor. 15:1ff.), not false revelations purporting to be inspired (II Thess. 2:2). Lest the Apostles forget something, He furnished them the divine Spirit to teach them all things and remind them of everything He had said to them (John 14:26).

What does it mean to *teach them everything I commanded you*?

1. His own centrality in all of God's revelations in the Hebrew Scriptures, His own universal authority expressed here.
2. His specific lessons that inform our minds.
 - a. Self-denial, cross-bearing.
 - b. The Kingdom, its goals, methods, values, future.
 - c. The disciple's relationship to others, humility, forgiving spirit, helpfulness.
 - d. The dangers of hypocrisy, pride, ambition, self-deception.
 - e. His emphases on the spiritual, as opposed to the material and political nature of His rule and Kingdom.
3. His great, precious promises to motivate us to become sharers in His divine nature.
4. His own marvelous example that shows us what righteousness means and how it is achieved. His entire life and ministry, death and resurrection are full of information about the mind of God and how human conduct can reflect it.
5. His commands that render specific His moral imperatives, His graciousness to make clear what it is He expects us to do.
6. His unequivocal confidence in the authority and validity of the Old Testament as well as the Christian's new relationship to its standards, examples, types, predictions, theological concepts, etc.
7. His validation of the authority of the Apostles and their ministry.
8. His driving sense of world mission to seek and save that which is lost.

This is but a poor, short summary. The mind of Christ is broader than this. But if we *observe all* that He commanded, we shall not simply have more of the Spirit of Christ, but more appropriately and significantly, the Lord shall have more of us! The clearest lesson

here is that selection of a few pet doctrines cannot substitute for loving absorption of the total mind, ministry, manners and morals of Christ.

God with Us Forever

And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. This heart-thrilling assurance aims to encourage His people to believe that they have power equal to their task in the age-long mission on which He sends them and that He personally and concretely guarantees this power with His presence. (Cf. Exod. 33:14f.; Josh. 1:5.) This heartening word to weak mortals burdened with the responsibility of discipling a lost world is but another way of saying, "I send you heavenly power, the Holy Spirit my Father promised," (Luke 24:49). Since these disciples had already labored in Galilee in Christ's absence (Matt. 10:1ff.; Cf. Luke 9:6, 10; 10:17ff.), they knew that the power He delivered to them was invincible. The visible presence of Christ was not to be expected because not absolutely essential to the victorious completion of their mission.

Matthew omits all mention of the ascension. Three considerations argue that his silence cannot be interpreted as a denial of Luke's clear affirmations that it occurred:

1. Even before promising them His presence with them, His command to go had already implied His absence during their efforts, unless somehow He could accompany each one personally. *His incarnation had limited Him to be one Man in one place.*
2. Unless He were to overcome the previous, self-imposed, spatial limits on His physical, even if glorious, body, how could He personally remain with *all the believers in all the world until the judgment*? But by dispensing with these limitations, He could be everywhere with all His people all the time. Although the ascension means so much more, it is nonetheless a highly feasible, appropriate way to facilitate this.
3. Matthew's special purpose was to picture Jesus as the Christ, ruling the Kingdom of God among His people. While His return to heaven could still accomplish this, Matthew desired that the last impression of the reader should be that of the heavenly Messianic King, Jesus Christ ruling on earth, living among His people. Matthew has created a magnificent effect by not reporting the ascension. The reader is left with the impression that life in the

Kingdom of God continues as if the Lord never departed. Rather, in the person of the Holy Spirit, Jesus would somehow take on omnipresence, so that each disciple, however far across the face of the earth he may go, might know Jesus' love and sympathy and bank on His vast reserves of heavenly might. Thus, any disciple may maintain the closest contact with His heavenly King.

So, even if it would be His eternal Spirit to accomplish this uninterrupted omnipresence, Matthew's report of His promise, by its nature, presupposes His absence and leaves room for the ascension, reported by his colleagues.

The grand significance of His Name, "Emmanuel" (1:23), with which Matthew's Gospel began and now ends, shall be realized: God is with us in the person and presence of the Spirit of Christ. Now it becomes clear how His presence could bless even the smallest possible gathering of the Church anywhere in the world in any age (18:20). Already the language of this cosmic Sovereign reflects the confidence of the eternal point of view where all tomorrows resolve into one endless now: *I am*. (Cf. John 8:58.)

Always, even unto the end of the world: the time-barrier has been broken. Jesus is Lord of the Christians, singularly and collectively, in every epoch until He pleases to call a halt to this age and start eternity rolling for us. Thus, the modern Christian, rather than lament his misfortune not to live in that great golden age when Jesus walked the dusty roads of Palestine, may rise to the challenge of the early Church who saw her risen Lord ascend into heaven, leaving them the power of His Spirit, rather than His physical presence. The early Christians adored Him, not as an admirable historical figure, but as their Eternal Contemporary who led them always, everywhere in triumph (II Cor. 2:14ff.).

Although the Apostles would not live *unto the end of the world*, because they would die before that moment arrived, yet His being with them promised them support, not only in their personal ministry but, especially by means of the Holy Spirit. He would give power and authority to their words, so that their words, whether oral or written, would become the touchstone by which all of the Church's future life would be judged. (See notes on 10:40; 19:28.)

Even though He gladdens our hearts by the warmth of His presence, the time-span between His departure and His return appears to lengthen as He guarantees His presence down to the end of an era that must seem unthinkable long for those whose Messianic expectations looked

for a rapid conclusion of the age. (Cf. John 21:22f.) Contrary to the misunderstandings of those who read this notion into Scripture, the concept of a distant Parousia was already taught (24:48; 25:5, 19; Luke 19:11).

After this, the disciples would return to Jerusalem for the Ascension in anticipation of the arrival of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:48-52; Acts 1:4—2:4). Matthew closes his Gospel before these latter events, not to diminish their importance or, worse, because he supposedly knew nothing about them, but to leave in the readers' mind the ringing challenge of world-wide evangelism in the Name and power of the Risen Lord, Jesus the Messiah. As he has done in so many episodes before. Matthew now terminates his entire book without relating what the people did when they first heard Jesus' divine mandate. The conscience of the reader is left to ponder, "Were I in this situation what must I do about Jesus?" Matthew's brilliant conclusion implies: Jesus has completed His mission expressed through His incarnation. Now He grants us the fellowship of His omnipresent Spirit, in order that we might successfully and joyfully fulfil ours.

For further study, see Wilson, *Learning From Jesus*, 531-541.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. In relation to the appearances in Jerusalem, when did the appearance in Galilee recorded by Matthew occur?
2. To whom did Jesus appear on this occasion?
3. Explain why some of these could worship Him.
4. Explain why others doubted.
5. How many appearances of Jesus does Matthew report?
6. What may we learn about Jesus from His self-revelation in this section?
7. Quote the pre-amble to the Great Commission.
8. Explain why this introduction to the Great Commission was necessary.
9. List every evidence in the Gospel of Matthew that conclusively established that Jesus really possessed all authority.
10. What does it mean to baptize "into the name of" someone?
11. In what sense would Jesus say, "I am with you"?
12. How could His presence with His people last "until the end of the world"?

SPECIAL STUDIES

THE KIND OF MESSIAH GOD HAS IN MIND ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

From the very first page of his Gospel Matthew flashes before his readers a series of radical claims for Jesus that must be taken seriously and examined carefully. Before the reader has completed two chapters, Matthew has already introduced Jesus of Nazareth as:

1. The descendant of the principal heirs of the promises God gave to the Hebrew people, Abraham and David (1:1-17). Yet, He descends from at least three Gentile ancestresses.
2. He comes from God by the activity of the Holy Spirit (1:18-25).
3. Rather than liberate His people from their national enemies, He comes to "save them from their sins" (1:21). He is named "Jesus" ("Javeh saves") and "Immanuel, God with us" (1:23).
4. Though He is the "ruler who shall pastor God's people" (2:6), He is the object of the indifference of the clergy and the persecution of the powerful (2:1-23).
5. The very inauspicious circumstances surrounding His birth, combined with the disgusting nickname, "the Nazarene" (1:23), point to a suffering Messiah from the very beginning.
6. John the Baptist presented Jesus as the Judge who would execute the justice of God and who alone was qualified to immerse men in the Holy Spirit (3:1-12)! Yet, Matthew's Messiah appeared for the first time in public as just another common man among the sinners who presented themselves to John for baptism (3:13-15). Despite His humanness, He is God's beloved Son and anointed with the Holy Spirit (3:16, 17).
7. The Messiah relived the same trials of His own people, proving Himself faithful to God as His authentic "Son," responding to the temptations, not as would an angel, but, rather, with the attitude of a true human being who is a worshiper of God (4:1-11).
8. The Messiah is concerned with the enlightenment of the benighted among the Gentiles (4:12-17; Isa. 9:1f.).
9. As the "new Moses" Jesus is not merely a great Lawgiver who repeats what God told him, but actually rises above the Mosaic Law to say what He personally requires (5:21, 27, 32, 34, 39, 44). Further, He is a Messiah who will "fulfil the Law," bringing it to its proper completion (5:17).
10. Jesus is a Messiah who has time for, and is powerfully competent to help, the impure nature's most violent forces (8:23-27),

demoniacs (8:28—9:1), paralyzed sinners (9:1-8), the outcasts of society (9:9-13), the pious but ignorant (9:14-17), and many others (9:18-34). Despite the multiplicity of appeals for His help, He regards people with genuine compassion (9:36-38), as an abandoned flock over which God assumes the care. (Cf. Ezek. 34.)

11. Jesus presents Himself as Teacher and Master and Lord of the House. He expects His followers to suffer for His sake, and assumes upon Himself the role of Lawyer, or Advocate, at the Judgment of God. (Cf. 10:18, 22, 32, 33, 37-39.)
12. Even the mighty miracles of Jesus do not force people to believe in Him (11:2-24). They merely push His hearers into two positions: belief or unbelief. John the Baptist himself hesitated in the presence of contradictions in his own mind, the works notwithstanding (11:2-19). The Galileans did not understand their need to submit to Jesus by repenting (11:20-24). "The wise and understanding" could not grasp the wisdom and source of His work (11:25-27). He is the kind of Messianic King that is comprehensible only to the man who is ready to do the will of the Father (12:50).
13. In contrast to the austere John the Baptist, Jesus is a Messiah whose life is full of the fulness of the human life (11:16-19). Notwithstanding the different life-style of the two messengers of God, the results demonstrated that God had acted with wisdom in sending them precisely as He did.
14. Jesus reveals everything willingly to those who submit to His instruction and commit themselves to learn from Him (11:28-30). This intention involves growth of character, not automatic righteousness. Still, He is gentle and lowly in heart, and able to move mercifully among contrasting levels of society and help people.
15. Jesus is the kind of Messiah who does not overwhelm His opposition with a brilliant burst of supernatural power, forcing their belief and submission. Rather, He generously meets their questions, doubts, objections and cavils with answers sufficient to convince the common, honest listener (12:1-50). In fact, when the opposition demands the supernatural "fireworks," He who could call down 10,000 angels gave a common, perfectly acceptable sign. (Cf. 16:1-4.)
16. Jesus is the Servant of Javeh (12:18-21 = Isaiah 42:1-4).
17. Jesus recognizes no claims of blood or kinship of the flesh, only moral ties cemented by obedience to the will of God (12:46-50).
18. Jesus respects the human freedom of His own townspeople at

- Nazareth, however severely He must have been tempted to do many mighty works there "just to show 'em!" (13:54-58).
19. Even in His own ministry, Jesus respected His own time schedules, not only bending every lesson to prepare for the cross in His life, but avoiding unnecessary conflicts that would tend to abbreviate the time available to teach His disciples (Matt. 14:13a; cf. 4:12; 15:21; 16:4b).
 20. He is realistic about the overconfidence of His followers, since He knows that they can be influenced by popular leaders and parties' skepticism about Him (16:5-12). However, He has no fear to entrust the mission of the Church-Kingdom to men dedicated to Him (16:13-20).
 21. He does not swerve from the predetermined plan of God, notwithstanding the most strenuous efforts of earthly friends to dissuade Him from being the type of Messiah God has in mind (16:21-28).
 22. He will be the glorious Judge of every man, repaying each according to what he has done, thus fulfilling in full all that John the Baptist predicted of Him (16:27).
 23. He is the glorious Messiah foreshadowed by the Law and the prophets, to whom all must listen and obey (17:1-8). However, He would suffer the same fate as John (17:10-13).
 24. Despite His real exemption from paying tribute to God's temple, because He is God's Son, still He meekly pays it, in order not to scandalize those who would not understand His standpoint and miss His message because of it (17:24-27).
 25. He is the kind of Messiah who refuses to recognize artificial claims to honor and greatness. Rather, His "rule of greatness" is the degree to which anyone renders service to the weakest, smallest, least important in the Kingdom (18:1-35).
 26. He is the kind of Messiah that refuses earthly power-structures as a means of ruling over men, choosing rather the path of service as the ransom for man (20:20-28).
 27. Despite His dissimilarity to everything Messianic in the popular mind, Jesus really is God's kind of Messianic King (21:1-17).
 28. He is the kind of Messiah that, despite His autonomous miracle-working power and God-given authority, does not undervalue nor forget the importance of His lesser servants' ministry (21:23-27).
 29. He is really the "chief corner stone" God planned to use (21:42), really God's Son (21:33-43).

30. No mental image of the Messiah is adequate that sees His Messiahship as having only earthly regality, such as that of a "Son of David" reigning on a material throne in Jerusalem. In fact, the true Messiah, as David himself admits, must be thought of as the "Lord of David" (22:41-46).
31. Jesus is objective, willing to recognize truth wherever it is found and correctly taught, even if it is a Pharisee that teaches it (23:2, 3).
32. Jesus is Israel's truest Patriot (23:37-39), but true Prophet (24:1-28) and "Son of man" (24:29-44; cf. Dan. 7:13, 14).
33. He is the glorious Messianic King before whom all nations will be tried, whose judgment affects the eternal destiny of each one, and whose judgment is based upon how each one treated "the least of these my brethren" (25:31-46).
34. He is not a helpless victim going innocently to an unexpected, tragic death, but "the Son of man" fully self-possessed moving majestically and consciously toward victory. He willingly pours out His blood to establish a new covenant and provide forgiveness (26:1, 2, 12, 13, 26-29).
35. Jesus is not the kind of Messiah that would abandon His vacillating disciples, even though He proved to them that He knew what their reaction would be to His death, despite their good intentions (26:30-35).
36. Jesus is a fully human Messiah who could really suffer, flinching at the thought of death (26:36-46).
37. Though under arrest and abandoned by His Apostles and betrayed by His Apostle, He remains the real Master of the situation (26:47-56).
38. He is definitely innocent of any guilt, according to His betrayer-Apostle (27:4), the wife of Pilate (27:19) and Pilate himself (27:18, 24).
39. He is self-controlled despite temptations to return accusations and insults (26:62, 63, 67, 68; 27:12-14, 27-31, 40, 43).
40. Jesus is proven to be the Messiah of God even in His death, as shown by His fulfilment of the ancient prophecies (27:32-48). His death signalled the end of an era and the beginning of another (27:51-54).
41. Jesus is the victorious Christ to whom universal authority has been granted and who orders His people to participate in His personal mission to teach the entire world (28:18-20). His presence with His people until the end of time guarantees His concrete interest in their affairs and His care for them.

WHO IS JESUS ACCORDING TO MATTHEW?

1. Jesus is the fulfilment of all God's promises to ancient Israel:
 - a. He is the descendant of Abraham and David (1:1-17; Gen. 12:2f.; II Sam. 7:11ff.).
 - b. He is the Son of the virgin (1:23; Isa. 7:14) "God with us" (Isa. 7:14).
 - c. He is the Ruler, the Shepherd of Israel born in Bethlehem (2:6; Mic. 5:2).
 - d. He was God's reason for calling Israel out of Egypt (2:15; Hos. 11:1).
 - e. He is what it means to be called a Nazarene (2:23; cf. Ps. 22; Isa. 53; 49:6f.).
 - f. He is the Lord for whom John the Baptist must prepare (3:3; Mal. 3:1ff.).
 - g. He is the greater than John, who must immerse with the Holy Spirit and with fire unquenchable (3:11, 12; Mal. 3:2; 4:1; Joel 2:28ff.).
 - h. He is God's Son possessed of the Spirit of God (3:17; Isa. 61:1, 2; 42:1).
 - i. He is willing to do anything God requires (3:15; 4:1-11).
 - j. He is the great light to the Gentiles (4:12-17; Isa. 9:1, 2).
 - k. He is the fulfilment of the Law and Prophets (5:17-48).
 - l. He is the great Servant of Jahweh who bears our infirmities (8:17; Isa. 53:4).
 - m. He is the great Servant of Jahweh in whom Gentiles may hope (12:15-21; Isa. 41:1, 2).
 - n. He is Zion's true King (21:5; Zech. 9:9).
 - o. He is Jahweh incarnate whose praise on the lips of children silences His enemies (21:16; Ps. 8:2).
 - p. He is the stone the builders rejected (21:42, 44; Ps. 118:22, 23).
 - q. He is David's Son and David's Lord (22:44f.; Ps. 110:1).
 - r. He is the Pierced One over whom Israel would bitterly wail (24:30; Zech. 12:10-14).
 - s. He is the great "Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (24:30b; Dan. 7:9-14; Matt. 26:64).
 - t. He is the stricken Shepherd (26:31; Zech. 13:7).
 - u. He is the Servant of God sold for the price of a slave (27:9f.; Zech. 11:12f.; Jer. 32:6-9).
 - v. He is the despised and afflicted Servant of God (27:46; Ps. 22:1ff.).

To the discerning reader, well-schooled in Old Testament literature, Jesus would appear to be everything God had taught Israel to expect, even if Matthew did not explicitly cite every possible reference.

2. Beyond what had specifically been prophesied, Jesus is One greater than Moses, the Law and the Temple, the Sabbath.
 - a. While demanding a standard that is higher than Mosaic legislation (Matt. 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44), He expected men to be perfect as God (Matt. 5:48). He blessed people who suffered for His sake (5:11; 16:24-27; 10:18-39; 24:9, 13)
 - b. He not only expected that men accept His teachings as the rock-foundation of their lives (7:24-27), but proclaimed Himself the divine Judge with whom all must have to do at the final Day (7:21-23).
 - c. He possessed the right of earth to forgive sins which only God could do (9:1-7).
 - d. He demands absolute loyalty to Himself, a loyalty evidenced by public confession and rewarded by presentation personally to the Heavenly Father (10:32, 33, 37-39). To receive the least disciple in Jesus' name is to receive God (10:40-42)!
 - e. Moses could point men to the Law and Prophets (Deut. 18:15-18), but Jesus invited men to Himself (11:28-30), because the Father had intrusted everything to Him (11:27).
 - f. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and must do what is good in it (12:1-14). He introduced principles greater than the Temple (12:6).
 - g. Jesus claimed a unique Sonship to God, unshared with any other (7:21; 10:32f.; 11:25-27; 12:50; 15:13; 16:27; 18:10, 19, 35; 20:23; 21:37ff.; 22:2; 26:53; 26:39, 42).
 - h. Jesus is the Owner of the world (13:24-30, 37-43).
 - i. He did not correct men who confessed Him to be God's Son (cf. 8:29), but rather praised them (14:33; 16:16f.). See also 27:54.
 - j. Jesus is to be heard, while Moses and Elijah must forever fade into the background (17:3, 5, 7).
 - k. Jesus and His Apostles will judge all Israel (19:28) not Moses and the Prophets.
 - l. Jesus is the One whose life must be given as a ransom for many (20:28).
 - m. Jesus is the Sender of the New Testament prophets, wise men and teachers (23:34).
 - n. Jesus, as Son of Man in the Danielean sense, is final judge of the entire human race (25:31-46).
 - o. Jesus' blood ratifies the covenant, because poured out for the forgiveness of sins of many people (26:28).

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

3. Jesus is Someone greater than the great ones of the Old Testament.
 - a. He is greater than Jonah who brought Ninevah to its knees before God (12:39-41).
 - b. He is greater than Solomon whose God-given wisdom brought the Queen of the South to hear him (12:42).
4. Matthew's conclusion (28:1-20).
 - a. Jesus is risen from the dead (28:1-10).
 - (1) Vindicated by angels (28:1-7).
 - (2) Seen by women (28:8-10).
 - b. Jesus' greatness denied by Jewish gold and Roman lies (28:11-15)
 - c. Jesus' Great Commission (28:16-20).
 - (1) Jesus' authority is universal and the basis of His final orders.
 - (2) Jesus' final commission is to disciple every nation and edify the baptized believers by committing to them everything Jesus taught the original witnesses.
 - (3) Jesus' promise to be with His people till the very end.

THE TITLES OF JESUS IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

1. Jesus' personal name "Jeshua" or "Jehoshua" means "Javeh is salvation" or "Javeh saves," a fact made specific by Matthew's citation of the angel's words: "He will save His people from their sins" (1:21).
2. Jesus is "the son of David" by virtue of His genealogy (1:1-17), a fact underlined by the angel's address to Joseph: "Joseph, son of David . . ." (1:20), and stated by others elsewhere. (Cf. 9:27; 15:22; 20:30; 21:9, 15; 22:41-46.)
3. Matthew considered it essential for even Hebrew readers to see the significance of Jesus' fulfilment of the prophecy about the Virgin Birth (Isa. 7:14), whereby the child born is evidence of "God with us," "Emmanuel" in Hebrew (Matt. 1:23).
4. From the Gospel's title forward, Matthew speaks of Jesus as "Christ," God's Anointed (1:1, 16, 17, 18; 2:4; 11:2; 16:16, 20; 22:42; 23:10; 24:5, 23; 26:63, 68; 27:17, 22).
5. Jesus is "Lord" (3:3; 7:21f.; 21:3; 24:42, 48; 25:11, 19). There are many texts in Matthew where people address Jesus as "Lord," however with the common meaning of "Sir" or "Mister." Yet, there is also a growing importance evident in some of the uses of this title, especially when used in conjunction with other titles. (Cf. 8:25; 14:28, 30; 15:22; 20:31).
6. Jesus is the Ruler of God's people (2:6).
7. Jesus is God's Son (2:15; 3:17; 8:29; 14:33; 16:16; 17:5; 26:63; 27:40, 43, 54). Jesus proves Himself a genuine "Son of God" by His obedience to the Father's will (4:3, 6).
8. Although not a specific title, Jesus is, however, pictured as "the Forgiver of sins on earth" (9:6).
9. He is "the Servant of Javeh" (12:18).
10. He is, upon reflection, the Owner of the world. (Cf. 13:24, 27, 37, 38.)
11. Jesus is "the prophet" (21:11).
12. Jesus is addressed as, or described as "Teacher" (8:19; 9:11; 10:24f.; 12:38; 17:24; 19:16; 22:16, 24, 36; 23:8; 26:18). He thinks of Himself as the disciples' "one Leader" (23:10).
13. Jesus pictures Himself as "the King" of the Kingdom of God judging the servants of God (25:31-34, 40). In His meek Messianic entry into the Holy City He fulfilled the style of Kingship pictured in Zechariah 9:9 which sees Him as Israel's King (21:5).

14. Jesus calls Himself "the Son of Man" (8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8, 32, 40; 13:37, 41; 16:13, 27, 28; 17:9, 12, 22; 19:28; 20:18, 28; 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25:31; 26:2, 24, 45, 64). Because of the evident allusion to the Danielic vision of "the Son of man" (Dan. 7:13, 14) and the greatness of that personage who comes on the clouds of heaven, and because Matthew's Gospel was written after Jesus' vindication in His resurrection, ascension and glorification, should not all of the "Son of man" passages be read in this light? Granted that the original hearers of this expression would not have understood this much, what would this prove? They did not understand many things about the other titles either.

REACTIONS TO JESUS ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

A. DISCIPLES: TRUST AND OBEDIENCE, ALTHOUGH NOT WITHOUT SOME FAILURES.

1. The first disciples (4:18-22) called to participate in Jesus' ministry.
2. Amazement of the Apostles at the calming of the tempest on the sea (8:23-27).
3. Willingness of Matthew to leave all and follow Him (9:9-13).
4. Instances where Jesus' disciples are under attack for following His thinking rather than Pharisean or other popular interpretations. (Cf. 9:14; 12:2; 15:2.)
5. Willingness of disciples to be "babes" to accept Jesus' revelations (11:25ff.).
6. The disciples prove the reality of their discipleship by going to Jesus for explanations and answers (13:10-17, 36).
7. The disciples are baffled about how to feed the 5000, but offer themselves ready helpers when Jesus indicates the course to follow (14:15-18).
8. Peter trusted Jesus to enable him to walk on the sea, but when his faith failed, Jesus' rescue and general mastery of the sea and the situation caused the disciples to confess Him thus: "Truly you are God's Son" (14:28-33)!
9. Troubled by Jesus' intransigence in the face of the theological opposition to His ministry, the disciples fear offending the Pharisees (15:12). However, Jesus' puzzling answer draws out the disciples' real discipleship to Him, when Peter asks for explanations (15:15).
10. Unable to grasp Jesus' enigmatic warning against the influence of popular leaders and parties, they prove themselves unable to trust Jesus to create bread out of nothing, apparently not remembering the two recent miracles of multiplication of food (16:8ff.).
11. Despite many popular opinions to the contrary, the Twelve in the person of Peter confess Jesus' true identity. However, they (Peter) react vigorously to any mention of His future suffering (16:13-23).
12. Peter's exuberant suggestion to place Jesus, Moses and Elijah on equal terms, had to be corrected by God's: "This is my beloved Son, listen to Him" (17:1-13)! His desire to remain on the mountain only points up his lack of comprehension

- concerning the way in which the Messianic mission should be realized.
13. The nine disciples' failure to heal the epileptic boy is attributed to a lack of sufficient fundamental faith (17:14-20).
 14. The second announcement of Jesus' suffering is received with great sorrow (17:22, 23).
 15. Peter supposed Jesus to be subject to the Temple-tax, from which, as Son of the Temple's Owner, He was really exempt (17:24-27).
 16. The disciples supposed that Jesus' Kingdom was one in which human greatness was to be measured by the power wielded over others (18:1-35).
 17. The disciples were astonished that marriage can be dissolved for only one reason, i.e. fornication, and conclude that celibacy is the only solution (19:9-12).
 18. The disciples rebuked people who desired that Jesus bless their children (19:13-15).
 19. The disciples were astonished that wealth should be considered a grave danger to one's eternal salvation (19:26). Despite Jesus' warning, Peter asked what (wealth, position, authority or other) they would receive as rewards for their self-denial (19:27)!
 20. James and John, still refusing to admit the spiritual nature of God's Kingdom, seek power and position for themselves (20:20-28). The others were indignant at the two brothers, jealous that James and John had asked for the coveted positions first.
 21. It is conceivable that some of the crowds present during the triumphal entry actually welcomed Jesus as God's Messianic King without ulterior motives, despite their own mistaken notions about God's intentions for Him (21:1-11).
 22. Despite Jesus' sternness and vigor shown while cleansing the temple, the needy and the little children came to Him with their problems and their praise (21:12-17).
 23. The disciples were astonished at the withering of the fig tree (21:18-22).
 24. The disciples asked for explanations about the prophecy of Jerusalem's fall (24:3).
 25. Mary of Bethany lovingly anointed Jesus "for His burial" (26:6-13).

REACTIONS TO JESUS

26. The Twelve were shaken that one of their number should betray Jesus and they humbly asked in self-doubt whether it were they (26:20ff.).
27. Peter rejected the idea that he should deny Christ (26:31-35). All agreed that they would die with Christ.
28. In the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus refused to be defended by the sword, all forsook Jesus and fled (26:51-56).
29. Peter denied the Lord (26:69-75).
30. Disciples remained at the cross and saw to Jesus' burial (27:55-61).
31. Women behold first the empty tomb and then Jesus risen, then go to inform His disciples (28:1-10).
32. The Eleven behold Him in Galilee and are commissioned to evangelize the world (28:16-20). Although most worshiped Him, some doubted!

B. JOHN THE BAPTIST: PERPLEXITY

1. At Jesus' baptism: "I should be baptized by you, and you come to me?" (3:14).
2. Indirectly through his disciples: "We fast, as do the Pharisees, but your disciples do not" (9:14ff.).
3. In prison: "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (11:2ff.).
4. The apparent officiousness of Jesus' mother and brothers shares something of this same perplexity about Him. (Cf. 12:46-50.)

C. THE MULTITUDES: READINESS TO RECEIVE MATERIAL BLESSINGS, SLOWNESS TO SURRENDER ALL TO JESUS.

1. First summary of ministry (4:23-25).
2. Astonishment at His teaching as one having authority, not as their scribes (7:28, 29).
3. Desire for a qualified, convenient discipleship (9:18-22).
4. Glorifying God for having given authority to forgive sins to men like Jesus (9:1-8).
5. Blind men, healed, disobedient to Jesus' requests for privacy (9:30, 31).
6. Marveling at Jesus' healing of dumb demoniac (9:32, 33).
7. Fickleness in not committing themselves to the wisdom represented in the respective ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus (11:7-19).

8. Refusal to repent, despite the quantity of proof of Jesus' authority to require it (11:20-24).
9. Half-surprised belief asked: "Can this be the Son of David?" after the liberation of a blind and dumb demoniac (12:22, 23).
10. Great crowds listened to the enigmatic Sermon in Parables, but apparently few bothered themselves to ask Jesus its real meaning (13:2, 34, 36; cf. 13:10-17).
11. Crowds flocked together for the Messianic excitement, but not necessarily to believe anything Jesus might say, on the basis of His divine credentials (14:13bff.).
12. The rich young ruler offered to follow but the price was too high (19:16-22).
13. Great crowds joined in the Triumphal Entry of the Messiah for various motives (21:2-11).

D. THE ENEMIES: DEDICATED OPPOSITION

1. Pharisees attacked Jesus' acceptance of the outcasts of Hebrew society (9:9-13). Their reaction is that of men who live in a situation of security and certainty about their own rightness and their judgment of those who disagree with them.
2. Pharisees raise objections to Jesus' flagrant disregard for their private interpretations of the Sabbath Law, views that push them to blind, inhuman mercilessness to God's creatures for whose benefit God gave His law (12:1-14). They begin to plot His destruction.
3. Finding no suitable alternative explanation for His obviously supernatural power, the Pharisees must resort to the accusation that His good deeds were done in harmony with Satan and through his power (12:22-45). But this rejection of God's Spirit as the source of Jesus' power, is forever not to comprehend God's Kingdom as revealed by Jesus (12:28).
4. The Nazarenes, while not opposing Jesus with the vehemence shown on His former major visit to Nazareth (cf. Luke 4:16-30), nevertheless totally undervalued Him, found themselves without adequate explanation of their local Son, and so confirmed their own unbelief (13:54-58).
5. Jesus definitely withdrew from Herod's country when news arrived of the latter's murder of John the Baptist, Jesus' forerunner (14:1-13a; cf. Luke 9:9).

REACTIONS TO JESUS

6. Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem attack Jesus over His disrespect for the traditions of the elders (15:1-20).
7. Pharisees and Sadducees challenge Him to prove His authority by providing them some "sign from heaven" (16:1-4).
8. Pharisees tested Jesus on the divorce question (19:3-9).
9. Chief priests and scribes object to the children's praise of Jesus in highly Messianic terms (21:15-17).
10. All the religious authorities, at various times and ways, attempt to trap Jesus by argument and are bested (21:23—22:46).
11. The Sanhedrin decided the death of Jesus and finally succeeded in carrying it out (26:1-5, 47—27:44). They accepted full responsibility for His death, freeing the political authority from this responsibility (27:24, 25).
12. To guarantee against fraudulent resurrection, the religious authorities sealed the tomb (27:62-66).
13. To counteract resurrection testimonies, the Sanhedrin bribed false witnesses (28:11-15).

THE KIND OF KINGDOM GOD HAS IN MIND ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

1. By presenting Jesus as the humble babe of Bethlehem, adored by foreigners and rejected by His own people, then rescued by fleeing into a foreign country, Matthew pictures the hard reality of a Kingdom of God whose true value can be appreciated only through the eyes of faith and by the spiritual long view of things. Those who dreamed of a triumphalistic Messianic Kingdom must see the lowliness and suffering of Him of whom Matthew must speak (Matt. 2).
2. Matthew alone quotes Jesus' justification for His own immersion by John the Baptist (3:15). Jesus' Messiahship is founded on the principle that "We must do everything God says to, whether we understand it perfectly or not, whether we agree that it applies to us or not, whether it is popular or not, whether our best friends think we should or not,—just because God said to do it!" This is a Kingdom that collides with all notions of a Messianic utopia where we all get to do what WE want to.
3. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) is the first concrete answer Matthew includes to the question: "What does it mean to fulfil all righteousness? What does it mean to submit ourselves to the Kingdom of God, i.e. to His plans and will?" If this Sermon is a manifesto of the Kingdom, and if Jesus Himself is the realization of all that God intended in the Old Testament Law (5:17-20), and if His Word is that which God now substitutes for that Law (5:21-48), then THE KINGDOM IS JESUS HIMSELF present among men. He is the new Law. Consequently, the Church is none other than the totality of those who follow HIM toward that fulfilment of God's plan that Jesus has reached. The promise of obtaining the Kingdom is directed to those aware of their spiritual poverty (5:3), the persecuted for doing God's will (5:10), and those whose obedience to God's will exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20).
4. The continued presence of threatened judgment upon the believer stands out in stark contrast with pre-Christian Jewish views of the Messianic Kingdom, according to which, in the days of the Messiah, the people of God would be miraculously and instantly purified. (Cf. 5:19a, 20, 22, 26, 29, 30; 6:1, 14, 15; 7:2, 13, 14, 19, 21-23, 26, 27).
5. If the Kingdom of God and His righteousness is to be sought first, above and beyond all human necessities (6:33), then it is not a

Kingdom that eliminates the struggles involved in our human existence, but rather becomes the goal of our efforts despite the continued existence of these "normal necessities" (6:24-34). The Kingdom must be understood as a present reality, present IN the humdrum of our existential world, not merely an eschatological release from that reality. The purpose of this insertion of the Kingdom INTO the sinful world is to be light to illuminate its darkness, salt to save it from its corruption (5:13-16).

6. The non-nationalistic, non-racial character of the Kingdom is underlined in the account of the healing of the centurion's servant (8:5-13). The specifically racial and nationalistic claims of the Jews received a serious blow dealt by Jesus' comments on the exceptional faith of the Roman.
7. The Kingdom's standard of judgment is not based upon precise performance of rituals, but upon the real sincerity of one's motives for all that he does (5:8, 11, 19, 20, 22, 28, 32, 37, 44-47; 6:1ff., 24; 7:12, 18-20, 23).
8. God's Kingdom is His mastery over human uncleanness and disease (8:1-4, 14-17). It means His personal entrance into our human misery and bearing it Himself (8:17 = Isaiah 53:4).
9. God's rule must be considered as absolute, more demanding than the highest human need or responsibilities (8:18-22).
10. God's Kingdom includes His control over the elements of the natural world (8:23-27).
11. God's Kingdom is manifest in His total mastery over Satan's kingdom (8:28—9:1).
12. God's Kingdom is evident in His right to forgive man's sin (9:2-8).
13. The Kingdom of God is not a sect of purists ("the pure; the true Church"), but a movement that is genuinely open to all without distinction. If Matthew the publican can belong to it, ANYONE can (9:9-13)!
14. The Kingdom is not triumphalistic, does not force men to believe or be righteous, but it proceeds because of its missionary spirit. Its missionaries, because they labor where frictions among men are the bitterest, where selfishness explodes in all its forms, must expect persecutions and death (10:16ff.). Even though God is present and judging His people, He may not intervene to halt those who kill them (10:28). Jesus' disciples are to be identified with Him in suffering and service (10:16-40).
15. The unification of all men in the Kingdom of God can only come

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about by the elimination of all false unities, even those founded upon blood relationships (10:34-39).

16. The Kingdom of God, in its earthly manifestation, can suffer opposition and violent attempts to force it to be something other than what it was designed to be (11:12). This is in perfect harmony with the absolute freedom of the human will to accept its teachings or not (11:14).
17. God's government of heaven and earth includes His gracious will to hide significant truth from those who pride themselves as being "the wise and understanding," while revealing the truth to humble, sincere disciples, "the babes" (11:25-30).
18. The rule of God over His people lifts them over the highest institutions of the Mosaic Law, the Sabbath and the Temple (12:1-14). "The Son of man is lord of the sabbath."
19. The operational power of the Spirit of God working in Jesus of Nazareth is positive proof that the Kingdom of God has come and that Satan is really defeated and plundered (12:22-29)!
20. Something greater than the wisdom of Solomon and the testimony of Jonah is involved in Jesus' representation of God's Kingdom (12:38-43).
21. The Kingdom of God is not founded upon fleshly ties, not even to the Messiah Himself, much less to Abraham, but upon doing what the Father in heaven wills (12:46-50).
22. Jesus presented the "secrets of the Kingdom of heaven" to everyone listening, but in parabolic form so as to distinguish between listeners. Those who trusted Jesus enough to come to Him for explanations, received more information about the nature, progress and destiny of the Kingdom of God, because they gained the explanations of the unforgettable parables they already possessed. Those who did not care enough for truth, or did not trust Jesus to know what He was about, not only did not gain this vital information, but also lost the value of the parables they had heard (13:10-17, 34, 35). Thus, the Church is made up of those who desire to trust and learn from Jesus even those truths of the Kingdom that are unclear, unpalatable, or seem wrong.
23. The kind of Kingdom God has in mind has the following characteristics:
 - a. The effectiveness of God's rule in individual lives depends directly upon each one's personal openness to truth and his willingness to let God rule (13:1-9, 18-23). If so, the Kingdom

THE KIND OF KINGDOM GOD HAS IN MIND

- is not a materialistic regime that conquers by force of arms, but by the painfully slow process of planting truth in men's hearts, which are of widely varied character.
- b. The temporary presence of evil in the Kingdom of God is not His fault, because He is not the source of evil. Rather, He has inaugurated a process whereby final judgment will reveal the truly righteous and segregate the wicked. The "righteous," the congregation of the Messiah, really are the citizens of His Kingdom (13:24-30, 36-43). The continued presence of evil in the world is clear proof of man's moral freedom to decide his own fate (13:47-50). The Kingdom is the work of a God who knows the time of its maturing and of the final day.
 - c. Despite its microscopic beginnings, the Kingdom of God will grow and become a mighty empire, because of its internal life and extensive expansion (13:31, 32).
 - d. The Kingdom will grow quietly in the world, without great noise and commotion, but its progress will not be hindered until its intensive, transforming power influences all it touches (13:33).
 - e. Whether discovered accidentally or sought deliberately, the Kingdom of God, when discovered and appreciated at its true value, is worth all it costs (13:44-46).
 - f. The theologian who is a disciple of the Kingdom is a wealthy man who can bless his guests with treasured truth, the best of the old and the finest of the new (13:52).
- 24. It is not a kingdom in which external purity and ceremony has any real importance, but where the real purity of one's heart, as this is manifested in his spirit of obedience to whatever God requires, is everything (15:1-20).
 - 25. It is a Kingdom whose King, the Son of David, has time to bless even CANAANITES, despite the limitations of His personal mission to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:21-28)!
 - 26. It is a Kingdom where half-Jewish, half-Gentile populations can sit down to the Messianic banquet together, not because of personal worthiness, but because of the Messiah's bounty and graciousness (15:29-39).
 - 27. It is a Kingdom, rather, that one enters by death to self, and by acknowledgment of the true identity and consequent rights of the King (16:13-28). The "community of the Messiah" ("The

Church of Christ'), then, is but the *subjective* manifestation of the Messiah's *objective* rule. The Church is, in short, "the people of the Kingdom," the necessary result of the proclamation of God's sovereignty, a proclamation which calls into being a real assembly or communitary reality: the Church. It was to begin in the lifetime of Jesus' earthly disciples (16:28).

28. The Kingdom's power, while at the disposition of the disciples, is not automatic nor divisible from faith (17:14-21).
29. The "sons of the Kingdom": are free citizens, above even the obligatory Temple-tax (17:24-27).
30. Death to self, absolutely essential to entrance in the Kingdom, manifests itself in a refusal to recognize any standard of greatness other than the amount of service one renders to the weakest, smallest, least important in the Kingdom (18:1-35). No pride in achievement can justify unmercifulness or harsh treatment of any member of the Kingdom, however seemingly insignificant.
31. The Kingdom God has in mind is a community of the Messiah, yet it admits its internal problem and deals with them in an orderly manner (18:15-35). The problem of continued sinning and consequent need for forgiveness is to remain a live one, even after the beginning of the Kingdom. It is a Kingdom whose common life is characterized by its concern for the little ones, its reconciliation of brethren, its forgiveness of offenses, its purity of intentions, its harmony of life and its common prayer.
32. The Kingdom God has in mind is concerned with a right understanding of male-female relationships (19:3-12). Celibacy, even for sake of the Kingdom, is not possible for everyone.
33. The Kingdom of God belongs to "the children and such as they," not those whose adulthood makes them too proud to come to Jesus (19:13-15).
34. The Kingdom God has in mind does not belong exclusively to the wealthy, whom most people would automatically judge most qualified for it, being the most blessed by God who furnishes the power to become wealthy (19:13-30).
35. In God's Kingdom earth's value-systems and power structures have no importance, except in a negative way in the sense that they are condemned among believers (19:23-26).
36. Loyalty to Jesus Christ, as this is manifest in the sacrifices made for His sake, will be richly rewarded in that expression of God's Kingdom "in the world to come" (19:27-30).

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37. In fact, God's Kingdom attributes no priority to anyone on the basis of supposed merits or personal achievements, because the basis of blessing is the free choice and mercy of the King (20:1-16).
38. The usual, earthly power-structures have no relation to anything Jesus has in mind for His Kingdom. Rather, the measure of greatness and power is service and usefulness to others, not self-seeking and self-aggrandisement (20:20-28).
39. God intends that His Kingdom shall belong to people who will produce the results God desires. Therefore, it cannot long remain the private possession of those who do not (21:23-43).
40. The Kingdom of Heaven is a question of free choice that may be accepted or rejected, but not, however, without serious consequences. Many are invited into it, but few prove finally acceptable (22:1-14).
41. Surprisingly, God's Kingdom does not conflict with normal, constituted human authority nor vice versa, and may be considered consistent with it when properly exercised (22:15-21).
42. While the present phase of the Kingdom of God is played out on earth's stage, the resurrection of the dead ushers men into a different state of life with the God of the living (22:23-33).
43. The religion and ethics of God's Kingdom may be summed up as love for God and unselfish service to one's neighbor (22:34-40).
44. The "son of David," long-awaited Messianic King, must also be the Lord of David (22:41-46).
45. In God's Kingdom, there are not to be "many chiefs," just one Father, one Teacher, one Leader. Everyone else is one of the "brothers" (23:7-10).
46. Nor is God's Kingdom to be exclusive and sectarian on the basis of human traditions and proselytization. Rather, its concerns will be with the things that count: justice, mercy and faith, inward purity, consciousness of God, moral understanding, hatred of sin (23:13-36).
47. The Kingdom God has in mind and of which Jesus is the Messianic King, will not be without its "prophets, wise men and theologians," sent as Christian missionaries to save Israel (23:34). Not only is their preparation emphasized here, but also their mission of mercy to an unworthy people.

48. The way in which God's Kingdom would be carried on will create a situation in which constant vigilance and constant preparation are absolutely essential to please the King (24:36—25:13). There remains the live possibility of losing everything, despite one's privileged position as servant of the King. The King's arrival will be delayed (24:45; 25:5). But the daily life of the citizen must be one marked by faith, sobriety, alertness and dedicated service.
49. The Kingdom involves a trust of the King's goods left in custody of His servants, to be utilized for His benefit (25:14-30). The King's return will be delayed (25:19). This only emphasizes the greatness of the opportunity to make good use of His goods for His glory.
50. The Kingdom involves a proper, personal care for the world's needy to whom service is to be rendered as if to the King Himself (25:31-46).
51. The Kingdom God has in mind is based on covenant sealed in Jesus' blood, furnishing the forgiveness of sins (26:28). The "fruit of the vine" which symbolized "the blood of the covenant" would be shared with Jesus' disciples "in the Father's Kingdom" (26:29).
52. Since Jesus was tried and crucified by the Romans and Jews as "the King of the Jews," and since God vindicated Jesus' right to this title by raising Him from the dead, it should be clear to Matthew's readers that God's Kingdom, the Kingdom of Israel as God envisioned it, was not to be of the type usually dreamed of in current Jewish speculation, but precisely the Kingdom Jesus continuously and consistently represented to them. It is almost as if Matthew were saying: "The exclusively Jewish 'King of the Jews' is dead, never to rise again, not crucified by His own people, but by the King Himself. In His place there arose the true King of the new Israel, the King of the universe with authority in heaven and on earth." (Cf. 28:18.)
53. While our King is one in the daily expectation of whose return from a long trip we are to live (cf. 24:45-48; 25:5, 19), He is always near us, by our side, and His faithfulness will not fail (28:20).
54. Whereas in Mark we read of "the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God," the object of the announcement being the person of Jesus

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Himself, in Matthew the characteristic expression is "the gospel of the Kingdom," almost as if it is meant that the object of the Gospel, the purpose of the Christian message is the actual proclamation of the Kingdom. (Cf. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14 in contrast to Mark 1:1, 14).

55. Because the *Kingdom* of God expresses the *will* of God, His Kingdom is evident in His choice to reveal His plans, not to the intelligentsia, but to little children (11:25, 26).
56. God does not will that any of these little ones should be lost through neglect or stumbling blocks of other disciples (18:14).
57. **WHATEVER** God wills is the essence of the Kingdom of God in one's life, regardless of how deeply that cuts across our choices or preferences (26:39).

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

1. Despite the variety of events in the history of the Jewish people, as these are noted in the record of Jesus' genealogy, God was silently working to bring His Messiah into the world (1:1-17).
2. Despite the real perplexities of Joseph about his beloved Mary, God was taking care of Jesus by providing Him a legal father and protection for His mother. Despite human experience of a virgin birth, God chose this method to come into the world, so that in the human Jesus, we learn what it means to have "God with us" (1:18-25).
3. Despite the clever planning of a murderous king, God rescued Jesus from harm and furnished sufficient funds for an extended sojourn in Egypt by gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh (2:1-21).
4. God will severely judge an unrepentant Israel, notwithstanding her claims to physical descent from Abraham, unless she embraces "the Lord" for whom John prepared the way (3:1-12).
5. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus underscored again and again "the Fatherhood of God" and His Fatherly care. (Cf. 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 4, 6, 8, 14, 15, 18, 26, 32; 7:11.) Despite the terror of the persecutions which would tempt Christians to close themselves up in monastic seclusion, their purpose must be to glorify their Father who watches over their most secret thought and cares for their most fundamental needs.
6. The Mission of the Twelve is born in prayer to "the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (9:38). It is His field for which He is responsible and into whose service we pray He will raise up laborers. Despite the temptations to deny everything because of the terrors of the persecutions, God watches over His creation and will bless with victory all who proclaim His Word, although He may not intervene to halt those who would kill the body (10:26-31). He will not forget even the smallest help given His people (10:40-42).
7. Notwithstanding the incomprehension encountered by Jesus among His own people, God's sovereign decision to reveal Himself and His will in precisely the way Jesus had followed was gratefully accepted by Jesus (11:25-27). God's design actually worked and was being realized by Jesus' works. The sovereign Lord of heaven and earth is not forced to bow before those who believe themselves lords of the world ("the wise and understanding") (11:25).
8. It is God who can guarantee that all the sacrifices of Christ and

His people will only result in life lived at its best (16:24-28). Life belongs to God, and only He can transform it. All that Jesus demands becomes comprehensible, if seen as obedience to God who by resurrection defeats our death, even as He did it for Jesus (16:21).

9. It is God who speaks from heaven, confirming Jesus' ministry, notwithstanding what all human judgment must pronounce a failure in His mission and procedure and results (17:5). Success, in God's view, must be obtained at the cross, both by Jesus and by each single disciple.
10. With God all things are possible, even the damnation of men despite their wealth and the saving of those who sacrifice all they possess for Jesus' sake, and who would be considered "poor" in human judgment (19:23-30).
11. The absolute Lordship of God is manifest in His free gift of grace to those whom He wishes to bless, regardless of the apparent unworthiness of these latter (20:1-16). Rather than measure the recompense on the basis of one's achievements, Jesus reaffirms that everything depends upon the free choice and mercy of God.
12. The sovereignty of God is underlined in the Parables of the Vineyard and the Marriage Feast, in that the owner of the vineyard can (and should) put the former share-farmers to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants, and in that the king can rightfully send his troops to destroy the murderers of his messengers, burn their city, and replace them with just anyone who would come. But, even so, all must conform to his terms for remaining in his grace (21:33—22:14).
13. Jesus' quotation of Zechariah 13:7 points to God as the Ruler of history and who does everything according to His plan for man's salvation, even if this is not the kind of Messianism that man would design (26:31, 32).
14. Even in the attitude of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (26:36-46) we see the theme of human weakness in the presence of the will of God that must be carried out to the utmost. Temptation to give in is something that continually hangs over man, and only God can furnish him the strength to endure it.
15. The Garden arrest must take place "according to the Scriptures," because God, who ordered these events and is back of the Scriptures, is the final, real Actor in every event (26:56).
16. After Jesus' victory and receiving universal authority, He promises

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His people that, while they carry out His mission on earth, He will be with them until the end of the age. This means that His people are those disciples who are determined to follow the same path He did, confiding only in the blessing of God (Christ), sure that they will never be alone, since He, the sovereign God in Christ, is always guarding them (28:16-20).

17. The sovereignty of God is seen in the picture of Jesus as the Man over whom God had been watching even before His birth and had foreseen and prepared for every part of His life. This is especially emphasized in His fulfilment of prophecies. Among Matthew's at least forty formal quotations of the Old Testament, the following are expressly cited as being particularly indicative of God's preparation for and care of Jesus even before His appearance on earth:

MATTHEW	OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGE
1:23	Isa. 7:14
2:6	Mic. 5:2
2:15	Hos. 11:1 (cf. Exod. 4:22)
2:23	"prophets" Isa. 52:13—53:12; Ps. 22; Isa. 11:1?
3:3	Isa. 40:3
4:4	Deut. 8:3
4:7	Deut. 6:16
4:10	Deut. 6:13
4:15, 16	Isa. 9:1, 2
8:17	Isa. 53:4
11:10	Mal. 3:1
12:18-21	Isa. 42:1-4
21:5	Zech. 9:9
21:13b	Jer. 7:11
21:16	Ps. 8:2 (LXX 8:3)
21:42	Ps. 118:22, 23
22:44	Ps. 110:1
23:38, 39	Ps. 118:26; Jer. 22:5
24:29-31	Isa. 13:10; Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:10; 2:31; 3:15; Isa. 34:4b; Hag. 2:6, 21; Zech. 12:10, 12; Dan. 7:13, 14; Isa. 27:13; Deut. 30:4; Zech. 2:6
26:31	Zech. 13:7
26:64	Ps. 110:1; Dan. 7:13, 14
27:9, 10	Zech. 11:12, 13; Jer. 32:6-15
27:46	Ps. 22:1

THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

What kind of information did Jesus reveal about God's Fatherhood? While clearly picturing Him as "the Lord your God" (4:10; 22:37), as the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (10:28), as the sovereign "Lord of heaven and earth" (11:25) and as "king of the kingdom of God (18:23, 35), etc., our Lord laid heavy emphasis on God's fatherly character. Does Jesus picture Him as a celestial Santa Claus or as an unquestioning, all-accepting divine Grandfather or otherwise? Consider these revelations:

1. All our good deeds must be done so that others' praise will go to our Father (5:16).
2. Loving kindness to enemies makes us true sons of our Father in heaven (5:44). His perfection is our standard (5:48).
3. Our acts of righteousness must be done with a view to being rewarded by our heavenly Father alone (6:1-18).
4. In contrast to dead, pagan deities whose devotees must hopelessly, endlessly cry to them, our heavenly Father knows that we need daily necessities (6:32), and He gives only good gifts to those who ask Him (7:11).
5. Entrance into heaven's Kingdom depends on doing the will of Jesus' Father (7:21).
6. Early disciples, on trial for their Christian testimony, may depend with full confidence on the Spirit of our Father speaking through them (10:20).
7. Nothing sinister can happen to a faithful disciple, apart from what our Father permits (10:29).
8. However, it is before Jesus' Father in heaven that the disciple will be acknowledged or disowned, according to his attitude and faithfulness on earth (10:32f.).
9. Jesus sustained a unique, unshared relationship to this Father, whom He could call "my Father" in a way distinct from the relationship to this Father known by every disciple, because the Father had committed all things to Him (11:25-27).
10. The kinship to Jesus that really counts is not physical, based on a coincidental or miraculous fleshly relationship, but rather spirit, based on doing the will of His heavenly Father (12:50).
11. Although temporarily obscured in this life, after the judgment the righteous will be perfectly obvious in the kingdom of their Father (13:43).

12. Any doctrine not finding its origin in the will of Jesus' heavenly Father will be eradicated, and those who follow blind leaders who hold such doctrines will suffer the consequences along with them (15:13).
13. Jesus' Father in heaven revealed to Peter the true identity of Jesus (16:17).
14. Our Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost, so their angels are granted instant access to His presence (18:14, 10).
15. Jesus' return to earth will be surrounded with His Father's glory (16:27).
16. All of the might of Jesus' Father in heaven is at the disposition of two humble disciples who agree to ask Him for something in prayer (18:19).
17. However, Jesus' Heavenly Father will not tolerate any unwillingness to forgive in His subjects (18:35).
18. It is Jesus' heavenly Father whose will determines places of honor in His Kingdom (20:23).
19. God is the only one who rightly deserves to be called "Father" in the high, ethical sense of Provider of spiritual life and guidance (23:9).
20. The Father alone knows the day of Christ's return (24:36).
21. The righteous will finally be blessed by the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (25:34), and not unlikely, He is the author of the curse upon the wicked (25:41).
22. Jesus viewed the glorious Messianic Kingdom as belonging to His Father (26:29).
23. Jesus pleaded with His Father to remove the cup of suffering (26:29, 42), and remained steadfastly confident that His Father could at once put more than twelve legions of angels at His disposal (26:53).

THE KIND OF JUDGMENT GOD WILL EXERCISE ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

1. John preached repentance and deeds as all-important for spiritual preparation for the Messiah's coming, not pretended fleshly ties to Abraham. The judgment, while involving all of Israel, will examine each one individually (3:1-12). The Messiah Himself would be personally responsible to execute summary judgment.
2. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, underlined the inner purity of heart, the kind of motivated person that seeks God's will and man's good above personal interest. Only this kind of person will have God's approval. (Cf. 5:3-10, 21ff., 27ff., 44-48.) The rigor by which men deal with others will be the measure of severity or clemency by which they themselves are to be judged (5:7; 6:12, 14f.; 7:1-5). Men will be judged on the basis of what they do with JESUS' words (7:21-27). All are judged by their deeds and attitudes (7:15-23). Jesus Himself will decide the fate of all (7:22). God will not judge men merely by the standards of the most pious theologians of the day, the scribes and Pharisees (5:21), but against the standard of perfection itself (5:48)!
3. In the dialogue with the Gadarene demons, they demand to know if Jesus is come to punish them "before the time" of the final judgment (8:29). This suggests without stating it that Jesus Himself is the final Judge by whom these dark spirits must be judged and sentenced. How much more would mankind be judged by Him? "Before the time," however, means that the demons, and evil in general, are yet free to do their worst, even if drastically curbed for awhile and in limited ways. (The demons are cast out of the poor sufferers.)
4. God desires to exercise a judgment tempered with mercy, not merely the rigid, heartless censorship practiced by the Pharisees (Matt. 9:9-13, especially v. 13; 12:7).
5. God will save the man who endures to the end (10:22).
6. God will not destroy in hell those who, however frightened by persecutors and death, give their testimony boldly and confess Jesus before men (10:26-33).
7. God will judge sinners on the basis of their attitude toward His Holy Spirit (12:31f.), on the basis of the character of their heart as this is seen in their words, (12:33-37), and on their opportunities to know the truth (12:38-42), and on the basis of the practical emptiness of their sterile lives (12:43-45).
8. For the emphases on judgment in the Sermon in Parables (Matt. 13), see Note at the end.

9. God judges men's ideas on the basis of their origin, not upon their acceptability to "current scholarship" (15:13). If their ideas did not originate in the truth of God, they will be eradicated in judgment.
10. God cannot tolerate any rivals to Jesus His Son, not even the greatest Law-givers and Prophets of Old Testament religion (17:5, 5). Men must see "Jesus only" (17:8).
11. Greatness in the Kingdom of God is measured by God's concern for the least, the last and the lost (18:10-14). Anything that causes these to be lost must be eliminated on the penalty of eternal destruction (18:8, 9). God will use the same rigor of judgment with which men treat one another (18:23-35).
12. The lesson of the barren fig tree cursed (21:18-22) is that God eliminates useless, unfruitful creatures, with a suddenness and severity that may surprise the observer, but with undoubted justice, because of the richness of opportunities to produce what, by their nature, they should be expected to produce.
13. The severe condemnations of Pharisaism and Jerusalem (23:1-39) teach that God's judgment condemns making religion a burden (23:1-4), "proud humility" (23:5-12), partisan zeal (23:13-15), the art of evasion (23:16-22), loss of the sense of moral proportions (23:23, 24), external purity in contrast to inner pollution (23:25-28), abuse of God's messengers (23:29-36), rejection of Love's appeals (23:37-39). They are without excuse, because they know God's will and do not do it (Cf. v. 3).
14. The great Eschatological Discourse deals with judgment upon Israel, then upon the world (Chapters 24, 25). The bases of judgment mentioned are readiness, faithfulness, usefulness, faithfulness to Jesus.

NOTE that all the major discourses recorded by Matthew proceed to a climax in judgment:

- a. The Sermon on the Mount ends on the parable of judgment against the house built on the sand foundation (7:24-27).
- b. The Sermon on the Apostolic Mission rises to a climax from fear of human persecutors to concern for not being acknowledged by Jesus in the presence of God the Father (10:26-33). The result of God's judgment will be determined by the positions taken during this life (10:34-39).
- c. The Sermon on John the Baptist, "Shall We Look For Another Christ?" emphasizes the theme of judgment upon the

most favored cities where Jesus had bestowed His richest favors of blessing, healing and teaching. Judgment, says Jesus, will be in proportion to the light against which we have sinned (11:20-24). The very choice to hide certain truth from "the wise and understanding" while revealing them "to babes," is itself a judgment in which Jesus fully concurs (11:25ff.).

- d. The Sermon on the Kingdom of Heaven, told in truth-hiding parables, is itself a masterpiece of judgment executed upon those who had no desire for truth (13:10-17). The parable of the Sower emphasizes the grounds of the difference in reactions to truth and consequent judgment upon individuals (13:1-9, 18-23). The parable of the Weeds underscores the certainty of judgment, despite what appears to be unnecessary delay in its coming. It explains also the impossibility to pronounce premature judgments on our part (13:24-30, 36-43). The parables of the Yeast and the Mustard Seed pronounce God's judgment upon the progress of the Kingdom, despite man's opinions to the contrary (13:31-33). The parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Precious Pearl express God's judgment of the value of the Kingdom: it is worth all it costs the individual who acquires it (13:44-46). The story of the Dragnet repeats the message of the final, inexorable division of the world's people (13:47-50).
- e. The Sermon on Personal Relations in the Kingdom thunders judgment without mercy against the unmerciful, by means of the parable of the Two Debtors (18:23-35).
- f. The Sermon on the Sins of the Religious (Matt. 23), while itself almost entirely a thundering denunciation of a multitude of sins, rises to its dramatic climax in the words: "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth. . . . Truly, I say to you, all this will come upon this generation" (23:33-36).
- g. The Sermon on the End of the World (24, 25) underlines again and again not only the fall of everything not in God's plans, but also the necessity for immediate, personal preparation.

“BY THEIR FRUITS YOU WILL KNOW THEM”

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEARING FRUIT AND DOING WHAT JESUS DEMANDS

ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

1. John the Baptist defined “repentance” by demanding that those who pretend to repent should prove their sincerity by producing “fruits worthy of repentance,” i.e. the characteristic deeds of a changed life. Unless these deeds were forthcoming, punitive judgment would overtake the unfruitful, despite all pretenses and claims to the contrary (3:1-12).
2. The Messiah Himself insists upon being baptized by John “to fulfill all righteousness,” i.e. to do what God defines as right for any man (3:14, 15). The plan of God can be brought to fulfillment only in this way, not by fleeing one’s responsibility, but by accepting it completely.
3. The Sermon on the Mount is packed with blessings, admonitions and teaching to underscore the importance of deeds:
 - a. The active “peacemakers” are the sons of God (5:9). Only those who ardently desire to do the will of God will truly be satisfied in the Kingdom (5:6).
 - b. The true “salt and light” are useful to God (5:13-16).
 - c. Doing and teaching is God’s standard of greatness in the Kingdom (5:19).
 - d. Worshiping (5:24), almsgiving (6:2-4), praying (6:7ff.) and fasting (6:16ff.) are assumed to be part of the normal activity of the godly disciple, but are not more important a part of personal piety than active reconciliation (5:21-26), personal self-denial (5:27-32), absolute honesty (5:33-37), merciful generosity (5:38-42), and actively blessing one’s enemies (5:43-48).
 - e. The same judgment threatened against imposters is the standard for unfruitful disciples (7:19).
4. Real union with Christ is to be enjoyed, not by family relationship to Him by blood or by accidents of birth in the right family or people, but by obedience to the will of the Father (12:46-50).
5. The Sermon in Parables (chapter 13) links the disciples’ fruit-bearing to his understanding the word of the Kingdom (13:19, 23) as well as to his moral character (13:21, 22). Interest is shown, further, in the differing quantities of fruit borne even among the fruitful disciples. The Kingdom demands total commitment (13:44-46).

6. Only total commitment to the will of God, even in the prospect of suffering and death, will be rewarded with life in its highest and best sense (16:24-28). Every man will be repaid for what he has done.
7. Instead of commanding the rich young ruler to trust Him, Jesus told him something to do (19:21). Although this implicitly involved total trust in Jesus to know what must be done to inherit eternal life, the deed is in the foreground. (Contrast John 6:29.) Life is to be had in doing what God wills (19:17).
8. Men will be rewarded on the basis of what they have given up for Jesus' sake (19:29).
9. The cursing of the fig tree because it had no fruit, just leaves, becomes an enacted lesson on the destiny of the fruitless, pre-tentious Israel that refused to believe Jesus (21:18-22). It is also a warning to every believer concerning the damnation of uselessness and the punishment of proud promises without performance. It applies to Jesus as well, because He too has made tremendous promises which could only be kept by going to the cross.
10. The Parable of the Two Sons emphasizes actually doing the will of the Father, as opposed to merely professing obedience without really doing it (21:28-32).
11. The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (21:33-46) explains that the Kingdom of God will not remain the private possession of those who do not produce the results God intends. Rather, it will rightly pass over to those who will (21:41, 43).
12. In all the lessons on vigilance during the eschatological wait for the Lord's return, the emphasis is laid upon usefulness in the Lord's service, doing the job He assigns, making the preparation that is needed for His return, utilizing the goods He entrusts to our custody, and caring for the people made in His image (24:45—25:46).
13. The Great Commission (28:18-20) includes the order to "teach them to observe all that I have commanded you." The teaching has as its goal the production of the results Jesus desired.

THE KIND OF RIGHTEOUSNESS GOD HAS IN MIND ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

1. "It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (3:15) is not merely Jesus' reason for being baptized by John the Baptist, but His reason for living as He did and His model for us.
2. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Law of Moses is not despised, but fulfilled; not denied, but surpassed. Since Christ has come to fulfill God's promises and standards, He Himself takes over the function of the Law, and becomes the Law. The Law is already the realization of the Kingdom of God among men in the person of Jesus Himself, a law that cannot be codified, but must be totally accepted. It is no longer sufficient to perform certain actions. What counts is the spiritual attitude with which they are performed and the intentions that motivated them. In fact, much of Jesus' teaching can be found in the Old Testament in one form or another. What is radically new about His view of righteousness is its new motivation: "for my sake" (cf. 7:21-27), i.e. because the demands made are authoritative and final because of Jesus' authority. Everything depends upon accepting Jesus as the Christ, and having His power to live the kind of life described herein. Otherwise, everything falls back into a legalistic, hence, impossible, concept of righteousness. The standard is no longer a codified one, but God's own character, the goal for which He furnishes the Spirit to help us surpass the evil that dominates us (5:48). Only this kind of righteousness will surpass that of the sterile religionists and bring glory to God (5:10, 20). But it is a way to travel, an attitude to pursue, rather than a virtue intrinsic to discipleship. It is a search (6:33). Man is blessed in the measure he desires it (5:6).
3. The Lord's Prayer (6:9, 10) asks that God manifest His holiness, rule and will on earth, all in perfect harmony with the expectations created by the Old Testament doctrine of the Messianic age. The kind of righteousness Jesus has in mind, then, is that attitude which sanctifies God, seeks first His Kingdom and His righteousness and does His will (6:33).
4. There is no necessary separation between the concerns of the Kingdom of God and those of life lived on this earth, no false dichotomy between spirit and matter. While much Jewish apocalyptic had pictured a materialistic Kingdom, Jesus pictures it as something to be spiritually understood and appreciated. While other Jews prepared for a purely spiritual Kingdom with no

THE KIND OF RIGHTEOUSNESS GOD HAS IN MIND

earthly reality, Jesus recognized the human situation that is to continue until the end of the world, a situation in which God's people will need food, clothing and shelter, just like all men anywhere (6:24-34). The difference, however, is in what each chooses as his personal preoccupation: desire to please the Heavenly Father, or worry about personal needs.

5. The patterns of piety under the Old Testament system are definitely old, out-moded, worn, however useful in their time, but definitely to be substituted with new forms, new content (9:14-17). The wedding-joy of the Messianic Kingdom must not be marred by the severe piety that rightly characterized pre-messianic times. Jesus is not merely reforming Judaism with its legal system, but making a qualitative leap into a new relationship with God.
6. Righteousness, i.e. right thinking and doing, then, according to Jesus, means coming to Him, believing in Him, studying in His school, receiving peace of soul from Him alone (11:28-30). The life-style pictured for the disciple cannot be divorced from the Christology of Matthew, because the invitations to enter into the Kingdom of God are intimately associated with invitations to embrace the person of Jesus Christ the King.
7. This submission to God's will as it is revealed in Jesus means denying oneself for His sake and willingly accepting any suffering encountered in the line of duty for which all must answer to Jesus (16:24-28).
8. Righteousness, in Jesus' eyes, does not seek control over others nor promotes self-importance (18:1-35). Rather, real righteousness is humble, concerned about others' weaknesses and welfare and problems, dedicated to restoring harmony among men, and aware of its own need of God's mercy. (Cf. also 19:13-15.)
9. Righteousness, as Jesus defines it, does not seek easy escape from marital responsibility (19:3-9).
10. Righteousness not only does not hinder those weaker than oneself, but seeks to become like them in humility (19:13-15).
11. Perfection is a question of removing everything that would hinder perfect service to God and others (19:16-30). Strikingly, this answer is given to answer the request: "What good deed must I do to have eternal life?"
12. Righteousness does not depend upon one's own merits or efforts, but upon the free choice and generosity of God (20:1-16).
13. Righteousness does not express itself in self-seeking preeminence

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and priority over others, but in self-giving service for others (20:20-28).

14. Real righteousness does not consist in professing allegiance to God yet without producing the results that this allegiance should produce (21:18-22, 28—22:14).
15. All of religion and ethics may be expressed in the two great commandments (22:34-40).
16. True religion consists in doing and teaching what God has ordered, regardless of the hypocrisy obvious in the life of those who occupy the teaching position (23:2, 3).
17. Righteousness consists in humble recognition of our equality under Christ our only superior (23:8-12). True greatness is measured by service.
18. The "weightier matters of the law (are) justice, mercy and faith," although the positive ordinances are not to be neglected either (23:23).
19. The kind of righteousness Jesus has in mind is not a settled question, in the sense that any disciple can think himself to possess it perfectly. Rather, it is a life to be lived every day in the shadow of the real possibility of losing it (24:12, 13). It is a life lived under the daily tension of constant preparedness for whatever events signal the end for each one (24:42—25:13). It involved a proper utilization of the Lord's goods left in our custody (25:14-30). Every earthly decision involves our taking a position in the presence of God and Christ the Judge (25:31-46). The Christian ethic is not simply contemplative, but is highly practical, and by which all will be judged: did your trust of the Messiah make you generously helpful with your fellowman?

THE PARTICIPATION OF THE GENTILES IN THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

The Gentiles are a special class to themselves, whose reaction to Jesus deserves special note. In fact, although Matthew mentions none among Jesus' regular disciples or enemies, because His mission was principally to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," he does purposely include numerous mentions of them all in a favorable sense. The only significant negative Gentile personages are Pontius Pilate and his wife who figure in Jesus' trials, and while not pictured as particularly believers, both underline Jesus' innocence in different ways (27:18, 19, 24). Pilate's final decision to protect himself rather than an innocent man, needs no comment. The soldiers of the battalion that mocked Jesus (27:27-31) are negative, minor figures as are also the soldiers at the tomb who became involuntary witnesses to the reality of Jesus' resurrection (27:62-66; 28:11-15).

Consider, however, the following positive, deliberately apologetic instances Matthew included to show that the Messianic Kingdom, rightly understood, is open to everyone, regardless of birth, race, language or national background:

1. At least three of the four women mentioned in Jesus' genealogy are Gentiles: Rahab the Canaanite (Josh. 2:11; Heb. 11:31); Ruth the Moabitess (Ruth 1:16f.; 2:12); Bathsheba the wife of Uriah the Hittite (II Sam. 11; I Kings 15:5). The Messiah cannot be a pure-blood Hebrew: He is part pagan by unquestionable genealogy.
2. The adoration by the Magi, standing in stark contrast to the indifference of Jerusalem and the clergy and the suspicions of a murderous king, points to a Messiah whose mission concerns not only Israel, but all peoples (2:1-12).
3. John the Baptist preached: "God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" and insisted that repentance and righteousness are the essential qualities for participation in the Messianic Kingdom (3:1-10). If fleshly descent from Abraham is clearly subordinate to spiritual kinship to Abraham through faith and obedience to God, then, the logical conclusion may well be that even non-Hebrews will be permitted to share in the Messianic Kingdom on this same basis.
4. The universality of the Messiah's ministry is underlined by Matthew's quotation of Isaiah 9:1, 2 linking Jesus' ministry in "Galilee of the Gentiles" with the already well-attested prophecy that

had already sung of God's concern for the benighted pagans (4:12-17).

5. Remarkable for its absence in all of Jesus' teaching is any blessing of Israel above all other nations, any special honor given to uniquely Jewish practices, rites or customs; circumcision.
6. Unhesitatingly, Jesus blessed and praised the Gentile centurion of Capernaum and unblushingly stated Gentile participation in the Kingdom banquet to the exclusion of privileged Jews (8:5-13).
7. The account of the Syro-phoenician woman—herself a CANAANITE—underlines most vigorously the high quality of the faith of Gentiles when once brought into living contact with Christ and His message.
8. The participation of a half-Jewish, half-pagan population of Decapolis at the second miraculous multiplication of food, subtly underlines their common participation at the Messianic banquet (15:29-39; cf. Mark 7:31; 8:1-10).
9. In the parable of the wicked husbandmen, Jesus affirms: "The Kingdom of God will be taken away from you (Jewish leaders especially) and given to a nation producing the fruits of it" (21:43). The new nation would not be merely Gentile, but a new people of Gentile-Jewish extraction who love and serve Jesus.
10. In the parable of the marriage feast, the King, angered by those who were invited and had rejected His invitation, destroyed those murderers and burned their city, because "they were unworthy," and ordered His servants to bring in just anyone they could find (22:1-14). The evident allusion is to the destruction of Jerusalem and the privileged Jews who should have been most ready to accept God's invitation. Nevertheless, the non-Jews are offered the same privileges, but must not presume upon God's grace. (Cf. Rom. 11:22.)
11. "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations" (24:14)!
12. The Judgment of Christ, at which all nations will be gathered, separated and judged, will be settled, not on the basis of one's Jewishness, but on the basis of each one's usefulness in helping "the least of Christ's brethren" (25:31-46).
13. The kindness of Mary of Bethany in anointing Jesus for His burial "will be told in memory of her, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world" (26:13).

THE PARTICIPATION OF THE GENTILES IN THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM

14. Pilate's wife was the only voice urgently raised to protest Jesus' innocence at His trial before the Gentile court.
15. A Gentile centurion at the crucifixion is the only non-disciple quoted by Matthew as having made a statement favorable to Jesus: "Truly this was God's son" (27:54)!
16. In virtue of Jesus' universal authority, all nations are to be evangelized and discipled (28:18-20).

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