

Matthew's Gospel

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Author Matthew was a Galilean tax collector who became one of Jesus' disciples. Matthew was the son of Alphaeus and was originally called Levi. See. Mark 2:14. The name *Matthew* means *gift of God* and may be a new name given to Levi by Jesus.

Tax collectors (or publicans) worked for the hated Roman government and were allowed to add their own commission to the taxes. Tax collectors were seen as collaborators with the enemy and many were dishonest, so they were widely despised. When Jesus called Matthew to follow Him he *got up, left everything and followed him*. Luke 5:28. Soon after Jesus and the disciples attended a dinner at Matthew's house along with *many tax collectors and sinners.* When the Pharisees asked why Jesus ate with such people Jesus replied "*I desire mercy and not sacrifice, for I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners*". See Matthew 9:9-13.

The Bible doesn't say much about Matthew's activities as a disciple and little is known about him. Tradition says that after Jesus resurrection he preached the gospel for eight years throughout Judea and then travelled to Persia, Parthia, and Ethiopia, where he died as a martyr in about A.D. 62.

Date Probably written somewhere between 50 and 60AD. (Mark was probably the first gospel to be written, followed by Matthew). Matthew may have had access to Mark's gospel as he quotes 601 verses out of the 678 verses in Mark.

Purpose Matthew presents Jesus as the King of the Jews. (By comparison Mark presents Jesus as "the Son of man"; Luke presents Him as "the suffering servant" and John as "the Son of God").

Matthew shows how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies and was the Messiah. But Jesus was not an earthly King who would deliver the Jews from Roman oppression. Rather He was a heavenly King who came to set up an eternal Kingdom: the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus provided the way that all might be part of this Kingdom through repentance and faith. The Kingdom has not yet been fully instituted. One day Jesus will return to bring in the Kingdom in all of its fullness. In the meantime Jesus is to reign in our hearts and we are to spread the gospel throughout the world so others, too, may come under His Kingship.

The Kingdom of heaven

The Gospel of Matthew focuses on the *Kingdom of Heaven*.

What Matthew calls the *Kingdom of Heaven* is called the *Kingdom of God* in the other Gospels. That's because Matthew was writing for Jews who would not say the name of God. (Even today Jewish literature describes God as G_d).

The *Kingdom of Heaven* in Matthew and the *Kingdom of God* in the rest of the New Testament are the same Kingdom!

Matthew describes how Jesus brings in the Kingdom; teaches about the Kingdom; clarifies what the Kingdom is and isn't; denounces the Pharisees and Sadducees whose practices are at odds with the Kingdom, and encourages us to spread the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Relationship with other Gospels

Matthew is one of the Synoptic Gospels, along with Mark and Luke. These Gospels are called synoptic (from the Greek *syn-* together and *opsis* appearance) because they have so much in common. e.g. order of events, stories and parables.

- 45% of Matthew is also in Mark and Luke
- 25% of Matthew is also in Luke
- 10% of Matthew is also in Mark
- 20% is unique to Matthew.

John is quite different to the other three Gospels. It was written much later and focuses more on the spiritual meaning of what happened in Jesus' life, rather than on the events.

Setting

Matthew describes the genealogy of Jesus and His birth, then gives details of Jesus ministry in the area around Galilee. Later he describes Jesus' death and resurrection in Jerusalem.

Themes

Jesus, the promised Messiah, the King of the Jews.

The Jews were waiting for Messiah (the anointed One) to come and rescue them from oppression by the Romans. Matthew shows how Jesus fulfils many Old Testament prophecies and is the Messiah. But He isn't just an earthly King. He is King of kings. He is not just King of Israel; He is King over all. Jesus rules over time and eternity, heaven and earth, people and angels, Jews and Gentiles: everything.

The Kingdom of God.

King Jesus rules over an eternal Kingdom: the Kingdom of God (called *the Kingdom of heaven* in Matthew). Jesus introduced this Kingdom; showed how we can enter it; taught what the Kingdom is like, and will bring it to pass fully when He returns. All those who respond to Jesus, put their trust in Him and faithfully follow Him are God's children, and part of the Kingdom.

Fulfilment of the Old Testament.

Matthew was a Jew and his Gospel was primarily written for Jewish readers. As a result he quotes from the Old Testament a lot more than the other Gospel writers. The Old Testament points forward to the coming of Jesus and is fulfilled when our loving God brings redemption through His Son. Jesus fulfils many Old Testament scriptures (e.g. 1:22-23; 2:15, 17-18, 23; 4:13-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; 27:9-10) and bases many of His teachings on Old Testament verses or concepts. Also the Old Testament law is fulfilled in Jesus and is replaced by a new commandment, based around love. (5:17-20, 22:34-40).

Jesus teaching

Jesus taught the people through sermons, illustrations, parables, and by example. There are five significant sections devoted to Jesus' teaching.

- Chapters 5-7: The Sermon on the Mount
- Chapter 10: Sharing the Kingdom
- Chapter 13: Parables of the Kingdom
- Chapter 18: Relationships with others
- Chapters 24,25: What will happen in the future.



Jesus compassion

Jesus showed compassion in that He did, and called His followers to do the same. This compassion is real; practical, unselfish, and often carried out in private. It is an external outworking of love.

Jesus death and resurrection

Jesus died on the Cross in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. His death brought about forgiveness of sins enabling us to have a relationship with God. When Jesus rose from the dead, He established his credentials as King and proved His power over all authorities, and over evil.

1:1-17 The genealogy of Jesus

Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus: from Abraham to David; then from David to the exile to Babylon; then from the exile to the birth of Jesus. It is the family tree for Joseph so it finishes with *Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called the Christ.* v16. (As compared to Luke's genealogy which is different in the section from David to the birth of Jesus because it is the family tree for Mary. Luke describes Jesus as *the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli* Luke 3:23).

Matthew's genealogy is Jesus' legal family tree (through Joseph), while Luke's is His physical family tree (through Mary). It was customary for genealogies to end with males, which is why both end with Joseph as Jesus' father. Neither implies that Jesus was Joseph's physical son (because He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and was God's son, not Joseph's). Matthew 1:18, Luke 1:35.

1:18-2:23 The birth of Jesus

Mary was engaged to Joseph when Jesus was conceived in her by the Holy Spirit. Engagement in those days was much like marriage except there was no sexual union. Joseph wanted a divorce as he did not want to disgrace Mary but was told by an angel that Jesus *was conceived by the Holy Spirit* and that he was to call the baby *Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.*

This was in fulfilment of Isaiah 7:14: *"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel" - which means, "God with us".*

The name of Jesus

Lord - *kurios* means owner, master, sovereign

Jesus - *Iesous* means Jehovah is salvation

Christ - *Christos* means anointed. It is the same as the Hebrew word for Messiah *masiah*.

So Jesus' title is *Lord*, His name is *Jesus*, indicating that He is both God and Saviour, and His role is to be the anointed *Messiah* or *Christ*.

The wonder of Jesus birth is that God became a human being and is now with us!

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a village about 12km from Jerusalem, probably in 4 BC during the reign of King Herod.

Magi (or astrologers) from the east followed a star (which could have been caused by the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn) so they could worship the new-born *King of the Jews*. They brought Him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. When King Herod heard about this he asked the religious leaders where the prophets had said their future leader would come from. They said *Bethlehem*, quoting from Micah 5:2. Herod asked the Magi to report back when they found the child but they were warned in a dream not to, because they knew Herod wanted to kill Him.



An angel told Joseph to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt so He would be protected from Herod. This fulfilled Hosea 11:1 *Out of Egypt I called my Son*. Herod was furious and ordered that all boys in Bethlehem under the age of two be killed. There was much mourning as a result, fulfilling Jeremiah 31:15.

After Herod died an angel told Joseph to take Jesus back to Israel and the family settled in Nazareth, in Galilee.

3:1- 4:11 Preparing for the ministry of Jesus

John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin. (See Luke Chapter 1). John prepared the way for the ministry of Jesus in fulfilment of Isaiah 40:3.

John's message was one of repentance. The people must turn from their sins and turn to the Lord *for the kingdom of heaven is near*. He baptised those who repented in the Jordan River but was scathing about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Sadducees. John also explained that Jesus was greater than he:

"I baptise you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire".

When Jesus was about 30 years old He came to John to be baptised. John didn't want to do it, saying it was he that needed to be baptised by Jesus. Jesus replied *"let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness"*. When Jesus was baptised the Holy Spirit descended on Him and God the Father said *this is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased"*.



Jesus baptism was the start of His earthly ministry and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were all involved. Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit empowering Him for the ministry tasks ahead. Jesus baptism also highlights for us the major Christian experiences that Jesus would introduce:

- Repentance leading to forgiveness of sin, and salvation
- Baptism in water, showing that the old life is over, and a new life has begun
- Baptism in the Holy Spirit empowering us to live for Jesus.

Immediately after His baptism Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert and was tempted (or tested) by the devil to:

- do a selfish miracle (tell stones to become bread)
- cast Himself down from the highest point of the temple
- bow down and worship the devil.

In each case Jesus resisted the temptation by saying "it is written" and by turning away from the situation. Jesus was tempted to sin, just like we are, but resisted. Because He understands temptation He can now help us when we are tempted. See Hebrews 2:18, and 4:14-16.

Jesus had fulfilled all righteousness, been baptised, been anointed by the Holy Spirit, and had overcome temptation to sin. He was ready to begin His ministry.

4:12-25 Beginning of Jesus' ministry

Jesus lived in Capernaum (on the shores of the Sea of Galilee) and most of His ministry took place in the Galilee region. This fulfilled Isaiah 9:1,2.

At the beginning of His ministry Jesus preached that the people should *Repent for the kingdom of heaven is here*. No longer was the kingdom something that was coming in the future; now it was here!

Jesus called His first *disciples* (literally *learners*): Peter, Andrew, James and John. They were fishermen and Jesus said *"Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men"*.

Initially Jesus taught in the synagogues and also healed the sick, and delivered those suffering from demons. *News about Him spread and large crowds followed Him.*

5:1-7:29 The Sermon on the Mount

This sermon was given on a small mount outside of Capernaum. It is Jesus' first major teaching and sets out what He expects of those who will be in His kingdom.

5:1-12 The beatitudes

The beatitudes describe those who are blessed. Greek *makarios* means to be blessed, happy, envied, celebrated, fortunate, spiritually prosperous, as a result of God's favour.



What it means to be blessed

If you:

are poor in spirit
mourn
are meek
hunger and thirst for righteousness
are merciful
are pure in heart
are a peacemaker
are persecuted because of your righteousness
are insulted, persecuted and slandered because of Christ

You will:

receive the kingdom of heaven
be comforted
inherit the earth
be filled
be shown mercy
see God
be called the sons of God
have the kingdom of heaven
have a great reward in heaven

To be blessed is much more than feeling happy. It is a state in which you do what God wants you to do; be what God wants you to be; and fulfil God's purpose for your life. This can only come about when Jesus is truly king of your life: when you are part of His Kingdom.

5:13-16 Salt and light

We are to be the *salt of the earth* and the *light of the world*. Both salt and light make their environment better. When people see our *good deeds* they will *praise our Father in Heaven*.

5:17-5:48 Jesus has fulfilled the Law

Jesus did not come to *abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfil them*. Everything in the Old Testament Law – including all of its requirements – are fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus then sets new standards; ones that are even higher than the legalism of the Law. Our righteousness must *surpass that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law* or we will *certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven*.

For example:

- Murder (Exodus 20:13). Being angry with someone is equivalent to murder.
- Adultery (Exodus 20:14). Looking lustfully on someone is equivalent to adultery.
- Divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). The only ground for divorce is marital unfaithfulness.
- Oaths (Numbers 30:2). Swearing is equivalent to an oath.
- Retaliation (Exodus 21:24). Give extra instead of retaliating.
- Loving others Leviticus 19:18, Luke 10:29-37. Don't hate. Love everyone including your enemies.

When we are in Christ and live His way we meet all of the requirements of the Law so we are no longer under the Law. We must *be perfect (mature) even as your heavenly Father is perfect*.

6:1-18 Acts of righteousness

Acts of righteousness (giving, prayer, forgiveness and fasting) are not to be done in a hypocritical way, seeking to bring glory to yourself. Rather they are to be done in secret, focused only on the Lord, and on giving glory to Him.

Christians and the Old Testament Law

Jesus has fulfilled the Law so it no longer has any relevance for Christians (including the 10 commandments!). Jesus gave us a *new commandment* to love the Lord, our neighbours and ourselves, and obey what God says for us to do. See 22:37-40. This encompasses all that the Old Testament Law entailed. The new commandment is positive and freeing. Rather than being bound up in legalism about what we are not to do, we are to be led by the Spirit and to live a life of love. This will make our lives fruitful, positive, righteous and *free indeed*.

Many sections of the New Testament deal with this as it was a big issue for the early Christians. Some thought Christians should still be under the Law so Paul and the other New Testament writers expanded on Jesus teaching to show that Christians were free from the demands of the Law, because these demands have been fully met in Christ. Righteousness is by faith in Christ not by trying to keep the Law.

See Romans Chapters 1-11, especially Chapter 8; and 13:8-10; Mark 12:29-31; John 13:34,35; John 14:15-27; Matthew 5:17-20, 22:37-39; Galatians Chapters 2:11- 5:26; Ephesians 2:14-18, Colossians 2:6-23; Hebrews 10:1-18; James 2:8-13; 1 John 3 etc. The Church Council in Acts 15 ratified this by not laying any burden on believers to follow the Law.

Prayer is one of the *acts of righteousness*. It is to be meaningful and from the heart not just *babbling* with *many words*.



In the “Lord’s Prayer” Jesus gives us a model for how to pray:

<i>Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.</i>	We begin by focusing on God the Father who is in heaven. Ultimately, our prayer is towards Him, and for His glory, rather than being all about us.
<i>Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.</i>	We ask God to bring about His Kingdom: His rule and reign in our hearts and in the world. We are seeking to align ourselves with God’s will so that it will accomplished on the earth as it is being fulfilled in heaven.
<i>Give us today our daily bread.</i>	After focusing on God we can bring our needs to Him. Recognising that He knows what we need before we ask Him. v8.
<i>Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.</i>	We ask God to forgive us for our sins. The Greek word here means <i>sins, debts, offense, trespasses</i>. God will forgive us as we forgive others. We recognise this and ask Him to forgive us in the same way we forgive others. This is further explained in v14,15. If we don’t forgive others God will not forgive us.
<i>And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.</i>	After asking God to forgive our sin we ask Him to protect us from sin by keeping us from temptation, and from evil and satan, the <i>evil one</i>.
<i>For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever. Amen.</i>	We finish by giving God the praise and honour that He deserves. <i>Amen</i> means, “<i>So be it</i>”.

(The last verse was added in later manuscripts).

6:19-24 Treasure in heaven

Rather than storing up *treasures on earth* which can be *stolen* or *rust* or *decay* we are to store up *treasure in heaven* which is eternal. *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*. This complements Jesus’ other teaching about the Kingdom of God. When God is King of our lives our whole body will be *full of light* and we will serve Him rather than other masters, like money. *You cannot serve both God and Money*.

6:25-34 Worrying

If we *seek first His kingdom and His righteousness* we don’t need to worry about what is happening in our lives. *Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?* God loves us and knows our needs. He will provide for us as He does for all creation. When we fully trust Him *all these things will be given to you as well*. In our days we will have troubles, but Jesus tells us to trust God and not to worry. Worry doesn’t actually help, and our loving God is fully capable of meeting all our needs!

7:1-6 Judging others

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. It is easy to see the faults of others and ignore the same faults in ourselves. This is hypocritical so we must be honest in dealing with our own faults and not be judgmental of others.

7:7-12 Asking of God

God wants the best for us. We are encouraged to *ask* Him for what we need; continually *seek* His will, and *knock* on His door till we receive what He has for us. The tense here is present continuous. Ask, and keep on asking; seek and keep on seeking; knock and keep on knocking. If we do we will receive what we ask; find what we seek and the door will be opened to experiencing God's will for our lives. This is because God loves us and delights in giving us *good gifts*.

The royal law

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. 7:12

This is the heart of Jesus' teaching and reinforces that He has fulfilled the Law and shown us a higher way: the way of love.

7:13,14 The way to life

Many choose destruction and the way that leads there is *broad*. The way to life is *narrow* and *only a few find it*. The way to life is only found in Jesus Christ.

7:15-23 Bearing good fruit

False prophets can be recognised by their fruit. Just because people talk about the Kingdom does not mean they are part of it. Good trees bear good fruit. Bad trees bear bad fruit and will be cut down and burned. We should be doing the will of God and this will result in *good fruit*. The ones who *enter the kingdom of heaven* will be those who do the *will of the Father in heaven*. Someone may prophesy, drive out demons and do miracles but if they are evildoers they will not be part of the kingdom.

7:24-28 Good foundations

Those who hear *these words and puts them into practice* will be *like a wise man who built his house on the rock*. They will remain strong, no matter what happens in life, because their house has its *foundations on the rock* (Jesus). Those who don't put Jesus' words into practice *are like a foolish man who built his house on sand*. They will fall *with a great crash*.

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at His teaching, because He taught as one who had authority, and not as the teachers of the law.

In this His first major teaching, Jesus began to describe what the Kingdom of God is like. If we are living under King Jesus we will be what He wants us to be, and do what He wants us to do.

8:1 – 9:34 Jesus works miracles

8:1-4 Healing of the man with leprosy

People with leprosy were unclean and were shunned by everyone. Jesus reached out, touched the man, and made him clean. His love and compassion are for all.

8:5-13 Healing of the centurion's servant

The centurion's servant was *paralysed and in terrible suffering*. Jesus determined to go and heal her, but the centurion had great faith and said *Just say the word and my servant will be healed*. Jesus recognised that the centurion wasn't a Jew but had great faith. He was so impressed by this faith that He healed the servant immediately.



8:14-17 Healing of Peter's mother in law

Jesus healed Peter's mother in law, and many others in fulfilment of Isaiah 53:4.

Following Jesus

Matthew includes details about following Jesus in amongst his descriptions of Jesus' miracles.

8:18-22 The cost of following Jesus

When some teachers of the law said they would follow Jesus *wherever you go*, Jesus faced them up with the consequences. They would (like Him) have nowhere to lay their head, and would not be able to carry out family responsibilities. Following Jesus has a cost. We must lay down everything to be His disciple.

9:9-13 The calling of Matthew

Jesus called Matthew to *follow Me* and immediately *Matthew got up and followed Him*. This would have entailed giving up his livelihood, facing up to his sinfulness, trusting Jesus, and following Him wherever He went. A big decision! Matthew invited Jesus into His house and introduced Him to his friends: *tax collectors and sinners*. The Pharisees were disgusted by this but Jesus said *I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners*. Jesus loves everyone and will welcome all who repent and follow Him. Nobody is too sinful for Him!

9:14-17 New wine

When asked why His disciples didn't fast Jesus explained that they would after He had gone (just as wedding guests mourn after the bride and groom have departed). Jesus was showing the Pharisees that His way was completely different from their legalistic way. New wine has to be contained in new wineskins. The old wineskin (the legalistic way) cannot contain the new wine (the way of love).



8:23-27 Calming the storm

Jesus rebuked the storm and it went *completely calm*. It is surprising that, by this time, the disciples still had so *little faith*.

8:28-34 Healing the demoniacs

Jesus then cast the demons out of two demoniacs. The demons were sent into a herd of pigs which rushed into the lake. When the owners of the pigs reported this to the townspeople they pleaded with Jesus to *leave their region*.



9:1-8 Healing the paralytic

Back on the other side of the lake Jesus forgave the sins of a paralytic. When the teachers of the law heard this they said He was blaspheming but Jesus, *knowing their thoughts*, showed that He did have authority on earth to forgive sins by healing the man. The crowd who saw this was *filled with awe and praised God, who had given such authority to men*.

9:18-26 Healing the dead girl and sick woman

Jesus raised the daughter of a ruler from the dead. On the way to do this a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years touched the edge of His cloak. Jesus recognised her faith and in healing her said *Your faith has healed you*.

9:27-34 Healing the blind and mute

Two blind men believed that Jesus could heal them. Jesus *touched their eyes and said "According to your faith will it be done to you"*. Even though He warned them not to, they *spread the news about Him all over that region*. Jesus then healed a demon-possessed man who could not talk. The crowd was amazed and said *"nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel"*.



There is no 'formula' that Jesus used when He was doing His healing miracles. Sometimes it was dependent on the faith of the person; other times it wasn't. Sometimes Jesus initiated the healings; other times the person did. Sometimes Jesus cast out demons; other times He didn't. Sometimes the person was told to keep quiet about what had happened (so that Jesus wasn't overwhelmed by the crowds or antagonism that would result); other times the person was told to tell others.

Jesus loves each person as an individual, and so deals with each one in a personal way, doing what is best for them in their situation.

9:35 – 10:42 Sharing the good news

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus realised that, because *the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few* He needed to send out lots more workers into His *harvest field*. He therefore *called his twelve disciples to Him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness*. The disciples were sent out in Jesus' authority to do His works (and so are we!).

The disciples were to:

- Go to the lost sheep of Israel first; not to the Gentiles or Samaritans. (That would come later).
- Preach that the *Kingdom of heaven is near*.
- Heal the sick.
- Raise the dead.
- Cleanse those who have leprosy.
- Drive out demons.
- Give freely to others.
- Work to support themselves *for workers are worth their keep*.
- Stay with a *worthy person* in each place and bless their home with peace.
- Move on when rejected and leave the consequences of this rejection to God.
- Be *shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves*.
- Expect persecution.
- Trust God for what to say and how to say it. *At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.*
- Expect to be hated, and stand firm for *those who stand firm to the end will be saved*.
- Recognise they are Jesus' servants, and always try to be like Him, their Master.
- Don't be afraid of people. They can't hurt your inner soul.
- Be afraid of the *One who can destroy both body and soul in hell* (i.e. God).
- Acknowledge God before people (and Jesus will acknowledge them *before the Father in heaven*).
- Not disown God (or they will be disowned *before the Father in heaven*).
- Expect troubles rather than peace, because Jesus *did not come to bring peace, but a sword*.
- Recognise that even family could become enemies (in fulfilment of Micah 7:6). *Anyone who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.*
- Lay down their life for Jesus. *Whoever does not take up their cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*
- Know that anyone who receives them will be rewarded.

The principles that Jesus gave His disciples as they went out to share the good news are still relevant today!



10:2-4 The 12 disciples

Jesus committed the work of sharing the good news to a diverse group of disciples. They were ordinary men with little education or background for such a mission. They loved Jesus, though, and willingly served and followed Him. As a result the gospel was spread throughout the local area and, later, throughout the world. The disciples (except Judas Iscariot) are a great example to us of ordinary people who can do extraordinary things in partnership with Jesus.

- Peter (originally called Simon, son of Jonas). Peter was the recognised leader of the disciples.
- Andrew (Peter's brother). Peter and Andrew were fishermen before they were called to follow Jesus.
- James, son of Zebedee.
- John, James' brother. John was the *beloved disciple* and had a special relationship with Jesus. James and John had fiery natures and were called the "sons of thunder".
- Philip.
- Nathanael (also called Bartholomew)
- Thomas who later became famous for his doubting of Jesus' resurrection
- Matthew (originally called Levi) was a tax collector.
- James was the son of Alphaeus and may have been Jesus younger brother.
- Thaddaeus is also called Judas, the son of James.
- Simon the Zealot.
- Judas Iscariot was later to betray Jesus.



11: 1-19 John the Baptist

John the Baptist's disciples asked Jesus if He was the expected Messiah. Jesus told the messengers to report back to John that *the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor*. All of these were evidences that He was indeed the Messiah. The ultimate proof that Jesus was the Messiah was that the kingdom of heaven was *forcefully advancing*.

Jesus then explained to the crowd who John was. He was not just an ordinary prophet, but the one who came to prepare the way for Messiah, in fulfilment of Malachi 3:1. *Among those born of women there is has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he*. If they were willing to hear it he was Elijah. See Luke 1:17

The Pharisees and experts in the law rejected this. They were like children in a market place who wouldn't participate in what was going on and so missed out. John came *neither eating nor drinking* and they said he had a demon. Jesus came *eating and drinking* and they said He was *a glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners"*. Their so-called "wisdom" was obviously false - as shown by the fruits of their lives, their actions.

11:20-24 Judgment on unrepentant cities

Jesus then denounced some of the cities in which most of His miracles had been performed *because they did not repent*. The cities included Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, His home town. In the Old Testament God had judged cities like Tyre, Sidon and Sodom for their sinfulness. If they had seen the miracles Jesus had done they might have repented. It would be more bearable for these cities than for the ones who had seen God's power and still had not repented.

11:25-30 Rest for the weary

Jesus praised God that the things He was teaching were hidden from the *"wise and learned"* but obvious to *"little children"*. He recognised that God the Father had committed everything to Him and that *No-one knows the Son except the Father, and no-one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him*.

This is a very important statement as in it Jesus:

- identifies Himself with the Father
- describes His unique relationship with the Father: a Father-Son relationship
- validates what He was saying and doing because it came from the Father
- shows that He alone can provide the way by which anyone can know the Father
- introduces His sovereignty over everything, including our salvation.

These concepts are much more fully developed in John's gospel, written many years after Matthew, when the early Christians were reflecting on who Jesus was and what was His purpose in coming into the world.

Jesus then makes a wonderful offer:

Come to Me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Jesus has just said that He is one with the Father and is the only way by which we can know God. Immediately He says that He is personable, personal, approachable and caring. Know matter what human troubles we may experience we can come to Him and find rest. Nothing is too small for Him to be concerned about. He will carry any or all of our burdens because He loves us – and carrying of our burdens is no trouble to Him, because he is all powerful!



A yoke means that a load can be shared

12:1-14 Lord of the Sabbath

Jesus now confronts one of the most legalistic practices of the Pharisees: Sabbath-keeping. Jesus shows that He is Lord even of the Sabbath, and that there is something greater than rigid adherence to the Law. (The Law was just a temporary measure to show us that we can't be righteous on our own. Righteousness can only be found through faith in Christ. See Romans Chapter 2).

- The disciples were hungry and picked ears of corn on the Sabbath. Jesus showed that King David and the Priests did likewise. 1 Samuel 21:6; Leviticus 24:5,9; Numbers 28:9,10. God is much more interested in our hearts than our adherence to rituals. *I desire mercy, not sacrifice.* Hosea 6:6.
- Jesus healed a man with a shrivelled hand on the Sabbath. Jesus showed that the Pharisees would have helped pull a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath and *How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep?*

Both of these graphically demonstrated that the *Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath*.

12:15-21 The Lord's chosen servant

Jesus was aware that the Pharisees had *plotted how they might kill Him*. He withdrew from there but many followed Him, and He *healed all their sick, warning them not to tell who He was*. This was in fulfilment of Isaiah 42:1-4 in which Jesus is described as *my servant, whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight*. God had said *I will put my Spirit on Him and He will proclaim justice to the nations* and that He would continue faithfully *till He leads justice to victory*. God chose Jesus to carry out the work that He did. *"In His name the nations will hope"* is still true today!

12:22-37 For and against Jesus

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had cast out a demon and that the people were wondering if He was the *Son of David* (in other words, the Messiah), they said He did it by Beelzebub (the 'lord of the flies'; the prince of demons). Jesus explained that *every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined and every city of household divided against itself will not stand*. Satan cannot cast out satan. If Jesus cast out demons it must have been *by the Spirit of God* and that means the *kingdom of God had come upon you*.

Jesus then directly challenged the Pharisees: *Whoever is not with Me is against Me*. What they were saying was blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and that sin could not be forgiven. Their words were revealing their hearts, for *out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks*. If you have a bad heart it will show in the way you act and speak and you will bring evil things out of the evil in you. *Everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.*

Your words reveal your heart

What we say reveals what is in our hearts. It's worth listening to yourself every now and then and evaluating whether your words are reflecting a heart that is totally loving and serving the Lord.



Jesus said that we will be judged on the words we have said!

12:38-45 The sign of the prophet Jonah

Some Pharisees and teachers of the law wanted to see Jesus do a miraculous sign. *He answered. "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign. But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 12:40.*

Jesus was to be in the tomb for 3 days and 3 nights and then would rise again, just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish for 3 days and 3 nights and then was given his life back.

Jesus said that His death and resurrection would be the only sign given to an evil and adulterous generation. His death on the cross made atonement and fully satisfied God's righteous requirements for judgment of sin, and His resurrection proved that He was the Son of God.

Unfortunately the timeline given here doesn't fit with our traditional celebration (at 'Easter') where Jesus was (supposedly) crucified on Good Friday and rose on Easter Sunday. There is no way that this covers a period of 3 days and 3 nights.

Jesus' death and resurrection took place during the Jewish Feast of Passover and a careful study of Old Testament references to the Passover and New Testament descriptions shows that Jesus was crucified on Wednesday Nisan 14th and rose early in the morning of Sunday Nisan 18th. In other words He was in the tomb for 3 days and 3 nights!

Read all of the Scriptures in the table on the next page to check this out!



The sign of the prophet Jonah

Matthew 12:38-41

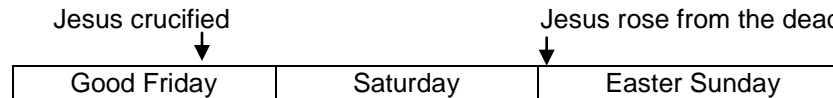
The Jews wanted a sign from Jesus to prove He really had come from God. Jesus said there would only be one sign: 'the sign of the prophet Jonah'. As Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights, so Jesus would be dead in the tomb for three days and three nights. After that He would rise again from the dead. Mark 8:31

The Cross is God's only sign. It is the only proof we have of the truth of Christianity:

Jesus died → Jesus was in the tomb for three days and three nights → Jesus rose again from the dead

Our tradition

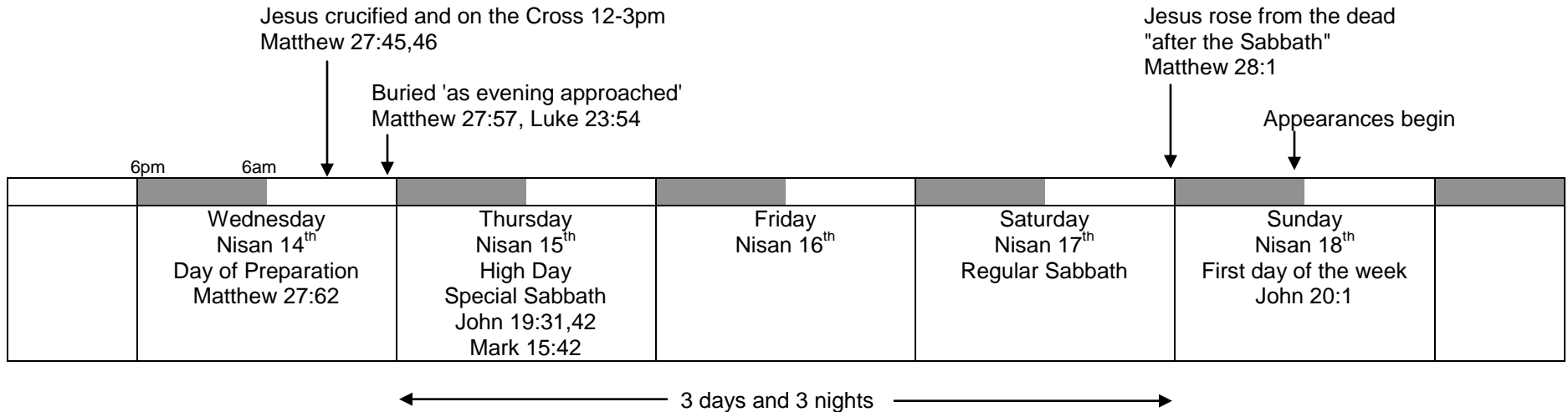
(See what Jesus said about traditions at Matthew 15:3-9).



Jesus died and was resurrected during the Feast of Passover

The death and resurrection of Jesus took place during Passover Week. Leviticus 23:5,6: Exodus 12:1-20

In an amazing fulfilment of the Passover Feast, Jesus (who is *the Passover Lamb who was sacrificed for us*. 1 Corinthians 5:7) was crucified at the time the Jews sacrificed their Passover lamb. He fulfilled all that the Passover lamb had accomplished in the time of Moses (and more). His blood was shed so that all who accepted His salvation might be free. This was God's greatest act of love: His only sign. John 3:16. And Jesus was in the tomb three days and three nights!



12:46-50 Jesus' family

Jesus mother and His brothers wanted to speak with Him. Jesus extended His family to all those who were His followers when *pointing to His disciples, He said, "Here are My mother and brothers. For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother"*. Doing this didn't exclude or diminish His relationship with His natural family. Rather it extended it so all who are born again and do God's will are part of God's family. See John 3:1-21.

13:1-52 Parables of the Kingdom

Jesus often taught in parables. The word parable comes from the Greek word *parabole* which means a *placing beside, comparison*. So a parable is a story built around a well known activity. There are about 30 parables in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), and none in John.

In 13:10-17 Jesus explained that His parables could only be understood by those:

- who were given understanding by God
- who were open to God
- who would listen and understand
- who had soft, teachable hearts.

Those who were like this would hear and understand the truths He was teaching and *whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.* v12. This shows how important it is to have our hearts right as we hear from God and seek His truth!

13:3-9 and 18-23. The parable of the sower

When someone hears the 'message of the Kingdom' a number of things can happen depending on the state of their heart:

- The evil one can snatch it away.
- The word can be received with joy but if it doesn't have any root it will be lost when trouble or persecution come along
- It can be choked out by the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of riches

All of these mean that they will not be fruitful. But when the word is received and understood it brings fruit in your life. (Everyone is different: for some this is 30, some 60, some 100 fold). The key thing is that God is King; you are living in the Kingdom of God; He is at work in and through your life; you are bringing forth His fruit!



13:24-30 and 36-43. The parable of the weeds

This world contains a mixture of people who are living in the Kingdom of God (the good seed) and people who don't have Him as Lord (the weeds ie. the people of the evil one).

At the harvest (when we die or when Jesus comes again) anything that is not of Jesus will be burnt up. *They will weed out of His Kingdom everything that causes sin and all those who do evil.* v41 The only things that will remain will be kingdom things: aspects where Jesus is Lord. Make sure that more and more of your life is under Jesus Kingship. Anything else is of no eternal value.



13:31-35. The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast

The Kingdom of God is pervasive. When Jesus is Lord it spreads out and grows to affect all aspects of your life (if you let Him be King!). The more you let Him be your King the more effective your life will be.



13:44,45. The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl

The Kingdom of God is so wonderful that it is worth giving up everything you have to find it!

13:47-52. The parable of the net

At the end of the age there will be a clear separation of those in the Kingdom (who will continue on into the eternal Kingdom of God) and those who are not (who will suffer eternal damnation).



Make sure you listen to Jesus' words about the kingdom, so you are one who is in the Kingdom of God!

14:1-12 The death of John the Baptist

Herod had divorced his wife to marry Herodias, the wife of his half-brother, Philip. John the Baptist had denounced this as sinful, and Herod had him imprisoned. Herodias pleased Herod by dancing at a party and was promised *whatever she asked*. She asked for the head of John the Baptist.

Herod was nervous about Jesus' miracles and wondered if He was John the Baptist raised from the dead. The behaviour of Herod and Herodias are warnings to us about the need to deal with our sin. If we sin we will feel guilty and may compound our sin to try and get rid of the guilt. This never works! God's way is to confess our sins, ask for forgiveness and keep a clear conscience before Him. Much more healthy!

14:13-21 Feeding of the five thousand

Jesus withdrew to a solitary place, but a crowd followed Him: about five thousand men, plus women and children. *He had compassion on them and healed their sick*. Jesus was sensitive to the physical needs of the crowd because it was getting late in the day. He told the disciples to give them food, but they only had *five loaves of bread and two fish*. Jesus gave thanks for this food then multiplied it so that there was plenty and *all ate and were satisfied*. Afterwards there were *twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over*.



14:22-36 Jesus walks on water

Jesus went up into the mountains to pray alone. At the same time the disciples were in a boat on the Galilee in a storm. Jesus came to them *walking on the lake*. They were scared but Jesus said *It is I. Don't be afraid*. Impetuous Peter said *Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water*. Jesus said: *Come*. Peter walked on the water while he kept his eyes on Jesus. As soon as he looked away from Jesus he started to sink, and then Jesus rescued him. Those who saw this worshipped Jesus saying *Truly you are the Son of God*.



If Jesus bids us to do something and we obey and keep our eyes on Him, wonderful things happen. If we doubt Him and turn our eyes from Him that's when we will sink! Faith does not mean "stepping out of the boat" and hoping something will happen. It means hearing Jesus voice; and doing what He wants us to do – even if it means stepping out of a boat!

15:1-20 Jesus and the Pharisees

Jesus again confronts the legalism of the Pharisees. This time it is over ceremonial washing of hands. By their pettiness the Pharisees were nullifying the Word of God for the sake of their tradition. Jesus quotes from Isaiah 29:13: *These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men*.

Jesus then explained how God was more interested in what is in our hearts; rather than in what we say or do; because our actions and words are expressions of our hearts. If your heart is evil all sorts of evil thoughts and actions will come out and make you unclean. Religious acts like eating with unwashed hands don't make you unclean.

The issue Jesus confronts in these verses is not just restricted to the Pharisees. It can easily happen in our day too. Traditions and religious practices can become so important that they take on a power and authority of their own and 'must' be obeyed. Yet they may not be God's Word and may even nullify it!

It's worth checking regularly that the things that happen in our personal Christian lives and in our churches are the things that God has told us to do.

15:21-28 Jesus and the Canaanite woman

A Canaanite woman came to Jesus on behalf of her daughter who was *suffering terribly from demon-possession*. They were not from Israel and the Jews were not supposed to interact with other races. Jesus said *I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel* but the woman replied that dogs were allowed to eat crumbs from the master's table. (Dogs was an abusive term Jews used for Gentiles). Jesus saw that the woman had *great faith* and *her daughter was healed from that very hour*. This is an early indication that Jesus came not just for the salvation of the Jews, but as Saviour of all.

15:29-39 Feeding of the four thousand

Great crowds gathered around Jesus bringing *the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and man others, and laid the at His feet, and He healed them.* Again, Jesus had *compassion for these people* and was sensitive to their physical needs. This time the disciples only had seven loaves and a few small fish. After Jesus gave thanks for this food, and *all ate and were satisfied.* Afterwards there were *seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.* This time the number fed was *four thousand, beside women and children.* Jesus is the great provider!

16:1- 12 Jesus warns about legalism

The Pharisees and Sadducees were continually testing Jesus. They asked Him to do a sign but Jesus pointed out they could interpret the skies to predict the weather, but couldn't read the signs of the times. The evidence before them that Jesus was from God was obvious but they couldn't see it. Jesus re-stated that the only sign He would give would be the sign of Jonah: that He would be resurrected from the dead. See Chapter 12:38-41.

When the disciples forgot some bread Jesus warned them about the *yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.* i.e. their legalistic teaching. Legalism is insidious and can easily creep in to taint our Christian and Church lives. Jesus way is to multiply blessings (as He did when He fed the 5000 and the 4000). The legalistic way just binds people up in a set of lifeless rules and regulations.

16:13-20 Jesus is the Messiah

Jesus then asked *Who do people say the Son of man is?* Some said He could have been John the Baptist, Elijah or one of the prophets. Jesus asked *But what about you?" Who do you say I am?*

This is a key question; and the answer we give to it determines our destiny!

Peter answered *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.* He was acknowledging that Jesus was the Messiah; the Anointed of God, and that He was God's Son. He was God! We also need to know and acknowledge this.

Jesus responded by recognising that Peter had only learned this by revelation from the Father (as we do!). He then validated it by saying *"I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

The word Peter means *rock.* The rock on which Jesus' Church is built is not Peter; it is the fact that *Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.* This is the key to understanding the Kingdom of God. Everything in Christianity is based on Jesus, so all we believe and all we do in heaven and on earth must be focused on Jesus and doing His will.

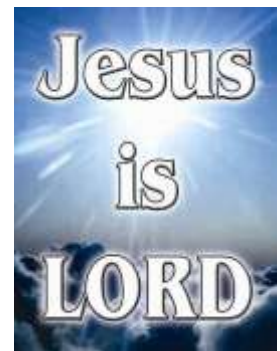
These verses have been widely misunderstood and have been misinterpreted as saying that Peter is the rock on which the Church would be built. From this Peter was named as the first Pope and his successors have been thought of as the leader of the Church. This is not true! Jesus is the Head of the Church.

16:21-28 Jesus predicts His death

Jesus then explained to His disciples that He *must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.* Peter objected but Jesus firmly rebuked him saying *you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.*

To be a follower of Jesus means that we must go through the same things He did. *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"*

We must be willing to lay down all aspects of our lives to Jesus' leadership and control. Only what is of God is eternal and will last. Jesus must be Lord of our lives! If we do this we will fulfil God's purposes for our lives and we will receive a reward. *For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then He will reward each person according to what he has done.*



17:1-13 Jesus is transfigured

Jesus took Peter, James and John up a mountain and was *transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.* Moses and Elijah then appeared and talked with Him. *A bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said "This is my Son whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!"*



The disciples were terrified but Jesus said "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no-one except Jesus. Having seen Elijah they asked "Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" (before the Messiah). Jesus replied that Elijah had already come but they didn't recognise him. *The disciples understood that He was talking about John the Baptist who had come to prepare the way for Jesus.* Matthew 3:1-12.

Why did the transfiguration take place? At this stage the disciples were becoming clearer that Jesus really was the Messiah, and the Son of God. Peter, James and John now had extra confirmation of this because God Himself reinforced it to them. He said *"This is my Son whom I love; with Him I am well pleased* (just as He had said earlier at Jesus' baptism. Matthew 3:17). The three disciples were not to tell others about Jesus transfiguration until after Jesus had been raised from the dead. Peter, James and John thus had a special revelation of Jesus which must have been extremely valuable for them as they all, later, became leaders of the early Church.

17:14-23 Jesus heals a boy with a demon

When Jesus healed a boy with a demon the disciples asked *Why couldn't we drive it out?* Jesus replied *Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there and it will move'. Nothing will be impossible for you.*

Here Jesus is not giving us a 'blank cheque' so that we can do miracles and achieve the impossible in our own strength. The key is to *have faith* or as it is literally in the parallel passage in Mark *Have the faith of God.* Mark 11:22. Faith comes from God. When He speaks to us and communicates His will to us faith is born in our hearts. Roman 10:17. Because our faith comes from God and is linked to His will (even if it is only a 'mustard seed' of faith) it will enable us to do mighty things. Only that which *is born of God overcomes the world.* 1 John 5:4.

17:24-27 Paying taxes

Jesus was asked whether He paid the Temple tax. As the Son of God He was exempt from this tax because sons don't pay taxes laid down by their fathers. But as a man He identified with us and paid the tax so as not to offend. Peter was told to catch a fish and inside its mouth was enough to pay Jesus' and Peter's taxes! (Jesus also taught about paying taxes 'to Caesar' in Matthew 22:15-22).

18:1-9 Humility

When the disciples asked Jesus *Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?* Jesus called over a little child and said *Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever takes a humble place – becoming like this child – is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*



Spiritual pride is a great enemy for all who seek to follow Jesus. As soon as you seek to build yourself up, you are taking away from the Lordship of Jesus in your life. He, and He only, is to be Lord!

Jesus said that whoever welcomes a child (in all of its humility) welcomes Him. If we cause a child (or anyone else) to sin we are going to be judged for it. We need to deal with this immediately: *If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire.*

This is a significant wake-up call for us all. We must be absolutely transparent before God; humble ourselves before Him, and immediately repent whenever we sin. The consequences of not doing so are dire.

18:10-14 The parable of the lost sheep

We must not look down on (or judge) *little ones*. When we judge others we leave ourselves open to God's judgement. (Matthew 7:1-5). Jesus illustrated this with the parable of the lost sheep. A shepherd with 100 sheep will always go to find one sheep who gets lost. *When he finds it he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.* See 2 Peter 3:9, Luke 19:10.



18:15-20 Disputes between brothers and sisters

Ever practical, Jesus now outlines the process that should be followed when there are disputes between Christians. If a brother or sister *sins against you* it is your responsibility to seek reconciliation and sort the matter out. You should:

- Go to them, *just between the two of you*, and seek to gain understanding of the situation.
- If they won't listen take *two or three others* along so that the matter *may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses*.
- If they still won't listen *tell it to the church*.
- If they still won't listen disassociate yourself from them.

This process assumes that you have already done all of the other things that Jesus taught about in human relationships: turn the other cheek; don't judge others; forgive them; identify and deal with the log in your own eye rather than looking at the speck in theirs; seek for peace with them; pray for and bless them; seek to find the truth in the matter; etc. It is not a negative or vindictive process. You are not there to judge them. God does that! You are to love them and seek to work the matter out so that there is reconciliation and a restored relationship.

Truth is all important because *whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*. If there is unity between you there is so much greater blessing and power. *If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for it will be done for you by My Father in heaven. For when two or three come together in My name, there am I with them.* What a great call for Christians to dwell together in love and unity. See Psalm 133.

18:21-35 The parable of the unmerciful servant

Jesus told this parable to illustrate how we should forgive others when they sin against us. We should not just forgive *seven times*, but *seventy times seven*. In other words forgiveness should be limitless; it should be an ongoing and natural part of our lives. A master forgave a servant's debt of 1000 talents (equivalent to millions of dollars). When the servant would not forgive debts of 100 denarii to other servants (equivalent to just a few dollars) the master said *Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?* And had the unmerciful servant put in jail till *he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from the heart.* God has forgiven us so much. We cannot afford to have any unforgiveness towards others.

19:1-12 Attitudes to divorce

The Pharisees then tested Jesus about another aspect of the Law: divorce. Some Pharisees believed that divorce could occur in limited circumstances; others said that there could be no divorce under any circumstances. Jesus replied by quoting from Genesis 1:27 and 5:2 and said *What God has joined together, let man not separate*. The Pharisees then asked why Moses allowed for divorce. Jesus replied that it was because their *hearts were hard*. Jesus then said that those who divorce *except for marital unfaithfulness* commit adultery. The disciples recognised this was complex and wondered if it was better not to marry at all. Jesus gave two situations where this might be so (eunuchs, and those who renounce marriage and live a celibate life *because of the kingdom of heaven*). Jesus never promotes divorce, recommends celibacy, or reduces the sanctity of marriage.

19:13-20:16 Teaching about the Kingdom of God

19:13-15 Jesus and the children

When children were brought to Jesus for prayer He said *Let the little children come to Me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.* Mark's gospel records Jesus adding to this by saying *Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.*

Jesus loves children! He also shows us that the way to enter His kingdom is with childlike openness, trust and faith.



19:16-30 Inheriting eternal life

A rich man asked Jesus *What good thing must I do to inherit eternal life?* This isn't a valid question because the way to inherit eternal life is to believe in Jesus, not by trying to do good.

Jesus checked whether the man was following the commandments, especially the six about moral behaviours. The man kept all of these but Jesus then identified the key aspect of the man's life he had to lay down if Jesus was to be first in his life: his wealth. *Go sell your possessions and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me.* The rich man couldn't do this and *went away sad.*

It is hard for rich people *to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.* That's because the kingdom is all about trusting in Jesus (not riches) and putting Jesus first in your life. *With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*

At the last judgment everyone who has left worldly things behind for Jesus' sake will be rewarded *and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.* Does Jesus have first place in your life?



20:1-16 The parable of the workers in the vineyard

In this parable Jesus describes a landowner who hires workers for his vineyard progressively throughout the day. To the first workers he promises to pay one denarius and to later workers he says *I will pay you what is right.* At the end of the day the workers were all paid the same: one denarius, regardless of how long they had worked. When the first workers grumbled the landowner said *I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?*

In the Kingdom of God *Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.* God will honour some people who others may not expect, and those who expect to be honoured may not be. As with the landowner the issue will not be about fairness, but about the generosity of God towards those who faithfully serve Him.

20:17-19 Jesus predicts His death

This is now the third time that Jesus predicts His death. This time He is very specific, describing how He will be condemned, mocked, flogged, crucified and then *on the third day He will be raised to life.*

20:20-28 Being a servant

The mother of the sons of Zebedee asked Jesus if her sons could sit on either side of Him in His kingdom. Jesus explained that she didn't know what she was asking. They would be sharing His cup of suffering, but the place in the kingdom was for those who *have been prepared by my Father.* The disciples were indignant when they heard about the request so Jesus called them all together and taught them that the way to greatness in the kingdom is through being a servant. *Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.* Jesus Himself was the best example of this kind of servant leadership. *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.*

20:29-34 Healing of the blind men

Two blind men cried out to Jesus that He would *have mercy on us*. Even though the crowd rebuked them they continued to ask Jesus to heal them and *Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed Him*. Don't give up when your first prayers are not answered. Keep pressing in to Jesus!

21:1-11 The triumphal entry

As Jesus approached Jerusalem for the final few days of His life on earth, He asked the disciples to fetch a donkey. This was so He could fulfil Zechariah 9:9. When He rode into Jerusalem on the donkey the crowds cried out *Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*. (Psalm 118:25, 26). At this stage many in the crowd were acknowledging that Jesus was the Saviour. (Hosanna means *Save, Lord*). The whole city was stirred and some asked who He was. The crowds answered *"This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee"*. Later, of course, the crowds were turned against Jesus by the religious leaders.



21:12-17 Jesus at the Temple

Jews had to change their money at the Temple so they could buy the animals needed for their sacrifices. The money-changers were robbing the people and Jesus overturned their tables saying *My house will be called a house of prayer but you are making it a 'den of robbers'*. Isaiah 56:7.

Jesus then showed what the Temple should be about: worship, healing of people, and proclaiming God's salvation. The children cried out *Hosanna*. The chief priests and teachers of the law were indignant and *asked Do you hear what these children are saying?* Jesus replied from Psalm 8:2: *From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise*. He is worthy of our praise!



21:18-21 Jesus authority

As Jesus passed a fig tree He saw it had no fruit on it so He said *"May you never bear fruit again"*. *Immediately the fig tree withered*.

The disciples were amazed at this and Jesus explained that if they had faith and did not doubt, they could do that kind of thing too. *You can say to this mountain, "Go, throw yourself into the sea, and it will be done."* *If you believe you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer*.

Here Jesus gives us the secret to effectiveness in prayer. If we hear from God what He wants us to pray; believe it, and act in obedience we will see wonderful things happen. It's not about us! It's about us acting in faith on what God has said!



Many consider the fig tree stands for Israel. The religious leaders had not accepted that Jesus had come to Israel as her Messiah. In rejecting Jesus they were departing from God's purposes, had *no fruit* and have *withered* ever since, spiritually. Through the Cross, Jesus' salvation is now available to all peoples (including Israel), and one of God's great works in the end times will be to draw Israel back to Himself so they acknowledge Jesus as Messiah.

21:28-22:14 The Kingdom of God is open to all

Jesus then told three parables to further illustrate His teaching that the Kingdom was not just for Israel, but for all who would receive Him.

21:28-32 The parable of the two sons

In this parable one son refused to work in the vineyard, then changed his mind and did so. The other son said he would work but didn't. The one that did the father's will was the first one. The Jews had received God's promises, but in rejecting Jesus were not fulfilling the Father's will. Now the kingdom was being made available to all. *Tax collectors and prostitutes* (who accepted Jesus) would *enter the kingdom of God ahead* of Jews who rejected Jesus because they *did not repent and believe* in Him.

21:33-46 The parable of the tenants

In this parable a landowner rented out his vineyard. When he sent servants to collect his returns the tenant killed them. Finally the landowner sent his son and the tenants determined to kill him also. This related to the Jews rejection of Jesus, and the desire of their leaders to kill Him.

Jesus said that the landlord *would rent the vineyard to other tenants* (i.e. all who accept Jesus; not just the Jews). This was in fulfilment of Psalm 118:22,23. *The kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and given to a people who will produce its fruit.* How important that all Christians (regardless of whether we are Jews or Gentiles) to produce the fruits of the Kingdom of God.

22:1-14 The parable of the wedding banquet

Jesus' next parable is about a wedding banquet that a king gave for his son. Those who were initially invited refused to come and even persecuted the king's servants. The king then invited all to the banquet: *Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you can find. Many are invited but few are chosen.* The Jews who rejected Jesus and persecuted His followers would miss out on the Kingdom. The invitation would be extended to all. But not all would accept Jesus and actually enter the Kingdom. (As happened with one man who was invited but was sent away).

22:15-46 Testing questions

The Jewish leaders then *laid plans to trap Jesus with His words.*

22:15-22 Paying taxes

First the Pharisees asked Jesus if it was *right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?* Jesus showed them a coin with Caesar's inscription on it and said we should *Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.* Our obligations to God don't preclude our obligations to human authorities.



22:23-33 The resurrection

Next some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) told a story about a woman who married a series of seven brothers in accordance with Deuteronomy 25:5,6. They asked *whose wife will she be* at the resurrection? Jesus explained that we will be like angels when we are in heaven, and there won't be any marriage. He then showed that there will be a resurrection by quoting from Exodus 3:6.

22:34-40 The greatest commandment

An expert in the law asked Jesus *Which is the greatest commandment in the law?* Jesus quoted the first two commandments and said that all *the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.* This tied in with His teaching elsewhere that love is the fulfilment of the commandments. We are no longer

We are now living in a time when salvation is available to all who will accept Jesus as Saviour and follow Him. There is no distinction. Salvation is for Jews, Gentiles, rich, poor, slaves, free..... *everyone whom the Lord our God calls.* See Colossians 3:11; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 10:12.

Now all Christians are God's special people and are part of His Kingdom. See 1 Peter 2:4-10.

Even though Israel has rejected Jesus God hasn't given up on her! Many Jews today are coming to Jesus and God has a wonderful plan to restore Israel back to relationship with Himself in the last days. Then Israel will recognise her Messiah: Jesus.

under the old Jewish Law; rather we are under a new commandment, to love as Jesus loved us. Matthew 7:12, John 13:34,35.

22:41-46 Who is Lord?

The Pharisees then asked Jesus whose son the Messiah (Christ) would be. Jesus turned the question back on them and they replied *The son of David*. Jesus then quoted from Psalm 101:1 where David called Messiah 'Lord'. *If David calls him 'Lord', how can he be his son?* Even though Jesus, the Messiah, was actually David's son, because He was in the lineage of David),

No matter how the Jewish leaders tried to trap Jesus, they couldn't because He knew the Word of God, He knew their hearts and He was who He said He was. He is Lord!

23:1-38 Hypocrisy

Jesus then directly confronts the Jewish leaders, pointing out their hypocrisy, and outlining what would happen as a result of this hypocrisy.

The Law was still in force (because Jesus had not yet been crucified) so the people were to obey the Jewish leaders and *do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach*. Their hypocrisy meant that they put people into bondage; were unhelpful to them; put on a religious show; loved to take the highest place, and enjoyed others giving them the status of Rabbi (Teacher).



Jesus said that there should be just one master; father or teacher: the Christ – Jesus Himself! The attitude they should have was that of a servant. *The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*

Jesus pronounced seven woes on the spiritual leaders. (*Woe to you* is more of a regretful 'Alas' than a pronouncement of doom). The seven woes were for:

- Shutting people out of the Kingdom of heaven. They would be shut out themselves.
- Making converts who are worse off afterwards: sons of hell, as they were.
- Swearing on the Temple and its altar and gifts. They were bound by their oaths even though what they were swearing on was inferior to God.
- Tithing their produce by neglecting *justice, mercy and faithfulness*.
- Focusing on externals but on their inside being full of greed and self-indulgence.
- Looking beautiful on the outside but being full of hypocrisy and wickedness on the inside.
- Condemning those who shed the blood of the prophets, but encouraging others to do similarly.

Jesus asked of the spiritual leaders *How will you escape being condemned to hell?* He knew they would persecute those who followed Him who would continue bringing His truth (as they had done right through history).

Jesus then looked out over Jerusalem and mourned for the city. *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"* Jerusalem was (and is) the centre of God's purpose for the earth. God had longed to see this city accept His salvation and His ways, but, once again it was about to reject Him, and would soon suffer the consequences.

Just a few year's later Jerusalem was destroyed.



24:1 - 25:46 Signs of the end of the age

Jesus predicted that Jerusalem would be overthrown and its buildings destroyed. This was fulfilled about 37 years later in AD 70, when the Romans ransacked Jerusalem. The disciples asked “*When will this happen and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?*”

Jesus’ reply in Chapters 24 and 25 (and the equivalent passages in Mark 13 and Luke 21) gives a clear account of what will happen before He returns, and what will happen at the end of the age. It is better to build an understanding of the end times based around these verses, than from the Book of Revelation which is apocryphal and so contains much imagery. (But recognise that there are many theories for what will happen in the end times and we will only know which one is correct when Jesus actually comes again!).

What happens when Jesus comes again?

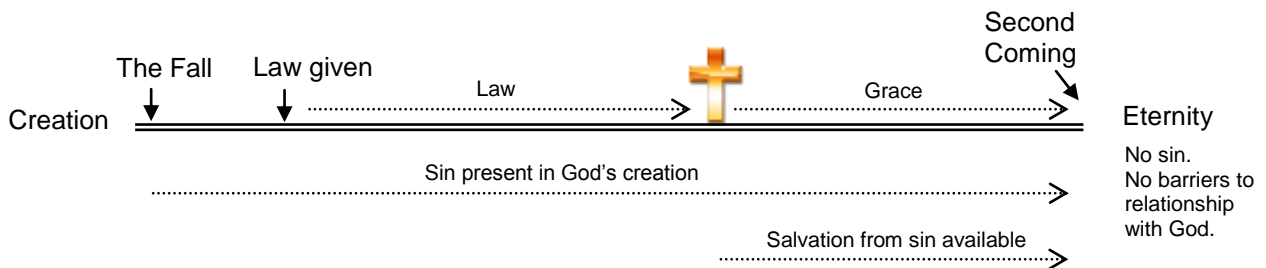
Here are some of the main aspects of Jesus’ second coming taken from throughout the Bible.

- There are many places in the Bible which describe events that will take place at the Second Coming and the end of the age. (There are lots of other places as well). The main ones are:

Isaiah 65, 66; Daniel 9,12; Joel 3; Zechariah 12-14; Matthew 24, 25; Mark 13; Luke 21; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4,5; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 2 Timothy 3; 2 Peter 3; 1 John 2; Revelation 6-22.

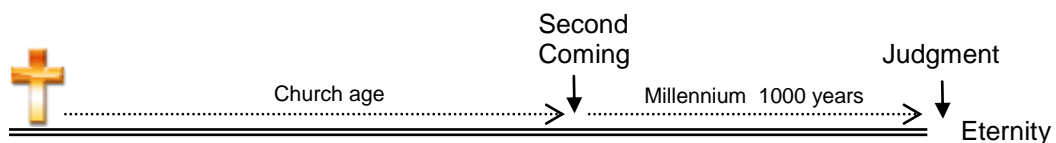
The events described in these Chapters include Judgment, Tribulation, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, the Second Coming, the Millennium, the Last Judgment and the New Heavens and New Earth.

- Jesus said He would come again. John 14:1-3, Matthew 24:3,30,36.
- Jesus’ second coming completes God’s great plan of redemption. It will bring the earth back to how it was before the fall and to how God wanted it to be all along. God will fellowship with His created people and they will bring Him pleasure for eternity. Revelation 4:11

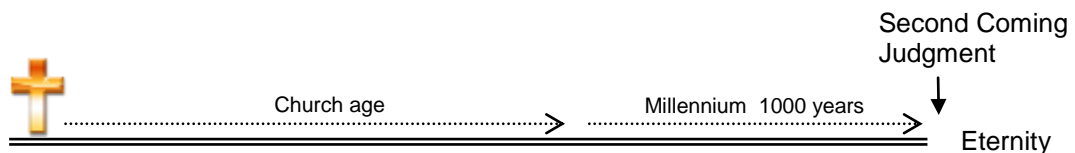


- There are three main ways of interpreting what the Bible says about the Second Coming of Christ:

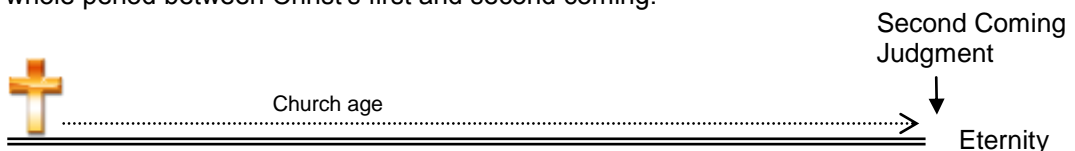
Pre-millennial view: Jesus returns before the millennium



Post-millennial view: Jesus returns after the millennium



Amillennial view: the millennium is not literal. The events described in Revelation are symbolic and apply to the whole period between Christ's first and second coming.



- Here are the main events associated with the Second Coming (not necessarily in order!):
 - There will be a period of tribulation, with wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution of Christians, wickedness and hatred.
 - The Gospel will be preached throughout the world and there will be a final harvest of souls won for the Lord. Israel will have her last chance to acknowledge Jesus as her Messiah.
 - The Antichrist will be revealed and will *cause the abomination of desolation*. (Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11). Ultimately the Antichrist will be defeated by the Lord.
 - False Messiahs will arise, even doing miracles.
 - Jesus will return from heaven, along with those who belong to Him. Christians who are alive at the time will be gathered to meet the Lord as He returns (the rapture).
 - There will be a final battle between the armies of the Lord and the armies of Satan, at Armageddon. (We win!).
 - Everybody will be resurrected and judged according to whether they belong to the Lord and according to what they have done. Reward in heaven or punishment in hell will follow.
 - Christians will receive a new spiritual body (the resurrection of the body).
 - The Kingdom of God will be ushered in with a new Heavens and a new Earth. There will be no more sin, sickness, death etc. Everyone will worship the Lord and live in relationship with Him for eternity.

Exercise:

Read Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21.

List all of the events that Jesus said would happen at the Second Coming. Then read Chapters 6-22 of the Book of Revelation and Daniel 9 in the light of this.

Being prepared for the Second Coming

Jesus' emphasis in Matthew Chapters 24 and 25 was less on what would happen at the end of the age, and more on making sure that we are prepared for it.

- Only God knows when it will happen. *No-one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*
- We must *keep watch* because we *do not know* on what day our *Lord will come*. It will be a time when *we do not expect Him*.
- Jesus gives four parables to emphasise the importance of always being ready for His return:

24:45-51. The parable of the wise servant. If we are *faithful and wise* we will always be doing what God has called us to do. *It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.* Those who are hypocritical will be found out and *there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

25:1-13. The parable of the ten virgins. When Jesus returns some will be ready and others won't. *Therefore keep watch because you do not know the day or the hour.*

25:14-30. The parable of the talents. Some will invest their lives in doing the Lord's work and be fruitful. For these ones Jesus says *Come share your master's happiness.* Others will waste their lives and will lose what they have had. For them there will be *darkness and weeping and gnashing of teeth.* *For those who have will be given more, and they will have an abundance. For those who do not have, even what they have will be taken from them.*

25:31-46. The parable of the sheep and goats. Everyone will stand before Jesus when He returns and will be judged. The sheep are those who have done God's will by caring for the sick, lonely and disadvantaged. To them He will say *"Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world"*. The goats are those who have not cared for the sick, lonely or disadvantaged. To them He will say *"Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels"*. The sheep will go on to eternal life and the goats to eternal punishment.



These parables are all teaching a very significant truth. We must always remain ready for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, by being righteous, doing His will and caring for those in need. The consequences for those who don't are serious.

Matthew 26:1 - 27:66 The death of Jesus

Matthew was there when Jesus was crucified so is able to describe the events accurately and explain in some detail how different people were involved.

The days before the Passover: Nisan 12th and 13th

Jesus knew that He was going to die. (26:2).

The chief priests and the elders plotted to arrest Jesus in a sly way and kill Him.

The woman from Bethany anointed Jesus with very expensive perfume. Jesus accepted the anointing by the woman because *she did it to prepare me for burial.*

The disciples were indignant because the perfume was costly and could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.

Judas went to the chief priests and offered to hand Jesus over to them. The agreed price was thirty pieces of silver; equivalent to the price of a slave – about 4 months wages. During the Last Supper Judas left and brought the soldiers to Jesus while He was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas led a crowd armed with swords and clubs and betrayed Jesus with a kiss. Jesus could have called on twelve legions of angels to help Him but submitted because *the Scriptures must be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way.* Later Judas was seized with remorse; threw the money into the temple and hanged himself. The money was used to buy a potters field as a burial place for foreigners. This was in fulfilment of Zechariah 11:12,13 and Jeremiah 19:1-13, and 32:6-9.

Jesus and the disciples held the Last Supper in preparation for the Passover.

Jesus explained (once again) that He was going to die, and the significance of it.

His body would be broken and His blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. He would not drink with them again until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.

Peter. Jesus predicted that the disciples would all fall away on account of Me (in fulfilment of Zechariah 13:7). Peter said he would never fall away but Jesus said he would deny Him three times that very night, before the cock crows. Peter said he would die with Jesus rather than disown Him and all the other disciples said the same. Later that night Peter did deny Jesus three times and then the cock crowed. Peter was distressed when he realised what he had done and wept bitterly.

Jesus prayed three times in the Garden of Gethsemane: "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may Your will be done". The cup was the suffering He was about to endure.

The disciples. Jesus asked the disciples to watch with Him and pray. The disciples went to sleep!

The servant of the High Priest had his ear cut off by the disciples. Jesus restored it back. Luke 22:51.

Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put Him to death. So much for a fair trial! The High Priest directly asked Jesus if He was the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus replied "Yes, it is as you say" and spoke of His return from His place at the right hand of the Mighty One. Even though it was true the High Priest saw this as blasphemy.

Pilate. The High Priest did not have authority to kill Jesus so sent Him to Pilate. Pilate was amazed that Jesus would not reply to accusations against Him. He had to release one man and wanted to know whether the crowd wanted Jesus released or Barabbas, a notorious prisoner. The Chief Priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. Pilate's wife warned him not to have anything to do with Jesus because she had suffered in a dream and He was an innocent man. The crowd was getting into an uproar so Pilate washed his hands of it saying "I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your responsibility". He then released Barabbas and had Jesus flogged and handed Him over to be crucified.



Jesus won His personal battle in the garden of Gethsemane. He obeyed the Father, regardless of the pain that He knew it would entail.

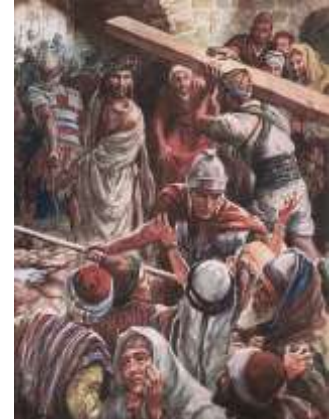
Later He won our battle on the cross of Calvary.

What amazing love!



The rabble spat in Jesus' face; struck Him with their fists saying "Prophecy to us Christ. Who hit you?" They then caused an uproar; and demanded that Jesus be crucified. They even took responsibility for Jesus' death saying "Let His blood be on us and on our children!" Ultimately it was the sin of all mankind that led Jesus to the cross.

The soldiers stripped Jesus, put a scarlet robe on Him, put a crown of thorns on His head, and bowed before Him. In doing this they were mocking Him and the fact that He was a King. They then spat on Him and struck Him. After they had mocked Him they put His own clothes on Him. Then they led Him away to crucify Him.



The day of Preparation Nisan 14th

Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry the cross for Jesus as He walked to Golgotha, the place of the skull (the local rubbish dump).

The soldiers offered Jesus wine mixed with gall (a pain-killer), but Jesus refused to take it. After they had crucified Him the soldiers divided up Jesus' clothes by casting lots (fulfilling Psalm 22:18). They then placed the charge over His head *This is Jesus, the King of the Jews* and kept watch over Him.

The crowd, the chief priests, the teachers of the law, the elders, and **the robbers** who were crucified with Jesus all mocked Him.

Between the 6th and 9th hour (noon till 3pm) there was *darkness over all the land*. This was mankind's darkest hour.

Jesus cried out *My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?* At this moment, in His full humanity Jesus took upon Himself all of the sin of the world and took the punishment that all sinners deserve. God's righteous anger at sin was poured upon Jesus and was then fully satisfied. When Jesus died the wages of sin were paid. On this basis, God could declare us righteous in Christ. Our salvation was won for us by Jesus at the Cross. Hallelujah! See Romans 6:23, Romans 3:25, Romans 5:12-19; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 5:1. As Jesus died He cried with a loud voice and *gave up His spirit*.



There were strange events that occurred at this most important time in history.

- **The curtain of the temple** was torn in two from top to bottom. This meant that now all could enter into God's presence, not just the High Priest. The curtain was torn apart by God and we have had direct access to Him ever since (in Christ).
- There was an **earthquake** and **tombs were opened** and many **righteous people were raised to life**. Later they *appeared to many people*.

The centurion exclaimed *Surely this was the Son of God*.

Women including Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons cared for Jesus.

Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body so he could bury it. Joseph *took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb.*

Mary Magdalene and the **other Mary** watched outside the tomb.

Nisan 15th, 16th and 17th.

Jesus was in the tomb. 1 Peter 3:18,19 and 4:6 tells us that during this time Jesus descended into Hades (the abode of the dead) and preached there. This means that all of those living before Christ had an opportunity to accept His salvation.

Pilate sealed the tomb and placed a guard around it because he knew that Jesus had said *After three days I will rise again.*

Matthew 28:1 - 15 The resurrection of Jesus

The first day of the week Nisan 18th

Jesus rose from the dead *after* (at the end of) *the Sabbath* (literally *Sabbaths*, because that week there was an extra Sabbath due to it being the Feast of the Passover). *There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.*

The guards were frightened *and became like dead men.*

The angel said to the women *Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen, just as He said. Come see the place where He lay.*

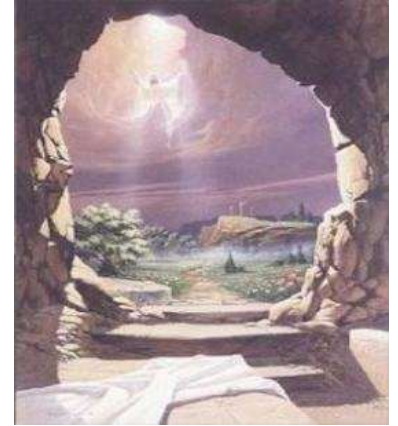
The women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy and ran to tell the disciples.

Jesus met them and they *clasped His feet and worshipped* Him. He said to tell the brothers that they would see Him in Galilee.

The guards reported what had happened to the chief priests.

The chief priests met with **the elders** and devised a plan; gave the soldiers money and told them to say that the disciples stole Jesus' body while they were asleep.

The disciples went to Galilee and met **Jesus** there. When they saw Him, they worshipped Him, but some doubted.



Matthew 28:16-20. The great commission

Jesus passed His authority on to His disciples and commissioned them to carry on His work. They (and we) are to:

- *Go and make disciples of all nations.*
- Baptise these disciples *in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*
- Teach these disciples *to obey everything* Jesus has commanded.

If we do this Jesus will be with us *always, to the very end of the age.*

The disciples obeyed Jesus and began sharing the Gospel. It soon spread throughout the known world, and now is proclaimed everywhere.

Jesus commission for us to make disciples still remains. There are still many who need to meet Him as their Saviour and Lord.

Jesus commissions us to make disciples, not just converts. The Greek word for disciple is *mathetes*. It means *a learner; one who follows a teacher.*

Jesus commissions us to share the Gospel so that others will receive Him as Saviour, obey Him as Lord, and continually learn from Him.

Discussion questions

The word *gospel* means *good news*. Identify the good news contained in Matthew's gospel. What makes it good news?

Find out all you can about Matthew. Why do you think he was chosen to write one of the gospels? What was the purpose of his gospel? How is His gospel unique? How is it similar to the others?

What are the major themes in Matthew's gospel? How are these relevant for Christians today?

What is the Kingdom of God (the *Kingdom of heaven* in Matthew's gospel)? What is it like? How can we enter it? How can we live in it? When and how will it be completed?

Jesus is portrayed in Matthew's gospel as 'The King of the Jews'. Why? What is the significance of this for Jews, and for Christians today?

Identify Jesus' teaching, parables and miracles in Matthew's gospel. What is their relevance and importance for us today?

What have you learnt from your study of Matthew's gospel? How will you apply this in your life?