

MATTHEW

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BACKGROUND

As Malachi, last of the OT prophets, passed from the scene (c. 400 B.C.), Judea was a tiny province of returned Jewish exiles living in relative peace within the Persian Empire. When Alexander the Great made Persia a part of his Greek Empire (c. 333), things continued to be relatively peaceful for Israel. Greece even facilitated the translation of the OT into Greek (the Septuagint) c. 250.

The Greek Empire was divided into four parts following Alexander's death. Israel was dominated by the part centered in Egypt (the Ptolemies) until 198, at which time it came under the control of the Seleucids of Syria. In 171, the Seleucid ruler Antiochus Epiphanes began a cruel anti-Jewish crusade in which he killed tens of thousands of Jews and desecrated the Temple (see exposition on [§Daniel 8:15-27](#)) before being defeated by the Jews in 165 (recorded in the apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees).

In the last 150 years before Christ, Rome gradually displaced Greece's four successor kingdoms as the dominant world power. By 64 B.C., Rome controlled Palestine. Beginning about 40, Rome allowed the Edomite Herods to govern the area. With the Middle Eastern world relatively at peace under Rome, and with Greek having become the common language of much of the empire, the "right time" ([Galatians 4:4](#)) had come for God to introduce his Messiah.

Matthew is one of four accounts of the life, death, and resurrection of this Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. These first four books of the NT are called the Gospels, meaning "good news." Matthew, Mark, and Luke are often called the "synoptic" Gospels because they tell Christ's story from similar points of view (see [Mark: Date and Location](#)).

While Christ was on earth, he and his disciples evangelized mainly among their fellow Jews, though their ministry did attract many Gentiles as well. Before his ascension, Christ made it clear that Gentiles were to hear the gospel as well (see [Matthew 28:19](#); [Acts 1:8](#)). The book of Acts records the disciples' enthusiastic response as they took the Good News throughout the Roman Empire. In his letter to the Romans, Paul explained how this universal proclamation of Christ fulfilled God's ultimate intention that all nations would be blessed and would come to faith in him through Israel, his chosen people (see [Genesis 12:1-3](#)).

- » **See also:** [Illustration: Important Events between the Testaments](#)

AUTHOR

Matthew, also known as Levi ([Mark 2:14](#)), a tax collector ([Matthew 9:9](#)) who became an apostle ([Matthew 10:3](#)).

DATE

Uncertain. Some date it in the early 50s A.D., while others date in the mid-60s. See [Mark: Date and Location](#).

RECIPIENTS

Jews living in Palestine.

PURPOSE

Matthew wrote some 20 years after Christ's death and resurrection. The Jewish nation as a whole had summarily rejected Jesus as their Messiah. Matthew knew that they would soon face the destruction of their very national and religious life ([Matthew 24:1-2](#)). Meanwhile they endured the oppressive yoke of Rome with no relief in sight. Matthew took his pen in hand to reintroduce Jesus to the Jews and to show that he was truly what he claimed to be, the Messiah, King of Israel. He pointed to the future when Jesus would return to the earth and set up his Kingdom and realize all the promises made to the patriarchs and Israel. Until that time, Jesus' followers should give themselves to making and baptizing disciples and teaching them the things that Jesus taught ([Matthew 28:19-20](#)).

UNIQUE FEATURES

- Matthew is the only Gospel containing the word *church* ([Matthew 16:18](#); [Matthew 18:17](#)).
- Matthew records five great sermons by Jesus:
 - The Sermon on the Mount ([Matthew 5-7](#))
 - The sending of the 12 ([Matthew 10](#))
 - The parables of the Kingdom ([Matthew 13](#))
 - The seven woes on scribes and Pharisees ([Matthew 23](#))
 - The Olivet discourse on the end times ([Matthew 24-25](#))
- Matthew is the most systematic Gospel, grouping together similar things such as discourses, parables, and miracles.
- Matthew emphasizes final rewards and punishments. The words *judgment*, *hell*, *fire*, *hypocrite*, or *woe* are found on almost every page.

COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

» **See also:** [Illustration: Fourfold Gospel Account, The](#)

Mark:

- Matthew presents Jesus as King; Mark presents him as Servant.

Luke:

- Matthew emphasizes Jesus' rejection; Luke emphasizes his acceptance.

Luke and John:

- Matthew (and Mark) present Jesus as the victim of the crucifixion; Luke and John present him as the victor.

Revelation:

- [Matthew 24](#) helps explain the seal judgments of [Rev. 6:1-8:1](#).

OUTLINE

1. INTRODUCTION OF THE KING ([Matthew 1-4](#))
 1. His genealogy: Earthly lineage ([Matthew 1:1-17](#))
 2. His birth: Heavenly descent ([Matthew 1:18-25](#))
 - C. Infancy and childhood ([Matthew 2](#))
 - D. Baptism ([Matthew 3](#))
 - E. Temptation in the wilderness ([Matthew 4:1-11](#))
 - F. His ministry begins; calls four disciples ([Matthew 4:12-25](#))
- II. PROCLAMATIONS OF THE KING: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT ([Matthew 5-7](#))
 - A. The Beatitudes ([Matthew 5:1-12](#))
 - B. Salt and light ([Matthew 5:13-16](#))
 - C. The law and the gospel ([Matthew 5:17-48](#))
 - D. Giving, prayer, fasting ([Matthew 6:1-18](#))
 - E. Money and worry ([Matthew 6:19-34](#))
 - F. Judging and being judged ([Matthew 7:1-6](#))
 - G. Asking, seeking, knocking ([Matthew 7:7-11](#))
 - H. The Golden Rule ([Matthew 7:12](#))
 - I. The two ways ([Matthew 7:13-29](#))
- III. POWER OF THE KING ([Matthew 8-10](#))
 - A. Healings ([Matthew 8:1-17](#))
 - B. Leaving all to follow Christ ([Matthew 8:18-22](#))
 - C. Calming the sea ([Matthew 8:23-27](#))

- D. Demons and pigs ([Matthew 8:28-34](#))
 - E. Power to forgive sins ([Matthew 9:1-8](#))
 - F. The call of Matthew ([Matthew 9:9-13](#))
 - G. Fasting and feasting; the old and new ([Matthew 9:14-17](#))
 - H. Healings ([Matthew 9:18-38](#))
 - I. Selecting and sending the 12 ([Matthew 10](#))
- IV. OPPOSITION TO THE KING ([Matthew 11-12](#))
- A. Delegation from John the Baptist ([Matthew 11:1-19](#))
 - B. Opposition from various cities ([Matthew 11:20-30](#))
 - C. Opposition from Pharisees ([Matthew 12](#))
- V. PARABLES OF THE KING ([Matthew 13](#))
- A. Sower and seed ([Matthew 13:1-9](#), [18-23](#))
 - B. The purpose of his parables ([Matthew 13:10-17](#))
 - C. Wheat and weeds ([Matthew 13:24-30](#), [36-43](#))
 - D. Mustard seed ([Matthew 13:31-32](#))
 - E. Yeast ([Matthew 13:33-35](#))
 - F. Treasure ([Matthew 13:44](#))
 - G. Pearl of great price ([Matthew 13:45-46](#))
 - H. Dragnet ([Matthew 13:47-50](#))
 - I. Treasures old and new ([Matthew 13:51-52](#))
 - X. Opposition in Christ's hometown ([Matthew 13:53-58](#))
- VI. REVELATIONS OF THE KING TO HIS OWN ([Matthew 14:1-16:12](#))
- A. Death of John the Baptist ([Matthew 14:1-12](#))
 - B. Feeding 5,000; walking on water ([Matthew 14:13-36](#))

- C. Warnings about Pharisees ([Matthew 15:1-20](#))
 - D. Healings ([Matthew 15:21-31](#))
 - E. Feeding 4,000 ([Matthew 15:32-39](#))
 - F. Warnings about Pharisees ([Matthew 16:1-12](#))
- VII. INSTRUCTIONS OF THE KING TO HIS OWN ([Matthew 16:13-20:34](#))
- A. Peter's confession ([Matthew 16:13-20](#))
 - B. Christ's first prediction of his death ([Matthew 16:21-28](#))
 - C. Transfiguration ([Matthew 17:1-13](#))
 - D. Disciples fail to heal a demoniac ([Matthew 17:14-21](#))
 - E. Christ's second prediction of his death ([Matthew 17:22-23](#))
 - F. Payment of the Temple tax ([Matthew 17:24-27](#))
 - G. Children and the Kingdom ([Matthew 18:1-14](#))
 - H. Conflicts in the church ([Matthew 18:15-20](#))
 - I. Forgiveness; the unforgiving servant ([Matthew 18:21-35](#))
 - X. Divorce ([Matthew 19:1-12](#))
 - K. Children and the Kingdom ([Matthew 19:13-15](#))
 - L. The rich young ruler ([Matthew 19:16-30](#))
 - M. Workers in the vineyard ([Matthew 20:1-16](#))
 - N. Christ's third prediction of his death ([Matthew 20:17-19](#))
 - O. Greatness in the Kingdom ([Matthew 20:20-28](#))
 - P. Jesus heals two blind men ([Matthew 20:29-34](#))
- VIII. PRESENTATION AND REJECTION OF THE KING ([Matthew 21-23](#))
- A. Triumphal Entry ([Matthew 21:1-11](#))
 - B. Cleansing the Temple ([Matthew 21:12-17](#))

- C. Cursing the fig tree ([Matthew 21:18-22](#))
 - D. Parables on Israel's rejection of Christ ([Matthew 21:23-22:14](#))
 - E. Paying taxes to Caesar ([Matthew 22:15-22](#))
 - F. Confrontation with Sadducees ([Matthew 22:23-33](#))
 - G. Greatest commandment ([Matthew 22:34-40](#))
 - H. Is Christ the son of David? ([Matthew 22:41-46](#))
 - I. Seven woes on scribes and Pharisees ([Matthew 23](#))
- IX. PREDICTIONS OF THE KING: THE OLIVET DISCOURSE ([Matthew 24-25](#))
- A. Jerusalem's fall; Christ's return ([Matthew 24](#))
 - B. Ten bridesmaids; three servants ([Matthew 25:1-30](#))
 - C. Sheep and goats ([Matthew 25:31-46](#))
- X. DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF THE KING ([Matthew 26-28](#))
- A. Plot of priests and scribes ([Matthew 26:1-5](#))
 - B. Anointing by Mary ([Matthew 26:6-13](#))
 - C. Judas plans betrayal ([Matthew 26:14-16](#))
 - D. Observance of Passover; Lord's Supper ([Matthew 26:17-30](#))
 - E. Jesus predicts Peter's denial ([Matthew 26:31-35](#))
 - F. Gethsemane ([Matthew 26:36-46](#))
 - G. Christ's arrest ([Matthew 26:47-56](#))
 - H. Trials; Peter's denial ([Matthew 26:57-27:31](#))
 - I. Crucifixion, burial ([Matthew 27:32-66](#))
 - X. Resurrection ([Matthew 28](#))

TIMELINE

5 B.C.:	Birth of Christ
A.D. 8:	Visits Temple, age 12
A.D. 26:	Begins ministry
A.D. 28:	Chooses 12
A.D. 29:	Feeds 5,000, Death of John the Baptist
A.D. 30:	Death, resurrection, ascension

Matthew 1:1-17 *From Abraham the friend of God to Christ the Son of God.* Matthew began his Gospel account with the genealogy of Jesus through his earthly father, Joseph. The genealogy goes back through King David to Abraham. Abraham, David, and Christ are all mentioned at the end of the genealogy as well as at the beginning. This shows that Jesus

- is legal heir to the throne of Israel (Davidic covenant, see [2 Samuel 7:4-16](#));
- fulfills God's promise that all nations would be blessed through Abraham (Abrahamic covenant, see [Genesis 12:3](#)). [[Luke 3:23-38](#)]

The genealogy mentions four women other than Mary—an unusual feature in genealogies of that day. While many of Christ's male ancestors were far less than noble, the inclusion of these four women especially shows God's grace and sovereignty in choosing through whom he will work:

- Tamar (see [Genesis 38:13-30](#)), Rahab (see [Joshua 2:1](#)), and Bathsheba (see [2 Samuel 11:1-5](#)) had either committed sexual sin or been victims of it.
- Ruth was a Gentile (see [Ruth 1:4](#)).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Important Events between the Testaments](#)

Matthew 1:18-25 *Good news for a troubled fianc,*. Joseph, engaged to Mary, learned that she was pregnant even though they had not had sexual relations. Assuming that she had been unfaithful to him, but being a "just" man, Joseph considered divorcing her quietly to avoid exposing her to public shame. However, an angel revealed to him the supernatural origin of Mary's pregnancy and that Mary's son would be the Messiah (see [Isaiah 7:14](#)). With this reassurance, Joseph married Mary but refrained from sexual relations with her until Jesus was born.

Note that divorce could end an engagement as well as a marriage ([Matthew 1:19](#), NIV).

Matthew 2:1-12 *"We three kings of Orient are!"* As Micah (see [Micah 5:2](#)) had predicted, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. About two years later (compare [Matthew 2:7, 16](#)), "wise men" led by a star came to see him. When they inquired about the "king of the Jews," Herod became very concerned. When informed that prophecy indicated the young king had been born in Bethlehem ([Matthew 2:4-6](#)), Herod determined when the event had occurred, directed the wise men to Bethlehem, and pretended to want to know when they found the child so that he could "worship" him.

Guided once more by the star, the wise men found Jesus, offered gifts to him, and, being warned not to inform Herod of the baby's whereabouts, returned home.

The wise men were probably astronomers. Tradition says there were three of them—probably because of the three gifts. The myrrh, used to embalm, may have signified the ultimate reason for

Christ's birth. The star was probably supernatural, since it apparently disappeared for a while, necessitating their asking directions from Herod.

Matthew 2:13-15 *Their prophetic move to Egypt.* Warned by an angel that Herod would try to kill Jesus, Joseph fled with Mary and Jesus to Egypt, fulfilling an OT prophecy (see exposition on ^s[Hosea 11:1-7](#)). Jesus would retrace the life of the nation of Israel, which took refuge in Egypt and later returned to possess Canaan.

Matthew 2:16-18 *The massacre they escaped.* Realizing the wise men had fled without leading him to the infant king, Herod became enraged and killed all the male children in Bethlehem up to age two, hoping thereby to kill Jesus (compare [Matthew 2:16](#) with [Matthew 2:7](#)). The event reminded Matthew of Jeremiah's lament for the Israelite exiles (see exposition on ^s[Jeremiah 31:15-25](#)). Herod's bloody rampage was in keeping with what history reveals of this cruel man who would later order the execution of his wife and three of his sons.

Matthew 2:19-23 *More directions from an angel.* For the third time an angel appeared to Joseph, this time telling him that Herod was dead so he and his family could return to Israel. A fourth dream warned them to go to the Galilean town of Nazareth instead of Judea because of potential problems with Herod's son Archelaus. This, says Matthew, fulfilled the OT prophecy that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene. The prophetic reference is unclear, though it may involve the "rod" that would come up from "the stem of Jesse" ([Isaiah 11:1](#), KJV). *Nazarene* may be related to *netzer*, meaning "rod." This would be in harmony with Matthew's emphasis on Christ's Davidic lineage. Or Matthew may have intended a more general reference to Christ's lowly nature (see [Zech. 9:9](#); [John 1:46](#)).

Matthew 3:1-12 *"Repent, bear fruit, and be baptized."* The story now moves forward 28 years to John the Baptist, who had been designated to prepare the way for Christ ([Matthew 3:3](#); see [Isaiah 40:3-5](#); [Luke 1:13-17](#), [76](#)). John appeared as a strange prophet in the desert of Judea. His odd clothing of camel's hair may have reminded the people of Elijah (see [2 Kings 1:8](#)), while his diet of locusts ([Matthew 3:4](#)) may have helped him identify with the poor. Many responded to John's message ([Matthew 3:5](#)).

His message had two points:

- Repent ([Matthew 3:2](#)).
- Prepare for the Kingdom of Heaven ([Matthew 3:2](#)) and the Messiah ([Matthew 3:3](#)), of whom the prophets had spoken ([Matthew 3:3](#)).

The people's response was likewise twofold: confession of sin and baptism in the Jordan River ([Matthew 3:5-6](#)). Many of the religious leaders, however, received a stern warning from John: They must demonstrate true repentance before he would baptize them ([Matthew 3:7-8](#)). Mere descent from Abraham would not save them ([Matthew 3:9-10](#)).

The coming Messiah, said John, would baptize not just with water but with the Holy Spirit and fire ([Matthew 3:11-12](#); see [Acts 1:5](#); [Acts 2:1-4](#)). Fire speaks of the Spirit's work in judgment (see [John 16:8-11](#)). [[Mark 1:1-8](#); [Luke 3:1-20](#); [John 1:6-27](#)]

Matthew 3:13-17 *"But why should I baptize you?"* John the Baptist obediently baptized Jesus, while acknowledging that he needed to be cleansed by Jesus, and not the other way around. Both the

Father and the Spirit signalled their approval of Christ's action (compare [Matthew 17:5](#)). [[Mark 1:9-11](#); [Luke 3:21-22](#); [John 1:31-34](#)]

Jesus was not baptized to be saved, for he did not need salvation. The text suggests several purposes for his baptism:

- to identify with John's proclamation of his coming
- to show John that he was in fact the Messiah (see [John 1:33](#))
- to signal the beginning of his messianic ministry
- to identify himself as a priest of Israel (see [Leviticus 8:6](#))
- to provide an example for believers to follow
- to demonstrate the involvement and approval of the other persons of the Trinity in his ministry. In fact, the baptism of Jesus gives one of the clearest illustrations of the doctrine of the Trinity (see exposition on [§Genesis 1:26-31](#)), with
 - the Father speaking from heaven ([Matthew 3:17](#))
 - the Son coming out of the water ([Matthew 3:16](#))
 - the Holy Spirit descending from heaven ([Matthew 3:16](#))
- Various theologians have promoted a "modalistic" view of the Trinity, with God taking one form at a time. But at Christ's baptism all three persons of the Trinity appeared at once.

[Matthew 4:1-11](#) *Passing the temptation test.* Following his baptism, Jesus was led into the desert by the Holy Spirit (who had come upon him at his baptism) to be tempted by the devil. Unlike Adam and Eve (see exposition on [§Genesis 3:6](#)), Jesus successfully resisted Satan, showing himself qualified, as the spotless Lamb of God, to be the perfect sacrifice for sin (see [John 1:29](#)). In his temptations, Jesus overcame three categories of sin (compare [1 John 2:16](#)):

- By refusing to satisfy his hunger by turning stones into bread, he conquered the lust for physical pleasure.
- By rejecting Satan's dare to jump from the top of the Temple, he conquered pride in one's possessions.
- By turning down Satan's offer of the kingdoms of the world, he conquered the lust for everything one sees.

Jesus responded to each temptation by quoting Scripture, showing his own familiarity with Scripture and setting an example for believers who are tempted. [[Mark 1:12-13](#); [Luke 4:1-13](#)]

[Matthew 4:12-17](#) *The light of deity in the land of darkness.* Hearing that John the Baptist was in prison, Jesus left Judea for Galilee. Galilee encompassed the tribal territories of Zebulun and Naphtali, so Jesus' living there fulfilled the prophecy that their land would be honored by the dawning of a great light ([Matthew 4:15-16](#); see [Isaiah 9:1-2](#)). Christ's message was identical to that of John the Baptist: Repent, because God's rule through the Messiah is drawing near ([Matthew 4:17](#)). [[Mark 1:14-15](#); [Luke 3:19-20](#)]

[Matthew 4:18-22](#) *Fishermen become fishers of men.* Jesus called his first four disciples, all of whom were fishermen. With the call came a promise: They would learn how to "fish for people." All four responded to Christ without hesitation. [[Mark 1:16-20](#); [Luke 5:1-11](#)]

Matthew 4:23-25 *A balm in Galilee.* Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching, healing, and casting out demons. Word spread and he attracted large crowds from all over Israel and nearby areas. Jews began meeting in synagogues sometime after the destruction of Solomon's Temple in 586 B.C. Never intended to replace Temple worship, they were primarily for teaching and prayer.

Matthew 5:1-12 *A bushel full of blessings.* Commonly called the Sermon on the Mount, **Matthew 5-7** includes many memorable teachings of Christ. Though it sets forth principles that will become universal only during the Millennium, Jesus expected believers of his own day and ours as well to follow those principles. **Matthew 5:1-12** has been called the "Beatitudes"—eight sayings that speak of blessings or happiness. Genuine happiness, said Jesus, comes from

- recognizing your need for God (spiritual poverty) (**Matthew 5:3**)
- mourning over your sin (**Matthew 5:4**)
- submitting to divine authority (**Matthew 5:5**)
- desiring justice or righteousness (**Matthew 5:6**)
- showing mercy (**Matthew 5:7**)
- maintaining a pure heart (**Matthew 5:8**)
- working for peace (**Matthew 5:9**)
- rejoicing in the face of persecution (**Matthew 5:10-12**) [**Luke 6:20-49**]

Matthew 5:13-16 *Shining light and seasoning salt.* Christians are to be "salt" and "light" for God. Salt was used in that day to prevent corruption, provide flavor, and promote thirst. Likewise, Christians are to stand against moral corruption; show the "flavor" of God's grace; and promote a thirst for salvation. As the light of the world, Christians are to live as well as proclaim the truth of Christ (see **Phil. 2:14-15**) so that others will come to know him (**Matthew 5:16**).

Matthew 5:17-20 *The Son of God and the law of God.* Christ's purpose was not to abolish the law but to fulfill it. The law would outlast heaven and earth. Every command, even what the KJV refers to as the "jots" and "tittles" (smallest letters and least strokes of a pen) are therefore significant. Christ's disciples must be more righteous than even the Pharisees—a standard that cannot be met apart from his work on our behalf (see **Romans 3:21-22**).

Matthew 5:21-48 *"It was said . . . but now I say . . ."* Having declared his utmost regard for the law, Jesus proceeded to show how the law's true intent went far beyond the superficial interpretation of the Pharisees. He dealt with several issues, highlighting each with a variation of "It once was said . . . but now I say . . ." The law forbade murder, but Jesus condemned anger as the root cause of murder. No gift is acceptable to God if the giver is harboring unresolved anger (**Matthew 5:21-26**). Likewise adultery begins with a lustful heart. Lust can destroy the soul. It should be dealt with quickly (**Matthew 5:27-30**).

A misapplication of the law had led to a liberal attitude toward divorce (**Matthew 5:31**; see **Deut. 24:1-4**). Once again, Jesus called for allegiance to a higher standard (**Matthew 5:32**; see exposition on **Matthew 19:1-12**).

While the law allowed the use of vows and oaths (see **Leviticus 19:12**; **Numbers 30:2**; **Deut. 23:21-23**), an honest person should not have to rely on them to back up his or her word (**Matthew 5:33-37**; see **James 5:12**). The Mosaic principle of an eye for an eye was often misapplied as a license for

revenge ([Matthew 5:38](#); see exposition on [§][Leviticus 24:17-22](#)). Instead, nonresistance to evil ([Matthew 5:39](#)), going the extra mile ([Matthew 5:40-41](#)), and love for enemies ([Matthew 5:43-48](#)) should distinguish Christian behavior.

Matthew 6:1-18 *The right and wrong way to give, pray, and fast.* Doing good deeds ([Matthew 6:1-4](#)), praying ([Matthew 6:5-15](#)), and fasting ([Matthew 6:16-18](#)) are best done in secret, to avoid spiritual pride.

[Matthew 6:9-13](#), commonly called the Lord's Prayer, is really the disciples' prayer, a guide for believers' prayers. It is not to be repeated over and over ([Matthew 6:7-8](#)). Instead, it gives principles for communicating with God. Its words demonstrate

- faith in God ([Matthew 6:9](#))
- worship of God ([Matthew 6:9](#))
- expectation from God ([Matthew 6:10](#))
- submission to God ([Matthew 6:10](#))
- petition for ourselves ([Matthew 6:11](#))
- confession of sins ([Matthew 6:12](#))
- dependence on God's grace ([Matthew 6:12](#))
- compassion for others ([Matthew 6:12](#))
- dependence on God's power ([Matthew 6:13](#))
- acknowledgment of God's sovereignty ([Matthew 6:13](#))

[Matthew 6:5-6](#) does not forbid all public prayers, since Jesus and his disciples prayed publicly (see [Matthew 11:25](#); [Luke 3:21](#); [John 17](#)).

Matthew 6:19-24 *The only bank that's fully insured.* Earthly treasure is insecure and corruptible, while eternal treasure is secure and incorruptible ([Matthew 6:19-20](#)). Christians should focus on the latter, to produce a heart for eternal things ([Matthew 6:20-21](#)). Greed can infect a person's entire life ([Matthew 6:21-23](#)). One must choose either God or money; both cannot be served at the same time ([Matthew 6:24](#)).

Matthew 6:25-34 *The answer to anxiety.* For the believer, worry and anxiety are pointless. God feeds the birds and clothes the flowers ([Matthew 6:26, 28](#)), and he loves and values us much more than them ([Matthew 6:26, 30](#)). Worrying does not solve anything ([Matthew 6:27](#)). Instead of worry, we should demonstrate faith by seeking God and trusting him to meet our needs ([Matthew 6:33-34](#)).

Matthew 7:1-6 *Those who judge risk judgment.* The person who judges risks being judged by the same measuring stick ([Matthew 7:1-2](#)) and often exhibits the same sin for which he or she condemns others ([Matthew 7:3-4](#)). Only after dealing with one's own sin can one have the spiritual insight to help other sinners ([Matthew 7:5](#)). God alone can judge; still, it is the duty of Christians to speak out against sin (see [Matthew 7:15-20](#) and exposition on [§][1 Cor. 5:9-6:11](#)) and to exercise wisdom in dealing with those who reject the truth ([Matthew 7:6](#)).

Matthew 7:7-11 *Ask God, and he'll answer!* Believers should never hesitate to seek God's richest blessings ([Matthew 7:7-8](#)), for God's generosity toward his children far exceeds our human understanding of generosity ([Matthew 7:9-11](#)).

Matthew 7:12 *All rules lead to one rule.* We should treat others the way we want to be treated. If we follow this principle, often called the Golden Rule, we can be confident that we are keeping God's law (compare exposition on [[§]Matthew 22:34-40](#); [Galatians 5:13-15](#)).

Matthew 7:13-27 *Four looks at the two ways.* As the Sermon on the Mount came to a close, Jesus drew four contrasts between those who accept and those who reject him:

The road less traveled (7:13-14). The highway to destruction is wide and well traveled. The gateway to life is narrow and little used. More people will miss eternal life than find it.

Only two kinds of trees (7:15-20). Many who claim to speak in God's name are false prophets. The true prophet's life will back up his or her message. Compare [Matthew 7:17-19](#) and [Matthew 12:33](#).

Not all who profess possess (7:21-23). It is one thing to profess to know and serve God ([Matthew 7:21-22](#)); it is quite another to be known by God ([Matthew 7:23](#)). Those accepted by God are those who do his will by receiving his Son (see [John 6:28-29](#)).

Foundations firm and flimsy (7:24-27). Those who put Christ's words into practice build on a solid foundation. Those who hear the truth but fail to apply it build on sand (compare [James 1:22](#)). The storms of life will demonstrate which direction one has chosen.

Matthew 7:28-29 *"This teacher is different!"* The people were amazed at the authoritative tone of Jesus' teaching. He was so different from the scribes, who could only cite the authority of earlier teachers to bolster their opinions.

Matthew 8:1-4 *A leper healed.* Immediately after finishing his teachings on the mountain, Jesus encountered a leper, healed him, and instructed him to tell no one about being healed—the first of several times Jesus would request such secrecy. The healed leper was to present himself to the priest for cleansing (see [Leviticus 14:1-32](#)). Matthew would later explain why Jesus shunned publicity (see exposition on [[§]Matthew 12:15-21](#)). The parallel accounts of Mark and Luke reveal, however, that the leper ignored Christ's directions and freely told others of his healing, as would many others who were instructed not to tell (see [Matthew 9:30-31](#); [Mark 7:36](#)). [[Mark 1:40-45](#); [Luke 5:12-16](#)]

Matthew 8:5-13 *More faithful than his own people?* A Roman centurion asked Jesus to heal his servant. Jesus granted the healing and commended this Gentile's faith while condemning Israel's unbelief ([Matthew 8:10-12](#)). [[[§]Luke 7:1-10](#)]

Matthew 8:14-17 *One healing leads to many more.* Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, prompting many more sick and demon-possessed people to seek healing. Matthew's reference to [Isaiah 53:4](#) has led many to believe that physical healing is as much a part of Christ's atonement as is deliverance from sin. While sickness and death are, indeed, a result of sin and will eventually be eradicated by Christ's atonement for sin, both Scripture (see [1 Cor. 15:51-54](#); [Rev. 21:4](#)) and experience attest that this will not be accomplished in full until Christ's second coming. [[Mark 1:29-34](#); [Luke 4:38-44](#)]

Note that Peter, claimed as Roman Catholicism's first pope, was married.

Matthew 8:18-22 *Only the sold-out need apply.* Jesus challenged the dedication of two would-be disciples. Neither loss of physical comfort nor interruption of family ties are valid reasons to delay following Christ. [[Luke 9:57-62](#)]

Matthew 8:23-27 *"Even the wind and sea obey him!"* While Christ was with his disciples on the Sea of Galilee, a storm threatened to overturn their boat, but at Christ's command it subsided. Evidently God used this experience to test the disciples' faith ([Matthew 8:26](#)). They were duly impressed by Christ's control of nature ([Matthew 8:27](#)). [[Mark 4:35-41](#); [§][Luke 8:22-25](#)]

Matthew 8:28-34 *A frightening miracle.* On the other side of Galilee, Jesus was confronted by two demon-possessed men. The remarkable cure Jesus performed frightened the people of the region. [[§][Mark 5:1-20](#); [Luke 8:26-39](#)]

Matthew 9:1-8 *"Be forgiven!" "Be healed!" Which is easier?* When some scribes accused Jesus of blasphemy for forgiving the sins of a paralytic, Jesus demonstrated his authority and power to forgive sins by causing the man to walk. The onlookers were amazed. [[§][Mark 2:1-12](#); [Luke 5:17-26](#)]

Matthew 9:9-13 *From tax agent to apostle.* Matthew noted his own call to discipleship, which was followed by a confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees for his associating with Matthew's unsavory friends. Tax collectors were not liked in Jesus' day any more than in our day! They were categorized with "sinners" ([Matthew 9:10-11](#)). Jesus used this occasion to stress that he had come as a physician to heal sinners. He rejected the Pharisees' practice of personal separation from undesirable people, which gave them little opportunity to make converts. [[Mark 2:13-17](#); [Luke 5:27-32](#)]

Matthew 9:14-17 *Why fast when you can feast?* When asked why his disciples did not fast, Jesus replied that as long as he was physically present with them, they should celebrate ([Matthew 9:14-15](#)). He had come not merely to patch up or reform a legalistic Judaism but to bring about something new ([Matthew 9:16-17](#)): salvation by grace through faith. [[§][Mark 2:18-22](#); [Luke 5:33-39](#)]

Matthew 9:18-26 *The hem of his garment, the touch of his hand.* While Jesus was on his way to visit a ruler whose daughter was ill, a woman with a hemorrhage touched his clothing and was healed. Jesus then proceeded to the ruler's house and resurrected the ruler's daughter, who had died during the delay. As a result, his fame spread far and wide. [[§][Mark 5:21-43](#); [Luke 8:40-56](#)]

Matthew 9:27-31 *Two faithful and grateful blind men.* Two blind men cried out for mercy, using the messianic title "Son of David." Acknowledging their faith, Jesus restored their sight. As in the case of the leper (see [Matthew 8:1-4](#); [Mark 1:45](#)), the blind men ignored Christ's instructions not to publicize their healing.

Matthew 9:32-34 *One miracle, two responses.* Jesus healed a man unable to speak because of demon possession. The healing brought two very different responses:

- The crowds marveled.
- The Pharisees attributed the healing to Satan.

This incident shows the ability of Satan and his demons to inflict physical suffering on humans, though this never happens outside of God's sovereign will (see exposition on [§][Job 1:6-12](#); [§][Job 2:1-8](#)).

Matthew 9:35-38 *Sheep without shepherds, grain without reapers.* As Jesus continued his preaching and healing, he felt deep concern for the multitudes without spiritual leadership. He explained to his disciples that many were ready to be "harvested" for the Kingdom.

Matthew 10:1-15 *The call and commissioning of the 12.* Jesus selected 12 of his followers to be "apostles" ([Matthew 10:2](#)) and gave them a specific mission: to proclaim to Israel the advent of their Messiah and his Kingdom ([Matthew 10:6-7](#)). They were not, at this time, to evangelize Gentiles or even Samaritans ([Matthew 10:5](#)). Jesus gave them the authority to heal disease and cast out demons ([Matthew 10:8](#)). They were to take no money or extra supplies but to live by faith, depending on the goodness of those who responded to their ministry ([Matthew 10:9-10](#)) while symbolically warning those who rejected them ([Matthew 10:11-15](#)). [[Mark 3:13-19](#); [Mark 6:7-13](#); [Luke 6:12-16](#); [Luke 9:1-6](#)]

Apostle means "messenger." Although it is usually a technical designation for the 12, the NT also applies the term to missionaries in general (see [Romans 16:7](#)) and to Jesus himself (see [Hebrews 3:1](#)).

Matthew 10:16-42 *The call and commissioning of all disciples.* Christ's further instructions to the 12 apply to his disciples throughout history. Some of his words seem prophetic of the intense suffering of the faithful during the Tribulation (see [Matthew 10:23](#)). Disciples are to be prepared for persecution ([Matthew 10:16-26](#), [34-36](#)), single-mindedly devoted to Christ ([Matthew 10:37-38](#)), and bold in their witness for him ([Matthew 10:27-33](#)). Those who kindly receive them will be rewarded ([Matthew 10:40-42](#)).

"Beelzebub" ([Matthew 10:25](#), KJV), derived from the name of a Canaanite deity (see exposition on [2 Kings 1:1-8](#)), was a common Jewish name for Satan.

Matthew 11:1-19 *Reassuring the peerless prophet.* John the Baptist, chained in a dark dungeon, probably with little food or water, was evidently having doubts about the one he had proclaimed as the Lamb of God, so he sent his disciples to ask Jesus if he truly was the Messiah ([Matthew 11:1-3](#); see [John 1:29](#)). Jesus' response contained only encouragement for John, and no rebuke ([Matthew 11:4-6](#)). He went on to commend John's ministry and validate it on the basis of OT prophecy ([Matthew 11:7-15](#)) and to chide the fickle crowd for their inconsistent responses to John and himself ([Matthew 11:16-19](#)). [[Luke 7:18-35](#)]

Christ's commendation of the doubting John shows that intellectual doubts need not necessarily affect one's relationship with Christ. Christ understands human frailty (see [Matthew 26:41](#)). The inconsistency of the crowd shows the folly of always trying to please everyone.

Matthew 11:20-24 *Three cities condemned for complacency.* Jesus singled out the three cities where he had performed most of his miracles and severely rebuked them for their lack of response. Their fate will be worse even than that of Sodom. [[Luke 10:13-16](#)]

Matthew 11:25-27 *Hidden from the haughty, shown to the humble.* Jesus thanked his heavenly Father for favoring the humble in his revelation of truth ([Matthew 11:25-26](#)). The truth about God comes only by revelation ([Matthew 11:27](#)); therefore, those who are proud of their own learning, such as the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day, are unable to see truths that even little children can see.

Matthew 11:28-30 *The trade-off: Burdens for blessings.* Describing himself as meek and lowly, Jesus invited all who so desired to come to him for rest. Those who are weary, especially under the burden of sin, will find that Christ is an easy taskmaster. This is the only self-description of Christ in Scripture.

Matthew 12:1-8 *Lord of the Sabbath.* The Pharisees criticized Christ's disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath, considering this a violation of the law. Jesus cited two OT examples to show that it was not necessary to interpret the law so strictly:

- David and his men ate consecrated Temple bread because of hunger ([Matthew 12:3-4](#); see exposition on [§ 1 Samuel 21:1-7](#)).
- Priests work on the Sabbath without violating the law ([Matthew 12:5](#)).

Actually the Pharisees were basing their criticism, not on the law itself, but on rabbinic interpretations of the law. Moving beyond legal precedents, Jesus made two other important points:

- God's overriding desire for mercy should guide any interpretation of the law ([Matthew 12:7](#); see [Matthew 9:13](#); [1 Samuel 15:22](#); [Hosea 6:6](#))
- As Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus had the right to define its true meaning.

[[Mark 2:23-28](#); [Luke 6:1-5](#)]

Matthew 12:9-14 *Healing on the Sabbath . . . in the synagogue!* Having declared himself Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus defied the Pharisees by healing on the Sabbath right in their synagogue, pointing out that even a Pharisee would rescue an endangered sheep on the Sabbath.irate at Christ's actions, the Pharisees began to plot his death. [[Mark 3:1-6](#); [Luke 6:6-11](#)] Compare [Luke 13:10-17](#); [Luke 14:1-6](#).

Matthew 12:15-21 *The Servant of God, quietly serving.* Jesus withdrew from the area, but many followed him and he "healed all the sick among them." Once again he warned those healed not to publicize their healing (see [Matthew 8:1-4](#); [Matthew 9:27-31](#); [Matthew 16:20](#); [Matthew 17:9](#)). Christ's reticence reminded Matthew of [Isaiah 42:1-4](#), which predicted that the true Messiah would not openly battle his enemies but would quietly do his work as God's Servant ([Matthew 12:18-21](#)). His quiet ministry would, however, lead to victory ([Matthew 12:20](#)). While the leaders of his own people were rejecting him, Christ would fulfill Isaiah's prophecy by extending the gospel to Gentiles ([Matthew 12:18, 21](#); see [Matthew 28:19](#)). [[Mark 3:6-12](#)]

Matthew 12:22-30 *How can a divided kingdom survive?* When Jesus healed a blind and mute man, there was again a sharply divided response ([Matthew 12:22-24](#); compare [Matthew 9:32-34](#)):

- The crowds began to suspect that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah.
- The Pharisees attributed his healing power to Satan.

To the Pharisees' charges Jesus responded that

- if he were to heal by Satan's power, Satan would be defeating his own purposes ([Matthew 12:25-26](#)).

- they would have to make the same charge against their own Jewish exorcists ([Matthew 12:27](#)).
- the miracle surely showed God's power over Satan ([Matthew 12:28](#)), for how could one destroy a work of Satan such as illness before first "tying him up"? ([Matthew 12:29](#)).

All who would join Christ in his battle against Satan must be very clear about whose side they are on ([Matthew 12:30](#)). [[Mark 3:20-30](#); [Luke 11:14-23](#)]

[Matthew 12:31-32](#) *Slandering the Spirit: The unforgivable sin.* In crediting to Satan the works Christ performed by the Holy Spirit, the Pharisees had committed an unforgivable sin. While this particular sin may have been possible only when Christ was physically present on earth, in a broader sense there is no hope left for anyone who persistently rejects the convicting work of the Spirit (see exposition on ^s[Hebrews 10:26-31](#)). [[Mark 3:28-30](#)]

[Matthew 12:33-37](#) *Bad roots, bad fruits.* The Pharisees' evil words, said Jesus, only revealed the evil in their hearts. Even our idle and careless words will be judged, since they reflect our hearts.

[Matthew 12:38-42](#) *Their judges: A prophet, a city, and a queen.* Although they had already seen Jesus perform many miracles, the Pharisees sought one more sign from him to prove his messianic claims. Chastising them for their persistent unbelief, Jesus reminded them of Jonah's miraculous escape from the great fish, and in a veiled prophecy compared that to his own approaching death and resurrection. In judgment, these self-righteous Pharisees will be found wanting in the presence of Gentiles who exhibit true faith. [[Luke 11:29-32](#)]

[Matthew 12:43-45](#) *Reformation minus regeneration means condemnation.* Perhaps recalling the many he had cleansed of demons, Jesus noted that such cleansing is useless unless it leads to a filling with the Holy Spirit. [[Luke 11:24-26](#)]

[Matthew 12:46-50](#) *The real family of God.* When Jesus heard that members of his biological family were looking for him, he used the occasion to teach that those who accept him as Messiah can enjoy a relationship with him that transcends earthly ties. [[Mark 3:31-35](#); [Luke 8:19-21](#)]

[Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23](#) *The sower, seed, and soils.* Following his rejection by the Jewish leaders, Jesus taught his disciples about the Kingdom of Heaven. In the first parable, a sower (Christ) cast seed (the Word of God) upon four kinds of soil (human hearts). Jesus later explained the significance of each soil ([Matthew 13:18-23](#)), showing that entrance into God's Kingdom is a matter of individual response. [[Mark 4:1-20](#); [Luke 8:4-15](#)]

[Matthew 13:10-17](#) *The purpose of his parables.* While telling the parable of the sower, Jesus paused to explain why he employed such symbolism in his teaching. Though the meaning of his explanation has been much debated, apparently Jesus intended his simple word pictures to confirm people in their response to him: Those inclined to believe found the parables an encouragement to their faith; those inclined to reject Christ would be confirmed in their unbelief, just as Isaiah had predicted ([Matthew 13:14-15](#); see [Isaiah 6:9-10](#)). However, see exposition on ^s[Mark 4:21-25](#).

[Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43](#) *Satan's weeds in the Savior's field.* A sower (Christ) sowed good seed (believers) in the field (the world). An enemy (the devil) sowed tares (unbelievers) in the same field.

Both grew together and were hardly distinguishable until the harvest (judgment). Only God knows the hearts of those who profess faith in him.

Matthew 13:31-32 *Like the mighty mustard seed.* The Kingdom of Heaven, said Jesus, would be like a tiny mustard seed, which grows into a plant 15 feet high. God's Kingdom would start out small but spread to encompass the whole world. [[Mark 4:30-32](#); [Luke 13:18-19](#)]

Matthew 13:33-35 *Yeast and the Kingdom of Heaven.* The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast, a very little of which quickly affects a large amount of dough. Scholars interpret this parable in one of two ways:

- The yeast represents the Kingdom's positive influence on society, or
- the yeast represents the pervasive evil that the Kingdom must combat.

While yeast may indeed represent good in this context, it generally represents evil in the Bible (see [Matthew 16:6](#); [1 Cor. 5:6-8](#); [Galatians 5:9](#)). [[Luke 13:20-21](#)]

Matthew noted again Christ's use of parables, seeing in it a fulfillment of prophecy ([Matthew 13:34-35](#); see [Matthew 13:14-15](#); [Psalm 78:2](#)).

Matthew 13:44-46 *Finding a fortune, on land and sea.* Two brief parables described people selling all they had to purchase a treasure. Two interpretations have been offered:

- The treasures are the Kingdom, and the eager buyers are believers who recognize its great worth, or
- the treasures are Israel or the church, and the buyer is Christ, who gave his all to purchase them.

The second view corresponds with frequent OT references to Israel as God's special treasure (see [Exodus 19:5](#); [Deut. 14:2](#); [Psalm 135:4](#)).

Matthew 13:47-50 *Sorting out a sea catch.* Just as a fishing net catches both good and bad fish, there will be many associated with the Kingdom who are not true believers. Only at judgment will their true identity become known (compare exposition on [§][Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43](#)).

Matthew 13:51-52 *A trained man and his treasure.* Jesus ended his parables by comparing the person who understood them to a person who values things both old and new, signifying that the truths revealed before Christ's time should be treasured along with the truths Christ revealed (compare exposition on [§][Matthew 5:17-20](#)).

Matthew 13:53-58 *No hometown hero!* Though the people in Christ's hometown were impressed by his teaching, their knowledge of his humble roots caused them to despise and reject his messianic claims. [[Mark 6:1-6](#)] Luke tells about an earlier rejection of Christ at Nazareth ([Luke 4:16-30](#)).

Matthew 14:1-12 *Her dance brings his death.* In a flashback, Matthew told how John the Baptist had been imprisoned and martyred. John had rebuked Herod (Antipas) for marrying Herodias, wife of his still-living brother Philip. Herodias's persistence and her daughter's enticing dance persuaded Herod, against his better judgment, to execute John ([Matthew 14:3-12](#)). When Herod later heard of

Christ's miracles, his guilty conscience convinced him it was John the Baptist risen from the dead ([Matthew 14:1-2](#)). [[§][Mark 6:14-29](#); [Luke 9:7-9](#)]

[Matthew 14:13-21](#) *History's greatest fish fry.* Surrounded by a hungry crowd of more than 5,000, Jesus miraculously provided food for them. This is the only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels. [[Mark 6:30-44](#); [Luke 9:10-17](#); [§][John 6:1-13](#)]

[Matthew 14:22-33](#) *The wind, the water, and two walkers.* When Christ's disciples were caught at sea in a storm, he came to help them, walking on the water. When Peter tried to walk on water as well, he struggled with a lack of faith and began to sink. His prayer, "Save me, Lord!" is arguably the shortest and most direct prayer in the Bible! [[Mark 6:45-52](#); [§][John 6:16-21](#)]

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[Matthew 15:1-20](#) *Honor from their lips, hostility in their hearts.* When the Pharisees criticized Jesus' disciples for ignoring religious tradition, Jesus accused them of violating the spirit of the law by keeping back from their parents things supposedly dedicated to God. They were like the hypocrites Isaiah described, who talk about God but do not walk with him ([Matthew 15:7-9](#); see [Isaiah 29:13](#)).

Jesus explained that it is the heart, not external activities, that determines a person's spirituality ([Matthew 15:10-11](#), [15-20](#)). Told that the Pharisees, as the obvious targets of this teaching, were offended, Jesus warned his disciples to avoid them lest they be adversely affected by these "blind guides" ([Matthew 15:12-14](#)). [[Mark 7:1-23](#)]

[Matthew 15:21-31](#) *Healing: For Gentiles too!* As Jesus visited a Gentile area, a Canaanite woman begged him to heal her daughter. Jesus responded first with silence, then declared that his mission was only to Israel ([Matthew 15:24](#); compare [Matthew 10:5-6](#)). When the woman continued to seek his help, he stressed again that his mission was to Jews only. When she still persisted, he commended her faith and granted the healing.

Christ's seemingly insensitive and contemptuous comparison of Gentiles to dogs must have been said with irony or to test the woman's faith, considering that

- he had at this time deliberately left Jewish territory to visit a Gentile area ([Matthew 15:21](#)).
- he healed other Gentiles (see [Matthew 8:5-13](#), [28-34](#)).
- on several occasions he compared Israel's lack of faith to the great faith of Gentiles (see [Matthew 8:11-13](#)).
- though his mission as Israel's Messiah was indeed for Jews first (see [Matthew 10:5-6](#); [Acts 1:8](#); [Romans 1:16](#)), the Bible also makes it clear that salvation is for all humankind (see [Matthew 2:1-12](#); [Matthew 12:18, 21](#); [Acts 1:8](#); [Acts 11:1-18](#); [Romans 1:16](#); see exposition on [§][Matthew 16:17-20](#); [Matthew 21:28-32](#); and on [§][Isaiah 56:1-8](#)).

Note that the Gentile woman used the messianic title "Son of David" ([Matthew 15:22](#)) and worshiped Christ ([Matthew 15:25](#)).

Going back to Galilee, Jesus performed many more miracles, resulting in glory to God ([Matthew 15:29-31](#)). [[Mark 7:24-37](#)]

[Matthew 15:32-39](#) *History's second greatest fish fry.* Again Jesus miraculously provided food for a large crowd, this time more than 4,000. [^s[Mark 8:1-9](#)]

[Matthew 16:1-12](#) *Signs of the times, yeast of the Pharisees.* Once again the Pharisees (joined by the Sadducees) asked for a sign, and once again Jesus rebuked them and reminded them of Jonah (compare exposition on ^s[Matthew 12:38-42](#)). They could predict the weather but failed to understand the person and work of Jesus ([Matthew 16:1-4](#)).

A little later, perhaps recalling the discussion about signs, Jesus warned his disciples to be on guard against the "yeast" (or leaven) of the Pharisees and Sadducees. When the disciples took him too literally, Jesus explained that he was talking about the Pharisees' legalistic teachings ([Matthew 16:5-12](#)). On the symbolism of yeast, see exposition on ^s[Matthew 13:33-35](#). [[Mark 8:10-21](#)]

[Matthew 16:13-16](#) *"But what do you think of me?"* Jesus asked his disciples who the people thought he was, and they gave various answers. Then he asked them for their own opinion, and Peter boldly proclaimed him to be the Christ, the promised Messiah. [[Mark 8:27-30](#); [Luke 9:18-21](#)]

Why were there so many rumors about Christ's identity?

- The belief that he was John the Baptist may have been Herod's influence (see [Matthew 14:2](#)).
- Elijah's return was predicted by Malachi (see [Malachi 4:5-6](#)).
- The apocryphal book of 2 Esdras predicted the return of Isaiah and Jeremiah (see [2 Esdras 2:18](#)). Many Jews believed that the prophets would rise again at the Messiah's coming.

[Matthew 16:17-20](#) *"Upon which rock?"* Jesus pronounced a blessing on Peter, declaring that only by divine revelation could he have made his confession ([Matthew 16:16](#)). Jesus then foretold the founding of his church ([Matthew 16:18](#); see [Acts 2](#)). He said, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" ([Matthew 16:18](#)). Some have interpreted this to mean that Peter was the foundation of Christ's church. The wordplay in Greek shows, however, that Christ himself is the foundation:

- "You are Peter [*petros*, a little stone]"
- "and upon this rock [*petra*, massive rock] I will build my church." Peter's own confession ([Matthew 16:16](#)) identified Christ as the church's true foundation (compare [1 Cor. 3:11](#); [1 Peter 2:4-8](#)).

The "gates of Hades" or "hell" may refer to death, which has no hold over those in Christ (see [1 Cor. 15:51-57](#); [1 Thes. 4:13-18](#); and exposition on ^s[Psalm 9](#)).

Christ gave Peter the "keys of the Kingdom" ([Matthew 16:19](#)), which may have been prophetic of his leading role in opening God's Kingdom to Israel (see [Acts 2:36-42](#)), to the Samaritans (see [Acts 8:14-17](#)), and to the Gentiles (see [Acts 10](#)). If his possession of the keys is closely tied to his further

role of "locking" and "opening" ([Matthew 16:19](#)), it may have something to do with a role of church leadership (compare [Matthew 18:15-20](#), where this principle is discussed again).

"Will be locked [or opened] in heaven" means not that God bows to human authority but that the actions of a Spirit-led Christian leader carry with them the awesome authority of heaven itself. To properly understand Peter's role in the church, it is important to note that the authority given here to Peter was later given to all the apostles (see [Matthew 18:18](#)).

Again Christ commanded secrecy ([Matthew 16:20](#); see exposition on [§Matthew 12:15-21](#)).

[Matthew 16:21-23](#) *"But we won't let you die!"* Though he had already alluded to his death indirectly, Jesus now began discussing it openly (see [Matthew 17:22-23](#); [Matthew 20:17-19](#)). Peter rebuked him, saying he and the other disciples would never let him die. Jesus in turn rebuked Peter, even calling him "Satan," for only Satan would suggest that Jesus avoid the Cross. [[Mark 8:31-33](#)]

[Matthew 16:24-28](#) *Lost and found: Someone's life.* Jesus spoke of the sacrifices that lay ahead for his disciples. Salvation is free, but discipleship costs everything. Yet only the self-sacrificing disciple will truly "find" his or her life. [Matthew 16:28](#) probably refers to the Transfiguration ([Matthew 17:1-2](#)). [[Mark 8:34-9:1](#); see [Luke 9:23-27](#)]

[Matthew 17:1-9](#) *Once again: "This is my beloved Son!"* On a mountain with Peter, James, and John, Jesus was transfigured. His face and clothing shone with a light from within, and for the second time (see [Matthew 3:17](#)) the voice of God the Father identified him as God the Son. [[§Mark 9:2-13](#); [Luke 9:28-36](#)]

The glory seen in the transfigured Christ was the same glory cloud that shone in both the Tabernacle (see [Exodus 40](#)) and the Temple (see [1 Kings 8](#)). It was later withdrawn because of Israel's sin (see [Ezekiel 10-11](#)) but then returned to confirm Christ's birth to the shepherds (see [Luke 2:9](#)) and to receive Christ at his ascension (see [Acts 1:9](#)). Stephen would see God's glory (see [Acts 7:55](#)), as would Paul (see [Acts 9:3](#)) and John (see [Rev. 1:16](#)). At Christ's second coming this glory will be revealed to the whole world (see [Matthew 25:31-32](#)).

Again Jesus discouraged publicity ([Matthew 17:9](#); see [Matthew 16:20](#) and exposition on [§Matthew 12:15-21](#)).

[Matthew 17:10-13](#) *Will Elijah return?* Having seen Moses and Elijah with Christ at the Transfiguration ([Matthew 17:3-4](#)), the disciples asked him about the prophecy that Elijah would precede the Messiah (see [Malachi 4:5-6](#)). Christ's response was twofold:

- Elijah had already come figuratively in the similar ministry of John the Baptist ([Matthew 17:12-13](#)).
- Elijah will indeed come, as Malachi predicted, "to set everything in order" ([Matthew 17:11](#)). This will happen before the Second Coming (see exposition on [§Rev. 11:1-14](#)).

In another sense, of course, by appearing at the Transfiguration, Elijah did literally come in association with Christ's first coming.

[Matthew 17:14-21](#) *Little prayer, little power.* When the disciples failed to heal a demon-possessed boy (compare [Matthew 10:8](#)), Christ did the healing and then explained that their unbelief and lack of prayer had prevented their success. [[§Mark 9:14-29](#); [Luke 9:37-42](#)]

[Matthew 17:22-23](#) *Another prediction of his death.* Once again (see [Matthew 16:21](#); [Matthew 20:17-19](#)) Jesus predicted his death and resurrection, causing the disciples great sorrow. [[Mark 9:30-32](#); [Luke 9:43-45](#)]

[Matthew 17:24-27](#) *Fishing for tax money.* When asked if he paid the Temple tax (see [Exodus 30:13](#)), Jesus claimed exemption since he was the Son of God, the Temple's owner (compare [Matthew 12:6](#)). Nevertheless, to maintain a good testimony, he miraculously produced the money to pay the tax.

[Matthew 18:1-14](#) *Lambs in God's Kingdom.* When the disciples asked Jesus who was greatest in his Kingdom, he used a little child as an object lesson: Only with childlike faith can one enter the Kingdom. No one in the Kingdom is greater than anyone else—all are on equal ground. Concerning children, Jesus also stressed that

- judgment awaits any who cause them to sin ([Matthew 18:6](#))
- they are not to be looked down upon ([Matthew 18:10](#))
- God desires their salvation ([Matthew 18:14](#); see [1 Tim. 2:4](#))

We cannot always avoid temptation, but we should make every effort to do so ([Matthew 18:7-9](#)). While we need not literally mutilate ourselves, Christ's overstatement shows the seriousness of sin.

Jesus extended his concern for children to all who are lost ([Matthew 18:11-14](#)). God's greatest joy is the redemption of one lost person. [[Mark 9:33-50](#); [Luke 9:46-50](#); [Luke 15:3-7](#)]

[Matthew 18:15-20](#) *Three steps to conflict resolution.* Jesus prescribed a three-step method for resolving conflicts among believers:

1. The person who is offended must go to the person offending (who may not even realize a wrong has been done) and talk about the problem ([Matthew 18:15](#)).
2. If the offender does not respond, the offended one is to take one or two others to be witnesses of the confrontation and to help determine who is right ([Matthew 18:16](#)).
3. If the offender still does not respond (assuming he or she is truly in the wrong), the matter is to be brought before the whole church for a decision. If the offender still refuses to repent, he or she is to be considered an unbeliever and not part of the church family ([Matthew 18:17](#)).

Jesus promised God's guidance and authority ([Matthew 18:18-19](#)) and his own loving presence ([Matthew 18:20](#)) with any who seek his will in such situations. On [Matthew 18:18](#), see the discussion of [Matthew 16:19](#) in the exposition on [Matthew 16:17-20](#). Compare also the exposition on [1 Cor. 5:1-8](#) and on [2 Thes. 3:6-15](#).

[Matthew 18:21-35](#) *Forgiveness taught and illustrated.* Peter asked Jesus if he should forgive someone seven times, probably thinking this a generous plan since it exceeded the traditional rabbinic requirement of three times (and that was only in special cases!). Jesus replied that forgiveness should be unconditional and unlimited, and illustrated with a parable: A king forgave his servant (probably a tax-collecting governor over one of his provinces) for having mishandled a large amount of money.

The servant then tried to extract a very small sum from his own creditors. Christians, completely forgiven by God, should never fail to forgive ([Matthew 18:35](#)). [[Luke 17:3-4](#)]

[Matthew 19:1-12](#) *One husband, one wife—for life.* When some Pharisees asked about grounds for divorce, Jesus initially ignored their question and reaffirmed God's original ideal for marriage ([Matthew 19:1-6](#); see [Genesis 1:27](#); [Genesis 2:24](#)). When they pressed the issue, citing Moses' apparent allowance of divorce ([Matthew 19:7](#); see [Deut. 24:1-4](#)), Jesus again reaffirmed God's ideal, noting that Moses' permission was "a concession to [their] hard-hearted wickedness" and that divorce was wrong for any reason other than sexual immorality ([Matthew 19:8-9](#)).

Moses had stated that a man could divorce his wife if he "discovers something about her that is shameful" ([Deut. 24:1](#)). In Jesus' day there were two opposing interpretations of this. Followers of Rabbi Shammai held that this referred to marital unfaithfulness, and that was the only grounds for divorce. Followers of the more liberal Rabbi Hillel emphasized the preceding clause, "suppose a man . . . discovers something about her," essentially allowing a man to divorce his wife for any reason. Jesus clearly sided with the more conservative view ([Matthew 19:9](#)) and went on to state that remarriage following divorce constituted adultery (compare [Deut. 24:4](#)). The disciples' surprise at Christ's strict views on marriage ([Matthew 19:10-12](#)) underscores his overriding concern for its permanence. (See [Matthew 5:31-32](#); [Romans 7:1-3](#); [1 Cor. 7:10-16](#).) [[Mark 10:1-12](#); [Luke 16:18](#)]

[Matthew 19:13-15](#) *"For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."* The disciples tried to prevent some parents from bringing their children to Jesus for blessing. Jesus rebuked them and once again (compare [Matthew 18:1-6](#)) used the occasion as an object lesson: Entrance to the Kingdom requires childlike humility. [[Mark 10:13-16](#); [Luke 18:15-17](#)] It is interesting that Christ's teaching on divorce was followed by this encounter with children, the ones most hurt by divorce.

[Matthew 19:16-30](#) *Forsake your silver! Follow the Savior!* A rich young man came to Jesus, seeking eternal life but believing he could gain it simply by adding to his good deeds and moral achievements ([Matthew 19:16-20](#)). Jesus suggested several commandments he might try keeping, not to imply that these would bring salvation, but to start him thinking about his sin ([Matthew 19:17-19](#)). Then he focused on the one thing that *would* save the young man: surrendering his wealth and following Christ ([Matthew 19:21](#)). Unfortunately, the man couldn't give up his wealth and pride ([Matthew 19:22](#); compare [Matthew 18:3-4](#)).

Jesus used the man's rejection of salvation to teach about the perils of earthly wealth ([Matthew 19:23-26](#)). Riches can give a false self-confidence, making it hard to humbly depend on God. And yet "with God" even the rich can be saved ([Matthew 19:26](#)).

The disciples, of course, had already given up their earthly wealth to follow Christ, thus Peter's question: "What will we get out of it?" ([Matthew 19:27](#)). Jesus taught that, in his coming Kingdom, his 12 apostles would rule with him over Israel and would have great wealth. This would, in fact, be the happy lot of all faithful believers ([Matthew 19:29](#); see [Rev. 20:6](#); [Rev. 22:5](#)).

Christ ended his teaching on wealth with a warning: Those with great wealth in this world, who refuse to forsake it, will not be nearly so prominent in the world to come ([Matthew 19:30](#)). [[Mark 10:17-31](#); [Luke 18:18-30](#)]

[Matthew 20:1-16](#) *Different hours, same wages?* Christ told a parable about a landowner who paid the same wages to all his workers even though they had done vastly different amounts of work. God

has the sovereign right to reward us for our work as he sees fit. Anything he gives us, whether small or great, is a gift of grace and is more than we deserve.

[Matthew 20:17-19](#) *Still another death prediction.* For the third time (see [Matthew 16:21](#); [Matthew 17:22-23](#)), Jesus predicted his death and resurrection, though his disciples probably still did not fully comprehend what he was saying. [[Mark 10:32-34](#); [Luke 18:31-34](#)]

[Matthew 20:20-28](#) *How to be great in God's eyes.* When the mother of James and John misguidedly sought places of honor for her sons, Jesus used the occasion to teach that true greatness means following his example of

- willingness to suffer ([Matthew 20:22-23](#))
- willingness to serve ([Matthew 20:24-28](#))

Christ's warning that his apostles would suffer for his sake ([Matthew 20:23](#)) was fulfilled. All of them experienced great trials, and all except John suffered violent deaths. [[Mark 10:35-45](#)]

[Matthew 20:29-34](#) *Sight restored on the Jericho road.* As Jesus left Jericho one day, pleas from two blind men gave him another opportunity to show his healing compassion. [[Mark 10:46-52](#); [Luke 18:35-43](#)]

[Matthew 21:1-11](#) *"Here comes our King!"* Having miraculously located a colt, Jesus rode it into Jerusalem in literal fulfillment of [Zech. 9:9](#). The crowds responded enthusiastically, laying tree branches and even their own clothes as a red carpet to welcome him, and proclaiming him as their Messiah. [[Mark 11:1-11](#); [Luke 19:28-40](#); [John 12:12-19](#)] This event, generally called the Triumphal Entry, is often seen as Christ's formal presentation as King of Israel. It came on the Sunday before his crucifixion and is celebrated today as Palm Sunday, so named because presumably many of the "branches" ([Matthew 21:8](#)) would have been from palm trees. *Hosanna* ([Matthew 21:9](#)) means "save now."

» **See also:** [Map: Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus](#)

[Matthew 21:12-17](#) *A place of prayer, not a refuge of robbers.* Probably the next day, Jesus entered the large outer court of the Temple and physically forced the money changers to leave ([Matthew 21:12-13](#)). The money changers were there to accommodate the priests, who often made money by selling items needed for the Temple rituals. Jesus considered this contrary to the spirit of [Isaiah 56:7](#), which called the Temple a "place of prayer." The scene reminded him of Jeremiah's criticism of Temple merchants in his own day ([Matthew 21:13](#); see [Jeremiah 7:11](#)). [[Mark 11:15-19](#); [§][Luke 19:45-48](#); [John 2:13-17](#) relates a similar but earlier incident]

When the Pharisees became irritated at some children singing Christ's praises, Jesus quoted [Psalm 8:2](#), affirming again that God's Kingdom is for those of childlike faith ([Matthew 21:14-17](#)).

» **See also:** [Map: Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus](#)

» **See also:** [Illustration: Final Days of Christ's Ministry, The](#)

[Matthew 21:18-22](#) *Fruitless tree, fruitless nation.* The next morning, as Jesus entered Jerusalem, he looked for figs on a fig tree and, finding none, cursed it and made it wither. Though he did not say

so at the time, it is apparent that his cursing of the tree foretold the setting aside of fruitless Israel as the gospel was offered to Gentiles, as seen by comparing this event with

- the parable of the fruitless fig tree (see [Luke 13:6-9](#))
- the parables and teachings immediately following this event (see [Matthew 21:28-22:14](#)), all of which have to do with Israel's rejection of Christ and the Gentiles' inclusion in the Kingdom

When his disciples marveled at the fig tree's fate, Jesus assured them that they too would perform such wonders—possibly a prediction of the overwhelming Jewish response to the gospel on and following Pentecost. [[Mark 11:12-14](#); [Mark 11:20-24](#)]

» **See also:** [Illustration: Final Days of Christ's Ministry, The](#)

[Matthew 21:23-27](#) *Two unanswered questions.* The Jewish leaders asked Jesus about the source of his authority for performing miracles. He responded by asking them about the source of John the Baptist's authority. When they refused to answer his question, he refused to answer theirs. [[Mark 11:27-33](#); [Luke 20:1-8](#)]

» **See also:** [Illustration: Final Days of Christ's Ministry, The](#)

[Matthew 21:28-32](#) *"I won't!" but he did; "I will!" but he didn't.* Jesus told a story about two sons who reversed roles: One said he would do what his father told him, but he did not. The other said he would *not* obey his father, but later he did. The first son was a picture of Israel, who had acknowledged God but then forsook him. The second symbolized the Gentiles, who had been aliens from God but would now receive him.

[Matthew 21:33-46](#) *The vicious vinedressers.* The next parable focused again on Israel and its rejection of God. The first part of the parable ([Matthew 21:33-37](#)) is historical:

- The landowner (God) planted a vineyard and turned it over to tenant farmers (Israel) ([Matthew 21:33-34](#); see [Isaiah 5:1-7](#)).
- The landowner sent his servants (the prophets) to get fruit from the vineyard, and they were badly treated ([Matthew 21:35-36](#)).
- Finally the landowner sent his son, thinking the vinedressers would respect him ([Matthew 21:37](#)).

The parable then turned prophetic: The wicked vinedressers killed the landowner's son ([Matthew 21:38-39](#))—a prophecy that would be fulfilled in less than a week!

When Jesus asked how they thought the landowner would punish those wicked vinedressers, the Pharisees, not yet realizing the parable was against them, replied that the vinedressers would be killed ([Matthew 21:40-41](#)). When Jesus then made it clear that he had spoken the parable against the Pharisees and that God's Kingdom would be taken from them and given to the Gentiles ([Matthew 21:42-44](#)), they began seeking ways to kill him but were afraid to because of his popularity ([Matthew 21:45-46](#)). [[Mark 12:1-12](#); [Luke 20:9-19](#)]

[Matthew 22:1-14](#) *Plenty of guests, but one with no garment.* Continuing the theme of Israel's rejection of him, Christ told a parable comparing God's millennial Kingdom to a royal wedding. All the

king's friends were invited to attend, but they refused to come ([Matthew 22:1-3](#)). After his second invitation was also spurned, the king ordered their city burned ([Matthew 22:4-7](#)) and invited social outcasts to come in their place ([Matthew 22:8-9](#)). These newly invited guests responded well, although one of them was banished from the banquet for being improperly attired ([Matthew 22:10-14](#)).

The burning of the city may foretell Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70. The replacement guests obviously represent Gentiles. The exclusion of the one ill-attired guest shows the importance of personal choice in responding to the gospel. At royal weddings in that culture each guest would have been provided with a wedding garment bearing the royal imprint. Refusal to wear this garment was a terrible insult. [[Luke 14:15-24](#)]

[Matthew 22:15-22](#) *"Pray your prayers, and pay your taxes!"* Unable to kill Jesus (see [Matthew 21:45-46](#)), the Pharisees began trying to ridicule him ([Matthew 22:15](#)). First, they sent the Herodians to ask him if it was right to pay taxes to Caesar. If Jesus had said it was not lawful, the Romans would have been mad. If Jesus had said it was lawful, he might have been labeled a traitor to his own nation. Taking a coin with Caesar's picture on it, Jesus wisely responded that Jews should give to Caesar what was his (the tax) and give to God what was his (worship and obedience). Believers are to pay taxes, even to an evil government. [[Mark 12:13-17](#); [Luke 20:20-26](#)]

» **See also:** [Illustration: Final Days of Christ's Ministry, The](#)

[Matthew 22:23-33](#) *A silly story of seven spouses.* The Sadducees, who didn't believe in angels or in the resurrection of the dead (see [Acts 23:8](#)), tried to trick Jesus with a hypothetical story and question: A man married a woman and then died. His brother married her and died as well, and so on through seven brothers. Which one would be her husband after the resurrection? Jesus' answer addressed the Sadducees' denials of both angels and resurrection:

- Resurrected people will not have marital relationships but will in that respect be like angels ([Matthew 22:30](#)).
- There will indeed be a resurrection, for God called himself the God of the patriarchs after they had died, meaning they will someday live again ([Matthew 22:31-32](#); see [Exodus 3:6](#)).

The Sadducees' root problem, said Jesus, was their ignorance of the Scriptures and the power of God ([Matthew 22:29](#)). Once again the crowds marveled at his wisdom ([Matthew 22:33](#)). [[Mark 12:18-27](#); [Luke 20:27-40](#)]

» **See also:** [Illustration: Final Days of Christ's Ministry, The](#)

[Matthew 22:34-40](#) *The bottom line? Love God and your neighbor!* The Pharisees tried again to entrap Jesus, asking him which was the greatest law. Jesus cited two Mosaic teachings:

- Love God with your whole heart (see [Deut. 6:5](#)).
- Love your neighbor as yourself (see [Leviticus 19:18](#)).

Undeniably, anyone who observes these two principles will keep the whole law. Once again Christ had silenced his critics. See exposition on [§][Galatians 5:13-15](#) and on [§][1 John 3-4](#). [[Mark 12:28-34](#); [§][Luke 10:25-37](#)]

» **See also:** [Illustration: Final Days of Christ's Ministry, The](#)

[Matthew 22:41-46](#) *How can David's son be David's God?* Jesus now asked a question of the Pharisees: They accepted [Psalm 110](#) as a prediction of the Messiah, yet they considered that he would be a merely human descendant of David ([Matthew 22:42](#)). If that were the case, asked Jesus, why did David refer to him as "Lord" ([Psalm 110:1](#))? Both the deity and humanity of the Messiah are taught clearly in the OT (see [Isaiah 7:14](#); [Isaiah 9:6](#)), but the leaders could not see it. Jesus had finally silenced his critics once and for all ([Matthew 22:46](#)). [[Mark 12:35-37](#); [Luke 20:41-44](#)]

[Matthew 23:1-36](#) *Woes for the hypocrites.* While warning his followers about the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus issued a series of woes against them, calling them hypocrites because they

- were inconsistent in their words and deeds ([Matthew 23:1-3](#))
- imposed on others non-scriptural traditions that they themselves found burdensome ([Matthew 23:4](#))
- sought human praise for their religiosity ([Matthew 23:5-7](#))
- hindered those who would follow Christ ([Matthew 23:13](#))
- cheated poor widows ([Matthew 23:14](#))
- prayed insincere prayers ([Matthew 23:14](#))
- taught others their evil ways ([Matthew 23:15](#))
- obscured the spirit of the law with legalism ([Matthew 23:16-24](#))
- were inwardly corrupt while looking good on the outside ([Matthew 23:25-28](#))
- were repeating the sins of past generations ([Matthew 23:29-35](#))

[[§][Luke 11:37-54](#)]

» **See also:** [Illustration: Final Days of Christ's Ministry, The](#)

[Matthew 23:37-39](#) *Chicks rejecting their mother hen?* Jesus wept over the people of Jerusalem, who had rejected him. They would now be set aside until the "complete number of Gentiles" ([Romans 11:25](#)) had come into the Kingdom, but would then be gloriously restored ([Matthew 23:39](#); see [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#); [Romans 11:26-27](#)). Compare [Luke 13:34-35](#).

[Matthew 24:1-20](#) *"The beginning of the horrors to come."* As Jesus left the Temple area on the Tuesday before his crucifixion, he predicted the Temple's destruction ([Matthew 24:1-2](#)). As he and his disciples reached the Mount of Olives, they asked him to explain his prediction ([Matthew 24:3](#)), asking specifically whether there would be a sign to signal his return and "the end of the world." His reply ([Matthew 24:4-25:46](#)), often called the Olivet Discourse, answers these questions and stresses the need for vigilance and faithfulness as we await Christ's return.

Jesus described the "beginning of the horrors to come" ([Matthew 24:8](#)), often seen as the first three and a half years of the seven-year Tribulation ([Matthew 24:4-20](#); see [Isaiah: Background](#) and the exposition on [§][Isaiah 2:5-4:1](#)). During this time there will be false messiahs and prophets ([Matthew 24:4-5](#), [11](#)); wars and anxiety ([Matthew 24:6-7](#)); famines and earthquakes ([Matthew 24:7](#)); persecution of believers ([Matthew 24:9](#)); apostasy ([Matthew 24:10](#), [12](#)); increased wickedness ([Matthew 24:12](#)); worldwide evangelization ([Matthew 24:14](#)); and the desecration of the rebuilt Temple by the Antichrist ([Matthew 24:15](#); see [Daniel 11:31](#) and [Daniel 12:11](#); and exposition on [§][Daniel 9:20-27](#) and [1 John](#)

4:1-6). When this happens, all who are able should flee for their lives ([Matthew 24:16-20](#)). [[Mark 13:1-18](#); [Luke 21:5-22](#)] See [Rev. 6](#).

» **See also:** [Illustration: Final Days of Christ's Ministry, The](#)

[Matthew 24:21-26](#) *"Unless that time of calamity is shortened . . ."* After the Antichrist desecrates the Temple ([Matthew 24:15](#)), exactly at the midpoint of the Tribulation (see [Daniel 9:27](#)), there will come a time of distress unlike anything in previous human history ([Matthew 24:21](#)). This time will be so horrible that, if it were to continue unchecked, everyone would die ([Matthew 24:22](#)). During this time false messiahs and prophets will continue to deceive with great miracles ([Matthew 24:23-26](#)). Some scholars reserve the term *Tribulation* for this second three-and-a-half-year period, after the Antichrist has shed his peacemaker facade (see exposition on [§][Daniel 9:20-27](#) and on [§][2 Thes. 2:1-12](#)). [[Mark 13:19-23](#); [Luke 21:23-24](#)]

[Matthew 24:27-31](#) *The coming of the King in the clouds.* Christ's second coming will be preceded by cosmic signs: darkened sun and moon, falling stars, and shaking planets ([Matthew 24:29](#)). Then Christ will descend to earth out of the clouds ([Matthew 24:30](#)). This event will happen quickly and visibly, like lightning across the sky ([Matthew 24:27](#)). A trumpet call will send angels to gather the saved from throughout the earth ([Matthew 24:31](#)). This refers not to the rapture of the church, which will occur before the Tribulation (see exposition on [§][1 Thes. 4:13-18](#)), but to the actual coming of Christ to earth about seven years later at the end of the Tribulation, at which time he will inaugurate his millennial Kingdom (see exposition on [§][Rev. 20:1-6](#)). [[Mark 13:24-27](#); [Luke 21:25-28](#)]

[Matthew 24:32-36](#) *What the fig tree teaches.* Perhaps recalling the question of when these things would occur (see [Matthew 24:3](#)), Jesus said that just as the buds on a fig tree announce summer so also the disciples would know Christ's prophecies were about to be fulfilled "when [they saw] the events [he] described beginning to happen" ([Matthew 24:33](#)).

Since Israel was often described as figs or a fig tree (see exposition on [§][Matthew 21:18-22](#); [Jeremiah 24](#); [Joel 1:7](#)), many scholars today see the rebirth of Israel as a harbinger of the end times. Others interpret "generation" ([Matthew 24:34](#)) as "race," meaning that the Jewish race will survive till Christ returns. Either interpretation must take into account Christ's claim that even he does not know the exact date ([Matthew 24:36](#); see [Mark 13:32](#)). [[Mark 13:28-32](#); [Luke 21:29-33](#)]

[Matthew 24:37-41](#) *Just like Noah's flood!* Prior to Christ's second coming, life will be going on as normal, just as in Noah's day. Then the wicked will suddenly be destroyed, just as in Noah's day. The ones "taken" ([Matthew 24:40-41](#)) are the wicked, who will be removed from earth before the millennial Kingdom begins.

[Matthew 24:42-51](#) *Watch, wait, and work.* Believers are to be watchful ([Matthew 24:42-44](#)) and faithful ([Matthew 24:45-51](#)) as they await Christ's return. [[Mark 13:33-37](#); [Luke 21:34-36](#)]

[Matthew 25:1-13](#) *Faithful and foolish virgins.* 10 virgins (representing Israel) went to meet a bridegroom (representing Jesus, their Messiah). Five were prepared and were invited to the wedding. The other five were unprepared and were excluded. The lesson: Be prepared, for no one knows when Christ will return ([Matthew 25:13](#)). » **See also:** [Illustration: Final Days of Christ's Ministry, The](#)

Matthew 25:14-30 *Faithful and foolish servants.* Three servants were given money to take care of for their master ([Matthew 25:14-15](#)). The two who were good stewards were commended and rewarded ([Matthew 25:19-23](#)), while the one who had not done well was condemned ([Matthew 25:24-30](#)). We should be faithful with what Jesus has entrusted to us during his absence (compare exposition on [§Luke 19:11-27](#)).

Matthew 25:31-46 *Separating sheep from goats.* At the end of the Tribulation, Christ will gather "all the nations" ([Matthew 25:32](#)) before him for judgment. They will be judged on the basis of how they treated Christ's "brothers and sisters" ([Matthew 25:40](#)). The good works are not the basis but the proof of salvation—note that neither the sheep nor the goats were aware of their good works or lack thereof ([Matthew 25:37-39, 44](#)). Christ's "brothers and sisters" probably refers in this context to Jewish people during the Tribulation, though the principle applies to the treatment of believers, both Jewish and Gentile, in all ages.

Matthew 26:1-5 *"Let's kill him! . . . after the Passover."* Jesus again predicted his betrayal and death, now just two days away ([Matthew 26:1-2](#)). Meanwhile the Jewish leaders plotted to kill him, though they planned to put it off till after the Passover since the large crowds in town for the feast were probably still sympathetic to him (see [Matthew 21:46](#)) and might cause a riot ([Matthew 26:5](#)). [[Mark 14:1-2](#); [Luke 22:1-2](#)]

Matthew 26:6-13 *They protest his anointing.* While Jesus was in Bethany, Mary anointed him with perfume worth a year's wages. When the disciples expressed outrage at her extravagance, Jesus commended her proper sense of values and noted that her actions foretold his death. Though Christ had spoken often of his approaching death, Mary was apparently the only one to take him seriously. John's account identifies the woman as Mary, sister of Lazarus (see [John 12:1-8](#)), and records the incident in its correct historical order, on the day before the Triumphal Entry. [[Mark 14:3-9](#); [Luke 7:36-50](#) records an earlier similar incident]

Matthew 26:14-16 *The betrayer makes his bargain.* In exchange for 30 pieces of silver, Judas agreed to betray Jesus to the chief priests and immediately began looking for an opportunity to do so. The betrayal price was an exact fulfillment of prophecy (see [Zech. 11:12-13](#)). [[Mark 14:10-11](#); [Luke 22:1-6](#)]

Matthew 26:17-25 *The spy comes to supper.* On Thursday (the "first day" of the festival), Christ's disciples prepared for the Passover ([Matthew 26:17-19](#)) and that night gathered with him to partake ([Matthew 26:20-25](#)). During the meal, he predicted that Judas would betray him. [[Mark 14:12-21](#); [§Luke 22:7-16](#); [John 13:1-30](#)]

Christ's secretive instructions ([Matthew 26:18](#)) were probably an effort to hide his whereabouts from Judas as long as possible.

The Passover meal traditionally included lamb, unleavened bread, wine, bitter herbs, and a sauce made of dried dates, raisins, vinegar, wine, and spices.

» **See also:** [Illustration: Final Days of Christ's Ministry, The](#)

Matthew 26:26-30 *"This is my body. . . . This is my blood."* During the Passover, the celebration of the Old Covenant, Jesus, who by his death would become the perfect "Passover Lamb" ([1 Cor. 5:7](#)),

took bread and wine from the table and instituted what would become known as the Lord's Supper, a meal symbolic of the New Covenant (see exposition on [§1 Cor. 11:17-34](#)). [[Mark 14:22-26](#); [Luke 22:17-23](#)]

[Matthew 26:31-35](#) *"Nonsense! We'll never forsake you!"* When Christ predicted that all of his disciples would abandon him in his hour of need, they all steadfastly denied that they would. Eventually, however, they all did (see [Matthew 26:56, 69-75](#)). [[Mark 14:27-31](#); [Luke 22:31-34](#); [John 13:36-38](#)]

[Matthew 26:36-46](#) *Then they sleep while he struggles.* After the Passover meal, Jesus and his disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane. While Jesus prayed, in bitter agony, his disciples slept, awakening only when Jesus announced the arrival of Judas and his coconspirators ([Matthew 26:46](#)). The writer of Hebrews would later describe Jesus' mental anguish in Gethsemane (see [Hebrews 5:7](#)). [[Mark 14:32-42](#); [§Luke 22:39-46](#); [John 18:1](#)]

» **See also:** [Illustration: Final Days of Christ's Ministry, The](#)

[Matthew 26:47-56](#) *A Savior betrayed and abandoned.* Judas came with an armed mob and betrayed Jesus with a kiss ([Matthew 26:47-50](#)). Peter responded with armed violence ([Matthew 26:51](#); see [John 18:10](#)), but Jesus remained in control of the situation, stating that this latest turn of events was necessary. God's plan of salvation (see exposition on [§Daniel 9:20-27](#)) must be carried out, including the death of the Messiah (see [Daniel 9:26](#)). Unlike the calm and composed Jesus, the disciples all panicked and fled. [[Mark 14:43-52](#); [Luke 22:47-53](#); [John 18:1-11](#)]

» **See also:** [Illustration: Final Days of Christ's Ministry, The](#)

[Matthew 26:57-68](#) *A godly King before godless rulers.* Jesus was taken to the high priest, who, along with the other assembled leaders, sought false testimony against him ([Matthew 26:57-61](#)). At first Jesus refused to respond to the false charges, but then he affirmed that he was the Messiah and warned that he would one day return in judgment ([Matthew 26:62-64](#)). At that the leaders agreed that he was guilty of blasphemy and should be killed ([Matthew 26:65-66](#)). They proceeded to beat and ridicule him ([Matthew 26:67-68](#)). [[Mark 14:53-65](#); [John 18:12-14, 19-24](#)] On [Matthew 26:61](#), see [Matthew 27:40](#) and exposition on [§John 2:18-22](#).

[Matthew 26:69-75](#) *Bold denials, bitter regrets.* Having followed Jesus from afar ([Matthew 26:58](#)), Peter was waiting outside the high priest's chambers. Given three opportunities to speak up for Jesus, he instead denied knowing him, even cursing and swearing to bolster his denials ([Matthew 26:72, 74](#)). When the rooster crowed, Peter remembered Christ's prediction (see [Matthew 26:34](#)), realized how far he had fallen from his lofty claims of loyalty, and wept bitterly ([Matthew 26:75](#)). [[Mark 14:66-72](#); [Luke 22:54-62](#); [John 18:15-18, 25-27](#)]

[Matthew 27:1-2](#) *Their next step: Permission from Pilate.* After abusing Jesus and deciding he should die, the Jewish leaders took him to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. [[Mark 15:1](#); [Luke 23:1](#); [John 18:28](#)] Ironically, they did not have the authority to do the one thing they most wanted to do: kill Jesus. For this they needed permission from a Gentile.

Judea had become so troublesome to Rome that it had sent its own governors there to help the Herods keep order. This sometimes led to jurisdictional disputes, as seen in Luke's account of the interactions between Herod and Pilate during Christ's trials (see [Luke 23:1-12](#)). Pilate's washing of his hands (see exposition on [§Matthew 27:15-26](#)) may have been in part an expression of frustration with his volatile post of duty.

» **See also:** [Illustration: Final Days of Christ's Ministry, The](#)

[Matthew 27:3-10](#) *Judas: Remorse but no repentance.* When Judas realized that Jesus was actually going to die, he returned the betrayal price and hanged himself. Like Peter, Judas felt remorse. But while Peter's remorse led to repentance and restoration (see [John 20:1-10](#); [John 21:15-18](#); [Acts 2:14-40](#)), Judas's remorse led only to death (see [2 Cor. 7:10](#)). [[Acts 1:16-19](#)]

[Matthew 27:11-14](#) *A silent Savior.* As Jesus stood before Pilate, the Jewish leaders renewed their accusations while he remained silent, much to Pilate's amazement. [[Mark 15:1-5](#); [Luke 23:1-5](#); [§John 18:28-38](#)]

[Matthew 27:15-26](#) *"Your choice: Redeemer or robber?"* After he had sent Jesus to Herod and Herod had returned him (see [Luke 23:6-12](#)), Pilate reminded the Jewish leaders of his custom of releasing one prisoner at Passover as a goodwill gesture. Given the choice between Jesus and Barabbas, a common criminal, they chose Barabbas and called for Jesus to be crucified ([Matthew 27:15-22](#)). Pilate symbolically "washed his hands" of the matter and, when the people eagerly accepted full responsibility for Jesus' fate, released him to the soldiers to be crucified ([Matthew 27:20-26](#)).

Within less than a week, the Jewish leaders had successfully turned the crowds from ardent supporters to bitter opponents of Jesus. Barabbas means "son of the father"—a beautiful picture of salvation as Christ, the true Son of the Father, died instead of Barabbas. [[Mark 15:6-15](#); [Luke 23:13-25](#); [John 18:39-40](#)]

[Matthew 27:27-31](#) *Ridiculed by the Roman soldiers.* Pilate's soldiers mocked Jesus, crowning him with thorns, putting a reed in his hand as his "scepter," and pretending to acknowledge him as King of the Jews. Then they led him to be crucified. [[Mark 15:16-20](#); [John 19:1-16](#)]

[Matthew 27:32-50](#) *The Crucifixion.* Arriving at Golgotha, the soldiers crucified Jesus. They cast lots for his clothing ([Matthew 27:35](#); see [Psalm 22:18](#)) and placed a sign over his head mocking him as "King of the Jews" ([Matthew 27:37](#); see exposition on [§John 19:19-22](#)). The crowds, the religious leaders, and even the robbers crucified with him likewise mocked him, challenging him to vindicate his messianic claims by saving himself ([Matthew 27:38-44](#)).

That Friday, from noon till 3 P.M., a supernatural darkness covered the land. Then, foregoing his usual tender designation of "Father," Jesus called out in agony to God, and at 3 P.M., he died ([Matthew 27:46-50](#)). As he asked why God had forsaken him ([Matthew 27:46](#); see [Psalm 22:1](#)), Jesus was enduring God's judgment for the whole world (see [Isaiah 53:6](#); [2 Cor. 5:21](#)). [[Mark 15:21-41](#); [§Luke 23:33-56](#); [John 19:17-30](#)]

» **See also:** [Illustration: Crucifixion of Christ, The](#)

[Matthew 27:51-56](#) *Fearful signs follow his death.* At the moment of Christ's death, an earthquake tore apart the curtain dividing the Temple's Holy Place from its Most Holy Place, indicating that Christ's work had accomplished free access into God's presence (see [Hebrews 10:19-20](#)). The earthquake also opened many graves, and many long-dead people made public appearances. These signs convinced at least one Roman soldier of Christ's deity ([Matthew 27:54](#)).

Matthew noted that several women who were friends of Jesus watched "from a distance" ([Matthew 27:55-56](#)). John's account places himself and Mary the mother of Jesus closer to the cross (see [John 19:25-27](#)), making John the only apostle known to have witnessed the crucifixion.

[Matthew 27:57-61](#) *"I'll bury him in my tomb."* Joseph of Arimathea, a rich disciple of Christ, took his body, put it in his own tomb, and placed a large, disklike stone over the entrance. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph ([Matthew 27:61](#); see [Matthew 27:56](#)) sat watch at the tomb. [[Mark 15:42-47](#); [Luke 23:50-56](#); [John 19:38-42](#)] Christ's crucifixion with thieves fulfilled the first part of [Isaiah 53:9](#). His burial in a rich man's grave fulfilled the rest of that verse and vindicated his sinlessness.

[Matthew 27:62-66](#) *"Seal the tomb so he can't escape!"* Recalling Christ's prediction that he would rise from the dead, and fearing his disciples would steal his body to perpetuate this hoax, the priests and Pharisees, with Rome's help, sealed the tomb and posted a guard.

[Matthew 28:1-10](#) *"He's alive! He's alive!"* Just before dawn on the first day of the week (Sunday), as the two Marys returned to check on the tomb, an earthquake rumbled, and an angel rolled the stone away from the tomb. He declared that Jesus had risen from the dead, and invited the women to view the empty tomb ([Matthew 28:1-6](#)). He told them to tell the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee ([Matthew 28:7](#)). While on their way to report this wonderful news, the women encountered Jesus himself—the first of his post-Resurrection appearances (see *Key Events in the Life of Christ*). [^s[Mark 16:1-11](#); [Luke 24:1-10](#); [John 20:1-18](#)]

» **See also:** [Illustration: Ten Resurrection Appearances of Christ, The](#)

[Matthew 28:11-15](#) *The soldiers tell, then sell, the truth.* When the guards reported what had happened at the tomb, the Jewish elders bribed them to change their story and say that Christ's disciples had stolen his body. Matthew noted that, at the time of his writing, 20 years later, this false version of events was still widely accepted among non-Christian Jews.

[Matthew 28:16-20](#) *Promising his power and presence.* While appearing to a large number of his disciples (perhaps the 500 mentioned in [1 Cor. 15:6](#)), Jesus instructed them to lead people to faith in Christ, baptize them in water, and teach them the things he had taught. As they did this they would have his power and presence. This final instruction from the Lord has come to be called the great commission and has been the marching order of the church down through the ages. [[Mark 16:15-18](#); [Luke 24:46-48](#); [John 17:18](#); [John 20:21](#); [Acts 1:8](#)]

» **See also:** [Illustration: Ten Resurrection Appearances of Christ, The](#)

People to remember from Matthew

- [Andrew](#)
- [Barabbas](#)
- [Caiaphas](#)
- [Herod Antipas](#)
- [Herod the Great](#)
- [James \(Son of Zebedee\)](#)
- [John \(The Apostle\)](#)
- [John the Baptist](#)
- [Joseph](#)
- [Judas Iscariot](#)
- [Mary \(Mother of Jesus\)](#)
- [Peter](#)
- [Pilate](#)

ANDREW

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM MATTHEW)

Key Facts: Apostle, brought his brother Peter to Christ ([John 1:40-42](#))

Father: John ([John 1:42](#))

Occupation: Fisherman, apostle ([Mark 1:16-17](#))

Total Bible References: 12

Key References: [Matthew 4:18-20](#); [John 1:35-42](#); [John 6:8-9](#); [John 12:20-22](#)

Andrew Speaks

Here I am in Greece—a long way from Galilee—awaiting death by crucifixion. Really, though, I'm not in the least surprised about all this. After all, both John, my first master, and Jesus, my Messiah, died terrible deaths. ([Matthew 14:10](#); [John 1:40](#))

I wonder if Peter is still in Babylon. Well, wherever he is, my big brother is no doubt stirring up the dust for Jesus! What a privilege it was to introduce him to the Savior. ([John 1:42](#))

As I await certain death I often think of my days as a fisherman. Of course that's what I was doing when Jesus called me. Then I vividly recall that incredible time when, despite my doubts, he fed more than 5,000 hungry people—to say nothing of 12 hungry disciples!—with just five loaves and two small fish. ([Matthew 4:18-20](#); [John 6:8-9](#))

Such memories comfort me. Yesterday he met my physical needs. I have every confidence that today and tomorrow he will provide for my spiritual needs as well.

Spiritual Lessons from Andrew

- Andrew didn't permit his loyalty to a human leader to keep him from following Christ ([John 1:35-37](#)). See [1 Cor. 1:10-17](#) for some who did.

- Unlike Cain, Andrew knew that he was truly his brother's keeper and that his first responsibility was to introduce his brother to Christ ([John 1:40-41](#); see [Genesis 4:9](#)).
- No matter how little we are able to give the Lord, he can make it adequate for his purposes ([John 6:8-13](#)).

Key Verses

"Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of these men who had heard what John said and then followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother, Simon, and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' . . . Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus" ([John 1:40-42](#)).

BARABBAS

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM MATTHEW)

Key Fact: Criminal set free in place of Christ ([Matthew 27:16-21](#))

Total Bible References: 11

Key Reference: [Matthew 27:16-21](#)

Barabbas Speaks

At first I thought it was either a mistake or some cruel joke. After all, it isn't every day that someone convicted of murder, robbery, and rebellion is suddenly set free by the Romans—especially if that scoundrel happens to be Jewish! ([Mark 15:7](#); [Luke 23:19](#); [John 18:40](#))

But I soon discovered it was true! Seems the crowd preferred me over one who claimed to be the Messiah himself! I'll admit it sickened me to watch him being beaten and crucified. But it was even more amazing to hear him actually pray for his tormentors on the cross. I just don't know. Maybe that Roman soldier was right after all. ([Matthew 27:21](#), [54](#); [Luke 23:34](#))

Spiritual Lessons from Barabbas

- Barabbas benefited from the goodness of God, but did he experience the grace of God? It is tragically possible to experience the one but not the other (see [John 5:8-9](#), [14](#)).

Key Verses

"So when the governor asked again, 'Which of these two do you want me to release to you?' the crowd shouted back their reply: 'Barabbas!' 'But if I release Barabbas,' Pilate asked them, 'what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' And they all shouted, 'Crucify him!' " ([Matthew 27:21-22](#)).

CAIAPHAS

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM MATTHEW)

Key Fact: High priest who plotted Christ's death ([Matthew 26:3-4](#))

Total Bible References: 9

Key References: [Matthew 26:3-4](#), [57-68](#); [Mark 14:53-65](#); [Luke 3:2](#); [John 11:49-53](#); [John 18:24](#), [28](#); [Acts 4:1-22](#); [Acts 5:17-40](#)

Caiaphas Speaks

Incredible! Absolutely incredible! Look at them, barely able to walk after that severe beating, but what are they doing? Laughing and singing, of all things! Gamaliel, no doubt, gave us the correct counsel, but I wonder. Should I have killed them as originally planned? Probably not. I mean, that kind of treatment certainly didn't work on their founder, whom I arranged to have executed. ([John 11:49-53](#); [Acts 5:17-18](#), [33-41](#))

Rumors still abound that he rose from the dead. In fact, that cursed resurrection doctrine is the main theme preached by his fanatical followers! ([Acts 2:24](#); [Acts 3:15](#); [Acts 4:10](#))

Yes, I led the plot to kill him. But what else could I have done? It was either this self-proclaimed Messiah or our entire religious and political system! Well, what's done is done. ([John 11:47-50](#))

But I am still greatly troubled at the memory of our last meeting, especially his answer to my question as to whether he was the Son of God. He said, "I am, and you will see me, the Son of Man, sitting at God's right hand in the place of power and coming back on the clouds of heaven." What did he mean by that? What if he really was the Son of God? ([Mark 14:61-62](#))

Spiritual Lessons from Caiaphas

- How sad that those who should know Christ best often understand him least. This was indeed the case with Caiaphas ([Matthew 26:62-65](#); [John 11:49-52](#)), as with all false religious leaders ([Matthew 7:21-23](#); [1 Tim. 4:1-2](#); [2 Tim. 3:5](#); [2 Tim. 4:3-4](#); [2 Peter 2:1](#); [2 Peter 3:16](#)).
- If nonbelievers say, "Don't speak of Christ" ([Acts 4:6-18](#)), our response should be, "We must speak of him!" ([Acts 4:19-22](#))

Key Verses

"And one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said, 'How can you be so stupid? Why should the whole nation be destroyed? Let this one man die for the people' " ([John 11:49-50](#)).

HEROD ANTIPAS

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM MATTHEW)

Key Facts: Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, ordered John the Baptist beheaded ([Matthew 14:1-12](#))

Father: Herod the Great

Brother: Philip ([Matthew 14:3](#))

Wife: Herodias ([Matthew 14:3](#))

Total Bible References: 27

Key References: [Matthew 14:1-12](#); [Mark 6:14-29](#); [Luke 13:31-33](#); [Luke 23:7-16](#)

Herod Antipas Speaks

Jesus of Nazareth was sent to me as a self-proclaimed king, but I turned him into a clown! Serves him right! How dare he refuse to answer my questions! ([Luke 23:8-11](#))

Besides, rumor has it he's been guilty of bad-mouthing me. What is it with these Hebrew prophets? I ended up putting one such prophet to death for meddling in my affairs—even though I didn't really want to. ([Mark 6:14-29](#); [Luke 13:31-33](#))

But this one troubles me even more. In fact, I thought at first he was a reincarnation of John! Well, whoever and whatever he is, this Galilean will probably suffer a similar fate. I think Pilate will cave in to Jewish pressure and kill him. ([Matthew 14:1-2](#); [Luke 23:7-12](#))

At any rate, at least one positive thing has come out of all this: The governor and I are now good friends! ([Luke 23:12](#))

Spiritual Lessons from Herod Antipas

- We may try to silence those who call attention to our sins ([Matthew 14:3-12](#)), but we cannot silence our own guilt ([Matthew 14:1-2](#); [1 Kings 22:7-28](#)).
- One sin always leads to another. Herod's lust would trap him into taking John's life ([Matthew 14:3-12](#); [James 3:5](#)).
- One's spouse can have a tremendous effect on one's spiritual welfare, for good ([1 Cor. 7:14](#); [1 Peter 3:1-2](#)) or for ill ([Mark 6:18-20](#)).
- Close friendships can result from either mutual faith in Christ ([Acts 2:44-45](#); [Acts 4:32](#); [1 John 1:7](#)) or mutual rejection of him ([Luke 23:12](#)).

Key Verses

"Herod would have executed John, but he was afraid of a riot, because all the people believed John was a prophet. But at a birthday party for Herod, Herodias's daughter performed a dance that greatly pleased him, so he promised with an oath to give her anything she wanted. At her mother's urging, the girl asked, 'I want the head of John the Baptist on a tray!' The king was sorry, but because of his oath and because he didn't want to back down in front of his guests, he issued the necessary orders" ([Matthew 14:5-9](#)).

HEROD THE GREAT

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM MATTHEW)

Key Facts: Tetrarch of Judea, tried to murder the infant Jesus ([Matthew 2:1-18](#))

Father: Herod Antipater

Sons: Archelaus ([Matthew 2:22](#)), Herod Antipas ([Matthew 14:1](#)), Herod Philip ([Matthew 14:3](#))

Total Bible References: 9

Key Reference: [Matthew 2:1-18](#)

Herod the Great Speaks

My soldiers tell me they took another route home. Mark my word, when I locate and kill that miserable little infant they called the King of the Jews, those traveling astronomers will suffer my wrath also! In fact, the Jewish leaders who sent them to Bethlehem in the first place deserve to be punished! What a country to be ruler over! I mean, where else would a powerful monarch feel threatened by a silly story about a star and a baby king? ([Matthew 2:2-6, 12](#))

The report has just reached me. All those male babies in Bethlehem have been killed. Good! Wait a minute! What do you mean, with one exception? Curses! I'm told a carpenter, his wife, and his infant son escaped to Egypt! Could he be the one? Ridiculous! The whole story is absurd in the first place! And yet . . . ([Matthew 2:14, 16](#))

Spiritual Lessons from Herod the Great

- Human leaders should realize that God is ultimately in charge ([Daniel 4:25](#)), and they have only the authority he chooses to give them ([Romans 13:1](#)). Any attempt to oppose him ([Psalm 2:2](#)) will fail in the end.

Key Verses

"Herod was furious when he learned that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, because the wise men had told him the star first appeared to them about two years earlier. Herod's brutal action fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah: 'A cry of anguish is heard in Ramah—weeping and mourning unrestrained. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted—for they are dead' " ([Matthew 2:16-18](#)).

JAMES (SON OF ZEBEDEE)

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM MATTHEW)

Key Fact: First apostle to be martyred ([Acts 12:2](#))

Father: Zebedee ([Matthew 4:21](#))

Mother: Mary ([Mark 15:40](#))

Brother: John ([Matthew 4:21](#))

Occupation: Fisherman, apostle

Total Bible References: 19

Key References: [Matthew 4:21-22](#); [Matthew 17:1-6](#); [Matthew 20:20-28](#); [Luke 9:51-56](#); [Acts 1:13](#); [Acts 12:2](#)

James Speaks

I've gone from contented fisherman in Galilee to condemned felon here in Jerusalem. And my crime? Preaching the resurrection of Israel's Messiah! It's Passover time. Little did I suspect some 16 Passovers ago that it would all end this way. Of course, Jesus did warn that some of us would die. ([Matthew 10:16-21](#); [Acts 12:3](#))

Who could ever forget that sunny day by the sea when the four of us were called into full-time service? There were eventually 12 of us, but for some reason John, Peter, and I were allowed to see and hear things that none of the others saw: up on that mountain, filled with fear, almost blinded by the light, meeting with Moses and Elijah; and, most incredible of all, hearing the voice of the Father himself. ([Matthew 4:21-22](#); [Matthew 17:1-6](#))

Glorious days, but also some moments of regret. How selfish to ask that John and I be given seats of highest honor in his Kingdom. And later, even worse, seeking fire from heaven to consume some Samaritans. Oh, how we were shamed by his rebuke, as he stated what should have been so obvious: He had come not to destroy his enemies but to save them! ([Matthew 20:20-28](#); [Luke 9:51-56](#))

He would, of course, later die for our sins. And now I'm ready to die for his matchless name. Come do your worst, Herod! ([Acts 12:1-2](#))

Spiritual Lessons from James

- "Much is required from those to whom much is given" ([Luke 12:48](#)). James, along with Peter and John, was permitted to witness things not seen by the other apostles ([Matthew 17:1](#); [Mark 5:37](#); [Mark 14:33](#)). But twice this favored follower displayed wrong attitudes ([Mark 10:35-37](#); [Luke 9:51-54](#)). Have you been blessed by God in special ways? How have you responded in your love for him and for others (see [Ephes. 4:1](#); [1 Thes. 2:12](#))?
- James died a martyr's death ([Acts 12:2](#)), while according to tradition his brother John died in peace at a ripe old age. God's will for others may be totally different than his plan for you ([John 21:17-22](#)).

Key Verses

"When James and John heard about it, they said to Jesus, 'Lord, should we order down fire from heaven to burn them up?' But Jesus turned and rebuked them. So they went on to another village" ([Luke 9:54-56](#)).

JOHN (THE APOSTLE)

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM MATTHEW)

Key Facts: Perhaps the apostle closest to Christ, authored five NT books

Father: Zebedee ([Matthew 4:21](#))

Mother: Mary ([Mark 15:40](#))

Brother: James ([Matthew 4:21](#))

Occupation: Fisherman, apostle

Total Bible References: 42

Key References: [Matthew 4:21-22](#); [Matthew 17:1-13](#); [Matthew 20:20-28](#); [Mark 5:37-42](#); [Luke 9:51-56](#); [John 1:29](#), [35-39](#); [John 19:25-27](#); [John 21:20-22](#); [Acts 3:1-8](#); [Acts 8:14-17](#); [Rev. 1:9-18](#)

John Speaks

From the Jordan River to the Isle of Patmos, 70 years and five books later! What a life I've had! ([John 1:35](#); [Rev. 1:9](#))

I remember John the Baptist calling him the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Well, Andrew and I immediately left John to spend the day with this Sin Bearer. That turned out to be the first step toward full-time service. The final step toward our new life would come on the Sea of Galilee. There we were fishing, the four of us—Andrew, Peter, my brother James, and myself—when he called out from the shoreline, calling us to follow him and saying he would show us how to fish for people. Well, we did and he has! ([Matthew 4:18-22](#); [John 1:29](#), [36-39](#))

The seven decades since then have seen their share of both glory and grief. That amazing day on the mountain, the raising of that little girl, the healing of that lame man at the Temple, the crusade in Samaria—those were the glory events. ([Matthew 17:1-3](#); [Mark 5:37-42](#); [Acts 3:1-8](#); [Acts 8:14](#))

But my partisan pride, my efforts at self-promotion, and my downright vindictive spirit—those things brought only grief. Perhaps the most embarrassing were my two recent attempts to worship an angel. ([Matthew 20:20-28](#); [Mark 9:38-41](#); [Luke 9:51-56](#); [Rev. 19:10](#); [Rev. 22:8-9](#))

Apostle, elder, author, and prophet: These offices God has entrusted to me. My brother James, my former master John, along with Peter and Paul, my dear friends, are all gone now, each of them dying martyrs' deaths. I wonder, will I join their ranks? ([Matthew 10:2](#); [Matthew 14:10](#); [Acts 12:1-2](#); [2 Tim. 4:6](#); [2 Peter 1:14](#); [2 John 1](#); [3 John 1](#); [Rev. 1:3](#))

The Savior once told Peter it was none of his business what happened to me. It's really none of my business either. Whatever he wills is fine. ([John 21:20-23](#))

What great honors he has given me, to have been so close to him and now to see him in his ascended glory and to actually have the privilege of describing for all believers our future home—that shining city among the stars! I only hope that the kind of love I learned of from our Lord will be a reality in the lives of all his disciples as they await his return. ([John 13:23](#); [1 John 4:7-10](#); [Rev. 1:10-18](#); [Rev. 21:1-4](#), [10-27](#))

Spiritual Lessons from John

- God chooses and uses whomever he will, regardless of the person's natural abilities or social background. Even though John was a theologically untrained fisherman, God used him to explain three important truths about Christ: his deity ([John 1:1-5](#)), humanity ([1 John 1:1-2](#)), and sovereignty ([Rev. 11:15](#); [Rev. 19:11-16](#)).

- Though he was the disciple closest to Jesus, John once coveted even greater honor, for which Jesus gently rebuked him ([Mark 10:35-40](#)). We should be content with what we have ([Phil. 4:11](#); [1 Tim. 6:8](#); [Hebrews 13:5](#)). God will determine when and how to exalt us ([Psalm 75:6-7](#); [1 Peter 5:5-6](#)).
- Believe it or not, God's grace transcends denominational boundaries ([Mark 9:38-41](#))!
- It is all too easy to give to God's servants—such as pastors or other people of influence in our lives—the honor and even worship that God alone deserves. Even John was guilty of this sort of idolatry ([Matthew 4:10](#); [Col. 2:18](#); [Rev. 19:10](#); [Rev. 22:8-9](#)).
- Love for God and for others is a distinguishing mark of all true Christians ([1 John 2:3-11](#); [1 John 3:4-18](#); [1 John 4:7-5:3](#)).

Key Verses

"Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is born of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God—for God is love. God showed how much he loved us by sending his only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins" ([1 John 4:7-10](#)).

JOHN THE BAPTIST

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM MATTHEW)

Key Facts: Prepared the way for Christ, baptized him ([Matthew 3](#))

Birth: Recorded in [Luke 1:57](#)

Father: Zechariah ([Luke 1:5-13](#))

Mother: Elizabeth ([Luke 1:5-13](#))

Occupation: Prophet, evangelist

Key Events in His Life:

- Announces Christ's coming ([Matthew 3:1-12](#))
- Baptizes Christ ([Matthew 3:13-17](#))
- Inquires about Christ's authenticity ([Matthew 11:1-6](#))
- Beheaded by Herod Antipas ([Matthew 14:1-12](#))

Age at Death: 35 (recorded in [Matthew 14:10](#))

Total Bible References: 90

Key References: [Matthew 3](#); [Matthew 11:1-6](#); [Matthew 14:1-12](#); [Acts 19:4](#)

John the Baptist Speaks

At least Herod allowed my disciples to visit me here in prison today. That's a lot more than his wife would have done. They came right after returning from their mission for me. Thank God my misgivings were totally unjustified. Their report literally thrilled my soul: "He's the one, John. No doubt about it whatsoever. We watched in amazement as he gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, mobility to the cripple, and, most incredible of all, life to the dead!" ([Matthew 11:1-6](#))

I thanked them again and again and bade them a final farewell. We all realized this would be our last meeting. I know it will be just a matter of time until she has my head. I am feared and hated by both the king and the queen—for my crime of denouncing their shameful sin. ([Matthew 14:5](#); [Mark 6:18-19](#))

It's so hot and oppressive down here by the Dead Sea. How I miss the cool waters of the Jordan, where I once baptized so many, including the very one my disciples just reported about. ([Matthew 3:13-16](#))

Chained here in the darkness, I often wonder if I have lived up to the lofty predictions made about me by that angel and by my father. Or, perhaps even more significant, what about those written by Isaiah and Malachi? ([Matthew 3:1-3](#); [Matthew 11:10](#); [Luke 1:13-17, 76-79](#))

God will be my judge, of course. But this one thing I know: Even in the hour of death, he must increase while I must decrease, for he's the one who will take away our sin. ([John 1:29](#); [John 3:30](#))

Footsteps outside the dungeon door . . . They're coming for me. Someone said that today is Herod's birthday party. Apparently I've been invited. ([Matthew 14:6](#))

Spiritual Lessons from John the Baptist

- The gospel message is always far more important than the gospel messenger ([John 1:19-37](#); [John 3:22-36](#)). A preacher's true spirituality is demonstrated when the crowds bypass him to hear another.
- John's message concerning repentance and right living never varied, whether his listeners consisted of the masses ([Luke 3:10-11](#)), religious leaders ([Matthew 3:7-10](#)), tax collectors ([Luke 3:12-13](#)), soldiers ([Luke 3:14](#)), or the king and queen themselves ([Mark 6:17-18](#)).
- Jesus gently reassured a troubled and imprisoned John that he was indeed Israel's Messiah ([Matthew 11:2-6](#)). He will comfort and assure us today concerning our doubts and fears. He knows that we are only human and will have such doubts from time to time ([Psalm 103:11-14](#)).

Key Verse

"Isaiah had spoken of John when he said, 'He is a voice shouting in the wilderness: "Prepare a pathway for the Lord's coming! Make a straight road for him!" ' " ([Matthew 3:3](#)).

JOSEPH

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM MATTHEW)

Key Fact: Legal father of Christ ([Matthew 1:18-20](#); [Luke 2:4-5](#))

Father: Jacob ([Matthew 1:16](#))

Wife: Mary ([Matthew 1:18-20](#); [Luke 2:4-5](#))

Sons: James, Joseph, Simon, Judas ([Matthew 13:55](#))

Daughters: Unnamed ([Matthew 13:56](#))

Occupation: Carpenter

Total Bible References: 16

Key References: [Matthew 1:18-2:23](#); [Luke 2](#); [Luke 3:23](#)

Joseph Speaks

It grieves me that in spite of our efforts they still look on him with disdain. Admittedly, both his mother and I have struggled throughout the years to even partly understand that incredible series of events. Who, indeed, could grasp the fact that my wife, while still a virgin, would give birth to the Messiah himself? But that's exactly what happened. ([Matthew 1:18-25](#); [John 7:3-5](#))

Jesus and Immanuel! Those were to be his names, as announced by an angel to both Mary and me; the names mean "Savior" and "God with us." But neither his half brothers nor our hometown people will accept this! They simply shake their heads when we recount the story of the wondrous star and those visits by shepherds and astronomers. ([Matthew 1:21-23](#); [Matthew 2:1-2](#); [Mark 6:3](#); [Luke 2:15](#); [Luke 4:29](#); [John 7:3-5](#)).

He has left my carpenter shop to perform the Father's work, just as he predicted he would when he was a young boy. I am told John the Nazirite has recently baptized him. What will happen next? Only he and his true Father can answer that question! ([Matthew 3:13-15](#); [Luke 1:15](#); [Luke 2:41-50](#))

Spiritual Lessons from Joseph

- Joseph provides a marvelous example of obedience: God told him to wed Mary ([Matthew 1:24](#)), and he did. God then instructed him to move his family to Egypt ([Matthew 2:13-14](#)), and he did. Finally, God commanded him to return to Israel ([Matthew 2:19-21](#)), and he did.

Key Verses

"Joseph, her fianc., being a just man, decided to break the engagement quietly, so as not to disgrace her publicly. As he considered this, he fell asleep, and an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. 'Joseph, son of David,' the angel said, 'do not be afraid to go ahead with your marriage to Mary. For the child within her has been conceived by the Holy Spirit' " ([Matthew 1:19-20](#)).

JUDAS ISCARIOT

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM MATTHEW)

Key Facts: Apostle, betrayed Christ ([Luke 22:3-4](#))

Total Bible References: 22

Key References: [Matthew 26:47-50](#); [Matthew 27:3-10](#); [John 6:70-71](#); [John 12:4-6](#); [John 13:2](#); [Acts 1:15-25](#)

Judas Iscariot Speaks

Hypercritical and uncaring idiots! Actually, I didn't really expect any help from those religious leaders. Maybe I just wanted to be reassured I'd done the right thing. ([Matthew 27:3-4](#))

Of course I knew differently. My action was wrong. I was aware of it at the time, and I feel great remorse right now. Frankly, I still don't know why Jesus chose me in the first place. He seemed to sense right from the beginning that my heart was not with him. Certainly I had little in common with

those 11 crude and uneducated men who also joined the cause. ([Matthew 10:2-4](#); [Matthew 27:4](#); [John 6:70-71](#))

Actually, though, why did I agree to sign up? Probably because I thought he just might be the powerful political leader we were all looking for, the one who would throw off the Roman yoke and declare himself king! Of course that would have made me a very powerful and rich man! ([John 6:14-15](#))

But no, to the contrary, he seemed only interested in associating with sinners and sick people! Nor, apparently, did he believe in rewarding us with generous salaries! Frankly, I really resented that. In fact, this forced me, as treasurer for the group, to secretly transfer funds to my own account. ([Matthew 10:9-10](#); [John 12:6](#))

In my mind the turning point was the Triumphal Entry, which would have provided the perfect opportunity to seize power and be proclaimed king. But what did our would-be Messiah do instead? He cried over Jerusalem! Well, that did it! I determined right then to get out as fast as possible with as much as possible. ([Luke 19:41-44](#); [John 12:12-16](#); [John 13:2](#))

Now that I see him being brought to trial, I realize there must be more to this remarkable man than I had admitted. I have obviously betrayed an innocent man. Meanwhile, I have no prospects for employment and no real friends to turn to. . . . There is but one course of action left. . . . ([Matthew 27:1-5](#))

Spiritual Lessons from Judas Iscariot

- People in rebellion against God prefer darkness to the light, the better to hide their sin ([John 3:20](#)). The closer Judas came to the light, the darker the shadow he cast—first as a thief ([John 12:6](#)), then as a hypocrite ([Matthew 26:21-25](#)), and finally as a traitor ([Matthew 26:14-16](#); [Luke 22:48](#)).
- Seemingly sincere Christians, even those in positions of trust, may not necessarily be what they appear to be ([Matthew 26:21-25](#); see [Matthew 7:15-23](#); [2 Cor. 11:13-15](#)).
- Remorse without true repentance is worthless ([Matthew 27:3-10](#)).

Key Verses

"And even as he said this, Judas, one of the twelve disciples, arrived with a mob that was armed with swords and clubs. They had been sent out by the leading priests and other leaders of the people. Judas had given them a prearranged signal: 'You will know which one to arrest when I go over and give him the kiss of greeting.' So Judas came straight to Jesus. 'Greetings, Teacher!' he exclaimed and gave him the kiss. Jesus said, 'My friend, go ahead and do what you have come for.' Then the others grabbed Jesus and arrested him" ([Matthew 26:47-50](#)).

MARY (MOTHER OF JESUS)

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM MATTHEW)

Key Fact: Gave birth to Jesus ([Luke 2:7](#))

Husband: Joseph ([Matthew 1:18-20](#); [Luke 2:4-5](#))

Sons: Jesus, James, Joseph, Simon, Judas ([Matthew 13:55](#); [Luke 2:7](#))

Daughters: Unnamed ([Matthew 13:56](#))

Key Events in Her Life:

- Christ's birth and childhood ([Luke 1:26-2:52](#))
- Witnesses Christ's first miracle ([John 2:1-12](#))
- Learns of Christ's "true family" ([Luke 8:19-21](#))
- Observes crucifixion ([John 19:25-27](#))
- Among his first disciples ([Acts 1:13-14](#))

Total Bible References: 19

Key References: [Matthew 1:18-2:23](#); [Luke 1:26-2:52](#); [Luke 8:19-21](#); [John 2:1-12](#); [John 19:25-27](#); [Acts 1:13-14](#)

Mary Speaks

How wonderful this time of prayer has been! Kneeling here in this upper room I think of Joseph. If only he could have lived to see the day. He would have certainly stood alongside me at the cross and then shared my joy over the empty tomb. ([John 19:25](#); [Acts 1:13-14](#))

I know the relief that would have been his concerning the conversion of his other sons. Of course, it was that glorious resurrection appearance to James that opened their eyes. But who knows, perhaps he is aware of all these things anyway. ([Acts 1:14](#); [1 Cor. 15:7](#); [James 1:1](#); [Jude 1:1](#))

What memories are mine. The angelic announcement. The shepherds and those very interesting men from the Far East. Simeon's strange prophecy—which now I understand all too well! The Temple episode when Jesus was but 12. And that wedding of all weddings in Cana. ([Matthew 2:11](#); [Luke 1:28-35](#); [Luke 2:15-16, 34-35, 46-50](#); [John 2:1-10](#))

John has been so kind, providing for my every need as he was instructed to do. I think I'm beginning to understand the special attachment my Son felt for him. ([John 19:25-27](#))

But enough of memories. Back to prayer: Dear Father, how can a mere mortal even begin to thank you for the priceless privilege of giving birth to the world's blessed Redeemer? As I once helped raise him, accept my vow to totally serve him till the day of my death. My prayer to you as a young virgin in Nazareth is still my prayer today: I am the Lord's servant, and I am willing to accept whatever he wants! ([Luke 1:38](#); [Luke 2:7, 40, 51-52](#))

People are beginning to move about. Apparently the prayer session is over. I see Simon Peter standing to his feet, ready to address us. I must give him my undivided attention. ([Acts 1:15](#))

Spiritual Lessons from Mary

- God pronounced special favor on Mary ([Luke 1:30](#)), and he will favor us if we emulate her spiritual qualities:
 - She was totally submitted to God ([Luke 1:38](#)).
 - She had hidden God's Word in her heart, as is seen in her song of praise ([Luke 1:46-55](#)), where she quoted from at least 15 OT sources!
- When problems arise, we should check with Jesus first, as did Mary ([John 2:3](#)). Then we should be ready and willing to do whatever he tells us to do ([John 2:5](#)).
- Like Paul and Barnabas ([Acts 15:25-26](#)), Mary had truly risked her life for the sake of Christ:
 - She endured a difficult and dangerous journey to accomplish his birth ([Luke 2:4-7](#)).
 - She exposed herself to hostility, ridicule, and possible death at Calvary to watch him die ([John 19:25-27](#)).

- The Bible presents Mary as a worshiper of her son Jesus, not as an object of worship herself. In the upper room, she was among those praying ([Acts 1:14](#)).

Key Verse

"Mary responded, 'I am the Lord's servant, and I am willing to accept whatever he wants' " ([Luke 1:38](#)).

PETER

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM MATTHEW)

Key Facts: Prominent apostle, authored two NT books

Father: John ([John 1:42](#))

Brother: Andrew ([John 1:40](#))

Wife: Unnamed ([Matthew 8:14](#))

Occupation: Fisherman, apostle ([Matthew 4:18-20](#))

Key Events in His Life:

- Called by Christ ([Matthew 4:18-20](#))
- Tries to walk on water ([Matthew 14:28-31](#))
- Publicly confesses Christ ([Matthew 16:16-18](#))
- Witnesses Transfiguration ([Matthew 17:1-8](#))
- Denies Christ before crucifixion ([Matthew 26:69-75](#))
- Exhorted by resurrected Christ ([John 21:15-22](#))
- Preaches at Pentecost ([Acts 2](#))
- Proclaims gospel in Samaria ([Acts 8:14](#))
- Sees vision, evangelizes Gentiles ([Acts 10](#))
- Jailed for preaching; freed miraculously ([Acts 12:1-10](#))
- At Jerusalem Council ([Acts 15](#))
- Writes 2 NT books

Total Bible References: 183

Key References: [Matthew 4:18-20](#); [Matthew 14:28-31](#); [Matthew 16:16-19](#); [Matthew 17:1-8](#); [Matthew 26:69-75](#); [John 6:68-69](#); [John 21:15-22](#); [Acts 2](#); [Acts 10-12](#); [Acts 15](#); [1 Cor. 15:5](#); [Galatians 2:11-13](#); 1 Peter, 2 Peter

Peter Speaks

35 years ago, Jesus told me that someday I would be led where I didn't want to go. I have the feeling that his prophecy will come true any day now. God will allow Nero to do what he once prohibited Herod Antipas from doing. ([John 21:18-19](#); [Acts 12:1-10](#); [1 Peter 1:14](#))

It would be so good to see my brother Andrew once more, but he's somewhere in Greece. I wonder where Paul is these days? How thankful I am for those two men. My brother introduced me to the Savior, and Paul was a trusted fellow evangelist. I say "trusted" in part because of that one time when he didn't hesitate to correct me when I became too legalistic. ([John 1:42](#); [Galatians 2:11-12](#))

At my first encounter with Christ, on the shore of Galilee, he told me to catch some fish. At our last encounter, on the very same spot, he told me to feed his sheep. By his grace I've been able to obey both commands. At Pentecost, he allowed me to snare 3,000 "fish." Later, through these two letters, I have tried, with God's help, to feed his sheep. ([Luke 5:10](#); [John 21:15-17](#); [Acts 2:41](#); [1 Peter 2:2-3](#))

Whenever I recall the beautiful Galilean countryside I think of my shining moment, when I was privileged to publicly confess my belief that Jesus was indeed the Son of the living God. But then I also recall how, shortly thereafter, he had to severely rebuke me for trying to stand in the way of his ultimate mission as God's Son—to die for our sins. ([Matthew 16:16, 21-23](#))

Then came that darkest moment of all, when I forsook and actually denied him in public! In fact, to my horror he overheard those curses, then turned and looked at me. Never will I forget the sad gaze that penetrated my very soul. ([Mark 14:50, 71](#); [Luke 22:61-62](#); [John 18:25-27](#))

But then, wonder of wonders, following his crucifixion and resurrection he personally appeared to me. Events seemed to move at lightning speed after that: his ascension, the excitement of Pentecost, the humbling experience of being used by him to heal the sick—and even one dear old saint whom we saw come back to life through his power. ([Luke 24:34](#); [Acts 1:9-11](#); [Acts 2:1-4](#); [Acts 3:1-8](#); [Acts 9:32-41](#); [1 Cor. 15:5](#))

There's probably nothing, of course, that can stop my approaching death. I hear they often do it by crucifixion here in Rome. When I think of all my Lord has done for me—and all he has forgiven me of—I hardly feel worthy to die in the same way he died. That's why I've made my special request. . . .

Spiritual Lessons from Peter

- The more clearly we see our Savior, the more clearly we see our sin. Both Isaiah ([Isaiah 6:1-5](#)) and Peter ([Luke 5:8](#); [Luke 22:54-62](#)) experienced this. According to tradition, when Peter was martyred for his faith, he asked to be crucified upside down, feeling unworthy to die in the same way his Lord had died.
- God doesn't need our advice or correction. Peter tried three times to change the Lord's mind but was himself promptly corrected each time ([Matthew 16:21-23](#); [Mark 14:27-31](#); [John 13:6-9](#); see also [Isaiah 40:13](#); [Romans 11:33-36](#)).
- As Peter learned one night on a stormy sea, only by looking to Jesus can we stand firm ([Matthew 14:22-33](#); [Hebrews 12:2](#)).
- It is more important to seek God's will for our own life ([Ephes. 2:10](#)) than to be concerned about his plans for someone else ([John 21:20-22](#)).
- God shows no partiality on the basis of race or class ([Romans 2:11](#)), and neither should we. Even though Peter acknowledged this ([Acts 10:34](#)), he did not always live up to the truth he knew ([Galatians 2:11-14](#)).
- Peter was an eyewitness of Christ's earthly ministry, including his glorious Transfiguration ([Matthew 17:1-8](#)). Yet though he greatly valued that remarkable experience ([2 Peter 1:16-18](#)), he seemed to value even more the written Word of God that it confirmed ([2 Peter 1:19-21](#)). None of us today share Peter's firsthand knowledge of Christ during his earthly ministry. But we can share his encounter with Christ through his Word ([2 Tim. 3:16-17](#); [1 Peter 1:23-25](#); [1 Peter 2:2-3](#)).

Key Verses

"At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, 'Are you going to leave, too?' Simon Peter replied, 'Lord, to whom would we go? You alone have the words that give eternal life. We believe them, and we know you are the Holy One of God' " ([John 6:66-69](#)).

PILATE

Key Facts: Governor of Palestine, condemned Jesus to death ([Matthew 27:2-26](#))

Total Bible References: 53

Key References: [Matthew 27:2-26](#), [57-66](#)

Pilate Speaks

I can't believe it! Yet another request concerning this would-be king of the Jews. Will it ever end? Even after his death it continues. First two followers desired his lifeless body. Now his enemies are demanding that I secure his tomb. ([Matthew 27:62-66](#); [John 19:38-39](#))

Actually, I thought the situation would end when I sent him off to Herod. But that was just the beginning, for I no sooner turned around than there he was again, standing in my court. Strange case to say the least. He must have been the only man in this entire insane country more hated by the people than myself. And that's saying quite a lot! They have literally despised me since the day I slaughtered a bunch of them along with their animal sacrifices. But I have never understood their fierce animosity toward this Jesus. Certainly he didn't seem to be a threat to anyone. ([Matthew 27:21-25](#); [Luke 13:1](#); [Luke 23:6-7](#), [11](#))

I probably should have listened to my wife and set him free, regardless of their protests. Amazing, though, that they chose Barabbas, that wretched creature, over this mild-mannered man. ([Matthew 27:19](#); [Luke 23:18-19](#))

This Jesus told me he was a King, but not of this world. He also claimed to be the very source of truth itself. Well, I ordered him severely beaten, attempting to appease the people's taste for blood and thereby save his life, but all to no avail. At any rate, I washed my hands of his innocent blood. ([Matthew 27:24](#); [John 18:36-19:5](#))

Strange, though, I still feel uncomfortable and uncertain—even unclean—over the whole episode. His friends desired the body, and I granted their request. His foes now demand that I secure the tomb, which shall be done. Surely this will end the matter forever. What more can he do, rise up from the dead?

Spiritual Lessons from Pilate

- We should always give due consideration to the advice of friends ([Proverbs 11:14](#)). Pilate ignored his wife's advice to his own peril ([Matthew 27:19](#)).
- Pilate tried to be neutral concerning Christ ([Matthew 27:24](#)), but Christ does not allow such neutrality ([Matthew 12:30](#)).
- When confronted with the very embodiment of truth ([John 14:6](#)), Pilate expressed contempt for the very possibility of knowing the truth ([John 18:38](#)), as do so many today (see [2 Tim. 3:7](#); [2 Tim. 4:3-4](#); [2 Peter 3:16](#)).

Key Verses

"Pilate saw that he wasn't getting anywhere and that a riot was developing. So he sent for a bowl of water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of the blood of this man. The responsibility is yours!' And all the people yelled back, 'We will take responsibility for his death—we and our children!' So Pilate released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to crucify him." ([Matthew 27:24-26](#)).