

Translation Notes

To accompany

The Pioneers' New Testament

2014 corrections

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TRANSLATION NOTES

For more than fifty years now, I have searched for people with whom to explore the Lord's intentions for his people. Except for a scattered few brief interludes, that search has failed.

I had hoped that the dissemination of my New Testament translation might provoke the discussion and contacts needed for greater faithfulness. But without any endorsement or any distributor, that also failed to produce the needed critical evaluation and interchange.

These observations, too, should have been refined by the challenge and counsel of a mutually seeking community of brethren. They have not: and consequently they are fragmentary and mostly untested.

But fifty years is a long time. Only the Lord knows how many years may be left. Certainly not fifty more! So I am beginning to record some thoughts that perhaps someone, someday, will correct, add to, and find a way to offer this message to the Body of Christ. With sadness, I no longer expect to live to see “ordinary folks” like myself privileged to contribute to that Body. Someday, though, the Lord will again make his voice heard and his people will again recognize the glorious message of Pentecost – that he intends to speak *to* all of us *through* all of us. What a beautiful time that will be!

Meanwhile, this is intended to be sort of an explanatory supplement to my New Testament translation. In the introduction to that work, I noted that I had deliberately chosen to avoid standard “Christian vocabulary” in favor of an attempt to use words in ways that would have been familiar to the first readers of the texts. This is an attempt to explain some of those vocabulary choices; to explain grammatical structures that are unfamiliar to the reader of English; and to include miscellaneous other observations that I have found helpful over the years.

Please do not interpret this as any kind of a “doctrinal statement”, or anything but the efforts of one follower of the Lord Jesus Christ to share with other followers (or potential followers) some of the treasures of his Kingdom.

INTRODUCTION

There are probably as many ways to approach the study of the New Testament as there are people who choose to do so. Some aim to discredit, or at least cast doubt upon its precepts and its integrity. Others attempt to “prove” some particular quirk of doctrine or conviction, in order to force their perspective upon others. Some glean from its pages a list of specific ideas and/or behaviors, which they then use as a screen to sift out who is or is not a “faithful believer”. Is this collection of writings a detailed and coherent history, a scientific text, a philosophical or theological treatise, a word-for-word transcription meticulously dictated by God? Is it a document created by a medieval hierarchy to solidify its power over its ignorant subjects? The assumptions with which one undertakes this study have an enormous impact on its outcome. Therefore, it is only fair that a reader be made aware of the perspective from which the present document is written.

Academically, I respect the work of those who are continually sifting through any available manuscripts to assemble the most complete text possible. I feel strongly that anyone who chooses to take the New Testament seriously, should certainly welcome any work that allows us to discern with greater accuracy the original message. I view folks who devote themselves to textual work, when they do so with academic integrity, as helpful brethren.

Being a confessed “language junkie,” however, trained in linguistics and the cultural challenges of translation, I have chosen rather to devote my energies to working toward an accurate transmission of the *message*, rather than its “DNA.” This choice is colored by my own history.

Although I had been exposed to “Sunday school stories” as a child, I was a college student when I first encountered the idea that the New Testament described a way of life, not just stories. Always having been a lonely person, I was enthralled, as I began to read it, with the wonderful ways Jesus and his followers interacted with each other and with other folks. I saw a concern, a degree of caring, a purposefulness, belonging, yes, even “love”, that I had never seen. There were – and are -- “churches” all over the landscape. Why had I never seen that kind of living? I needed to know more.

As I delved into a study of the Greek language, and the diverse cultures from which these documents arose, the conviction grew that the major reason for misunderstanding of the message was failure to explore those extremely important resources. Self-styled “scholars”, some highly respected, scoffed at many New Testament directives as “artifacts of contemporary culture”, without ever closely examining that culture. Even a cursory perusal of contemporaneous history and literature makes it obvious that the attitudes and relationships called for in the New Testament **challenge** far more aspects of its ambient culture than they endorse. We denizens of late 20th/early 21st century western culture inhabit a universe that, except for some technological advances, would fit very well into the Greco-Roman world of the first century. Sociological, economic, religious, ethical, linguistic and intellectual pluralism, enhanced (or aggravated, depending on one's perspective) by the relative ease of travel along eastern and Mediterranean trade routes, created a mix not at all unlike the scrambled cultural milieu in which we still obsess over Thales' (6th c. BC) admonition to “Know thyself.” Jesus' contrasting instruction that true life is to be found in “losing oneself” grated as harshly upon their ears as it does upon ours.

From various sources, I have accumulated this list of characteristics of first century BC/AD culture in the Greco-Roman world. Have we changed very much? There was:

- unprecedented ease of travel and communication.
- world-wide trade, bringing previously unheard-of luxury to the wealthy classes
- huge racial and ethnic diversity
- cheapening of life, leading to abandonment of babies, aged, and infirm
- a universally spoken and understood language
- religious plurality, fed by trade routes
- a single, dominant military power, brutally suppressing local uprisings
- executions, political and criminal, were shockingly common
- all manner of sexual deviations acceptable in society, even as a part of worship
- thousands assembling to watch increasingly brutal sports events, in stadiums holding tens of thousands
- large cities, encompassing extreme wealth and abject poverty, strain resources.
- political figures claiming to represent deities, and demanding ritual worship
- women holding more political and social power than ever before in recorded history

– an uncommonly just legal system, but one easily manipulated by the powerful and/or wealthy

And that is just a sample!

Linguistically, it is difficult for 20/21 century Americans to appreciate a culture in which nearly everyone was at least minimally conversant in three languages – often more. This is not so rare in Europe and parts of Asia and Africa, but to us it seems incredible. Everyone of course spoke his own “native” language – Aramaic, in the Roman province of Palestina. But business, philosophic discussion, and scholarship required Greek. Since the third century BC Diaspora, even the Hebrew scriptures were most common in the Septuagint (Greek) translation. And legal matters related to the Roman occupation forces, required Latin. Literacy may not have been particularly widespread, but language fluency certainly was.

And virtually every language I have ever encountered shares one extremely important feature that is conspicuously lacking in modern English: making a clear distinction between the singular and plural forms of the second person plural pronoun, “you.” Most languages make this distinction in the forms of verbs, as well as expressed pronouns. In written or spoken communication, it is readily obvious whether the “you” being addressed is (1) a single individual, (2) a group of people treated corporately as a group, or (3) the individuals *in* a group as individuals. In English, there is no way to be certain. This, I believe, is at the root of the almost universal failure, among groups that are sincerely seeking to be faithful, to understand or to embody the corporate nature of “the church” -- the Body of Christ. The vast majority of the precepts of the New Testament are addressed to “you” PLURAL. English readers assume the singular form, leading to much more private, individualistic interpretations.

For example, in the Sermon on the Mount as recorded by Matthew, there are 215 instances of either a second-person verb form or the pronoun “you”. Of these, 127 are of a plural form, and only 88 singular – and about half of the singular ones are OT quotations. It makes an enormous difference, for example, whether I am expected, singlehandedly, to figure out how to “do good to those who are persecuting (me)”, or if that is to be done in the context and with the counsel and support of a committed brotherhood! Some of the implications and other linguistic studies are explored in an earlier volume, *Citizens of the Kingdom* (1993).

The study of the language and culture from which the New Testament documents came to us can thus be extremely valuable in understanding what the original writers were trying to say. Vocabulary and grammatical structure make a huge difference in languages more precise than ours. Please see the Appendix for a brief introduction to significant aspects of these considerations.

Here, I will simply point out the following:

Paying close attention to the *usage* of a word, both elsewhere in the NT and in other period or classical writings, can help sharpen our concept of what the first readers “heard” by virtue of its use.

Distinguishing between singular and plural is *crucial* to understanding both instructions and prospects for individuals and/or communities

Understanding verb tenses makes a huge difference: simple past-present-future in ordinary narrative, but even more so the present vs. aorist imperatives, infinitives, and participles, which refer *not to time at all*, but to the difference between a snapshot and a video: a single event, or constant action.

These disciplines will be an enormous help in understanding what a given passage actually SAYS. They can answer many questions, resolve many apparent ambiguities, and also raise other questions that may not have occurred to the reader of English versions.

However, you should also be aware of what they will NOT do:

They will NOT enable you more skillfully to pull out “big guns” and pontificate, “The Greek says....” and thereby win every argument.

They will NEITHER enhance NOR shoot down the flights of fancy and intricate diagrams of self-styled “theologians” who try to reduce the message of Kingdom living to a list of cut-and-dried “doctrines”. Vocabulary and grammar can’t speak to something that is not there.

They will NOT solve every problem nor resolve every mystery. They will not magically produce “answers” to every dilemma.

You will notice that there are many issues that have become “hobby horses” for some folks that I have simply declined to

address. I advocate no “code” with which to decipher allegorical or metaphorical passages. That is not the job of a translator. Translation involves simply (or not!) rendering, as faithfully as possible, the *original intent* of the writer into the target language. Simply, “What does it SAY?” (See the following essay).

You may also notice that there are many individual “verses” (an artificial creation many centuries after the original text) that do not conform to any standard formulations of “doctrine” or “theology.” Please remember, I did not “change” them. I consulted nobody’s systematic formulation – only the text. Challenge my work on linguistic grounds, and I will owe (and pay!) you a debt of gratitude. Challenge it on the grounds of somebody’s “points of doctrine”, or “systematic theology”, and I will answer, “SO -----?” The standard for God’s people is what HE says – not somebody’s edited report. I am well aware that people who like their “beliefs” domesticated, housebroken, and sorted into neat little boxes, feel mightily threatened by this approach, as were their forebears who designed Inquisitions, drownings, and burnings for those who raised questions in the past. They prefer to start with their conclusions, and marshal (or alter) a handful of texts to “prove” their point. The followers of Jesus with whom I identify choose rather to mine for the treasure of “What does the text say?”, and build their lives on the results.

So this is not a commentary in any classical sense. It seeks neither to attack nor to defend any version of the text, nor any “doctrinal position.”

It is merely a collection of observations, linguistic and cultural, that have grown out of a fifty year quest to become a part of the beautiful demonstration project that I see my Lord outlining in this “operators manual” that he has provided for his people.

There is no way I can credit all the tidbits to their original sources – the years have blurred those. The best I can do is to say, if you see something that you may have said first, I thank you sincerely, and if there is a second edition, I will gladly acknowledge it. I do not claim to have originated many of these observations: I merely include things that have helped me along the way. May they enrich your journey as well.

With apologies to Dr. Seuss, I will conclude with a slightly altered quote from one of his/my heroes, Horton the Elephant, regarding the New Testament writers:

They meant what they said
and they said what they meant:
And JESUS IS FAITHFUL
ONE HUNDRED PERCENT!!!

It’s his opinion that counts!

Ruth Martin
2012

THE TASK OF A TRANSLATOR

The task of a translator, of any text, not just the Biblical one, if done responsibly, is excruciatingly difficult. It is exponentially more so if the translator has a serious commitment to the content of the text. This is because, in order to translate in an ethical and honest way, one must consciously resist, at every turn, the temptation to “slant” or prejudice the result in favor of his own opinion.

A translator, if responsible, is NOT an editor. A translator is NOT a commentator, and most certainly NOT a revisionist or critic. His job is consummately non-partisan. His commitment must be to the *original writer or speaker*: to convey, as closely as possible, in the target language, the intent of the originator of the text. He may not, *under any circumstances*, tamper with its content, if he is to produce honest work.

This becomes very complicated in the case of Biblical translation. Most people who undertake that task, despite doing so with the very best of intentions, approach it with a background of years of acquaintance with *other people's* distillations of what “the Bible says”. I had the rather rare privilege of delving into the text near the beginning of my Christian commitment, but even so, had to be careful of the influence of “accepted teaching.” Those with a longer history have an even more difficult assignment. This is because, as any serious student will attest, one cannot encounter “the living and powerful Word of God” without having his cage rattled, his presuppositions challenged, and his neatly defined understandings of faithfulness shuffled and rearranged.

The challenge is compounded further for those who derive their employment from this monumental task. An employer, be it church or other consortium, that chooses to fund such a project, usually has a reason for doing so, and an agenda to be fulfilled.

A case in point is seen in several recent attempts to remove or replace references to gender in English “translations” of Scripture. For starters, a goal like that immediately removes the work from the realm of “translation” altogether. These people, however well-intentioned, are not “translating.” They are not rendering the **original text** in the target language. They are editing and revising it, thus doing violence, not only to the text and its authors, but to both languages, as well as impoverishing their readers by ignoring cultural contexts.

Let me illustrate with a single word, much abused by the “gender police” -- “sons”, (υιοι) as in “sons of God.” With a cavalier “inclusiveness”, (they think), they rewrite the text to read “sons and daughters”, so that the ladies won't feel left-out. Such a revision displays total cultural ignorance, diminishes the power of the statement, and obliterates the amazing inclusiveness of Paul's original writing! Yes, I really did ascribe “inclusiveness” to our good brother Paul, who has been mightily abused for the opposite, by folks who use only the English texts of Galatians 3:26-29. Paul has just made the classic statement that there is no distinction in the Kingdom between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, when he says, “You are ALL sons of God.” To change that designation to “sons and daughters” (which he could have said), or “children” (for which he would have had a choice of two different words), completely ignores the import of the rest of the sentence, “if sons, then heirs”!!! The use of “daughters” or “children” removes the privilege of inheritance, for that was impossible in first century culture. He is saying that we are ALL considered SONS, in order that we ALL may be HEIRS – heirs of God, together with Christ! This is not a question of gender, but of elevated, equal status!

The same is true of words like “brethren” -- the writers don't *mean* “brothers and sisters”. They mean people of equal value and privilege! Rather than change and thereby cheapen the vocabulary, we need to teach the true meaning of the words that the writers *chose*. But that is the task of enlightened teachers, not translators.

There are other considerations of vocabulary. In relatively few cases does one find an exact, one-to-one correspondence between words in any two languages. In most instances, the Greek language is far more precise than English. Linguistically, one can discover the actual meaning of a word most accurately by looking at **every incidence** where it is used in a text. But this exercise must employ the *original* language, not the target language. (Young's Analytical Concordance is an excellent resource.) One must sort out instances where one Greek word has been commonly translated by two or more *different* English words. This has resulted in the (incorrect) communication that

there are multiple concepts in view, rather than one. Take for example, the word *αγγελος*, which means, simply, “messenger.” The early translators did not like using the same word for ordinary people and for supernatural beings, so they transliterated the Greek word to “angel” for the supernatural kind, and retained “messenger” for humans, ignoring the fact that the focus is on the function, and not the status of the individual. The same word is used of the supernatural apparitions to Mary and to Zachariah, as for the men John the Baptist sent to Jesus, and to the spies hidden by Rahab in Jericho! As a consequence, we fail to see our fellow-believers – even, occasionally, non-believers – as potential “messengers” from God!

There are also cases where two or more Greek words have been incorrectly lumped together and translated by a single English word, obscuring important distinctions. Notable for the confusion caused thereby, is the popular English word, “gift.” This word has been chosen by translators and commentators to represent no less than nine *different* Greek words, each with its own implications and connotations. The different words can carry the freight of the identity of the giver and receiver; the purpose of the “gift”; its character or quality; the relationship between giver and receiver; and a host of other ideas. The confusion leads to many kinds of misunderstandings of the text.

Cases do exist, of course, where a degree of ambiguity remains – and in those instances, the translator has to make a call. Some words are just less specific than we would wish. I have usually dealt with these situations by offering bracketed alternatives. Very few translators do. I consider it necessary, as a matter of integrity.

In any attempts at translation, there are also instances in which two languages lack a common grammatical structure. On such occasions, a degree of circumlocution is required, in order to convey the intent of the grammar; however, this needs to be done with extreme caution. Where I have felt it necessary to supply words that are not included in the text, I enclose them in parentheses, again, for reasons of integrity. It is amazing, the extent to which “scholars” or “theologians” will hang a whole “doctrine” upon a word that does not even exist in the text. A translator may have needed it to clarify a concept, in which case supplied words are quite justified, but the translator should have admitted that it was added. It may also be necessary to use additional words to express the proper tense or form of a word – at such times, I simply include it in the translation (for example, to indicate the continuous nature of the present tense.) Please see the Appendix for other examples.

Finally, the task of a translator is never finished. As indicated in my introduction to the first edition of the New Testament translation, there will never be a “perfect” or “definitive” translation of the New Testament. Not only does any presently spoken language keep changing constantly, but the plain fact is that none of us is “smart” enough either to understand or to communicate all of the purposes of our God. The “best” translation will always be one that is continually in process, as the shared effort of a group of folks whose mutual goal is faithfulness.

I began serious work on the translation project around 1980, when my husband and I began teaching techniques of Word Study, and then basic New Testament Greek, to Bible students. The initial intent was simply to sharpen my own language skills. At the request of students, the project grew. The first edition saw print in 1992; the first complete revision and correction was put in CD form in 2002; and the third revision is now complete, and about to be posted online. Had the work received the needed critique and feedback, it would not have taken so long, and would have been a better work – but it will never be finished. It is the work of a lifetime to “rightly handle the Word of Truth.”

MATTHEW

Some folks identify Matthew with the tax-collector turned disciple, called by Jesus early in his career. Others insist upon a later date of writing that would exclude any actual participant in his ministry in Palestine. A person with even minimal understanding of cultures that value oral tradition would respond to such a controversy with a rather bored, “So ---?” The meticulous care with which oral histories are transmitted, and the high value placed upon accurate recitation, make the time of actual transcription far less relevant than it would be today.

Matthew's inclusion of his own story among those of other marginal people who were welcomed and transformed by Jesus would seem to vindicate the idea of his involvement. “Common wisdom” also suggests that this is the “most Jewish of the Gospels”, because of the frequent reference to Old Testament prophecies. That may be partly true, but it is instructive to note the frequency with which he highlights Jesus **overtly correcting** the erroneous prevailing notions of “what was said by the ancients.” If this is indeed Matthew the disciple, his pointing out of Jesus' departures from convention will be seen in a new light – as he himself had suffered from the observance of those conventions.

He also takes pains to include accounts of Jesus' interaction with foreigners and outcasts of various types, and comes down hard on the ruling priests who opposed Jesus at every turn, and eventually accomplished his execution. He has written with a very even hand. I shall try to do likewise.

MATTHEW 1

Matthew traces Jesus' family line to David and to Abraham. Interestingly, it is traced through Joseph, of whom Jesus is not considered to be a lineal descendant. This should highlight the understanding of the purpose of genealogies in that culture. The terms “father” and “son”, while literally translated, are clearly not to be literally understood. A more culturally relevant rendering would be “ancestor” and “descendant.” Genealogies seldom “match”, as presented. A writer arranges them in a way that makes a particular point, not to construct a precise “family tree.”

In this case, Matthew has divided his history into even segments,, although archeology posits a date of the 18th century BC for Abraham, the 11th century BC for David, and the 7th for the Babylonian exile. Rather than counting years, it seems, we are to learn that these were drastically different segments of Israel's development, decline, and re-establishment as a nation.

Equally interesting is the observation of another way this genealogy departs from tradition. A very common use of genealogies, consistently traced through the male lineage, is the careful establishment of in-group status. Foreigners are systematically weeded out. Yet Matthew specifically includes four women on his list, three of whom are foreigners. Every one of them raised eyebrows among the meticulous. Tamar, the Canaanite widow of Judah's son, who in her desperation for justice resorted to harlotry, proved, in Judah's own words, “She is more righteous than I.” Ruth, a Moabite widow, followed the cultural rules in her union with Boaz, but was a foreigner nevertheless. Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, was victimized by the powerful king David. Mary was not a foreign woman, being also of David's line, but surely the circumstances of her pregnancy raised many questions. Even Joseph needed the intervention of a heavenly messenger to encourage him to cooperate.

Clearly, the prophecy quoted at the end of the brief narrative is also a summary of the foregoing material: Jesus will rescue his people from their failures!

The reader will note that I have frequently used the term, “failures” where most other versions prefer “sin.” This is a semantic, not a theological choice. Two different Greek words have traditionally been rendered “sin.” This one, by far the most common, is “*hamartia*”, which connoted a failure to hit a target or attain an objective, NOT a deliberate transgression, which is expressed by another word, “*paraptoma*”. We have been poorly served by teachers and translators who have failed to make this distinction.

Jesus will rescue his people from their failures! What glorious news! And how can this happen? Only as he graciously becomes what we all most desperately need: “Emmanuel – God with us!”

MATTHEW 2

The theme of foreigners proving more faithful than the folks who “should have known better” continues in the infancy narrative about the Magi. These guys were astrologers-- practitioners of a craft that was flatly forbidden in the Old Testament law. A person could be executed for practicing astrology! And they were from the east, yet – perhaps Babylon, perhaps Persia, the areas hated as the scene of the Jews' captivity! Why were these men led to seek – and to find -- the Promised One? Maybe they were the only ones paying attention. They headed to the “logical” place to find a ruler, and caused consternation. People with power, be it civic or religious, do not welcome the thought of an authority superior to their own. Certainly not one who will “shepherd” the people! Everyone, in those days, knew what a shepherd does – leading, feeding, doctoring, defending his flock, even placing himself at risk for their welfare. This was decidedly NOT the

agenda of the oppressive, abusive power structure.

Vv.11-12 – They worshiped, then went home by another road. Dare we say that no one has genuinely worshiped, who does not go on his way by a different road?

Much has been made of the content of their gifts, and the somewhat esoteric “spiritual” implications of each substance. There may be a point to that, I don't know. But one simple, obvious fact is often overlooked. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh were not only extremely valuable (a little bit goes a long way), but also very *portable*. The little family was soon to undertake a long and perilous journey, and to spend several years in a foreign country. They were not wealthy people. How were they to finance their exile? Might this not have been an instance of God's very practical provision?

One is made to wonder what became of these men. Tradition has named them, and concocted stories, but the Scripture does not even specify that there were three men – only three gifts – and we do not hear of them again. They did what they could, with the means at their disposal. Did they – do they – know of the results?

And what of the children of Bethlehem, the mothers and fathers whose little ones were snatched away and destroyed because of Herod's jealous rage? What of the uncounted thousands who suffer similar losses every day, because one or more of the world's powerful is convinced that his dominance, prestige, wealth, or other superiority, is threatened? No heavenly messengers appear to have warned these families. And no earthly ones intervened, either. What are we to make of that? Terrible things happen in a world that does not acknowledge its true Sovereign. How are we to respond?

Joseph seems to have been given very specific instructions. I wish that happened more often!

Matthew leaves the family activities completely at this point. They settle in Nazareth, which Luke represents as their point of origin. Matthew says nothing about a journey prior to the birth. Galilee may have been considered “safe”, being farther removed from the center of political and religious power. It did not have a very glowing reputation, as one may observe from various comments recorded during the course of Jesus' ministry. However, some historical evidence has emerged that it may have been a commercial center, with major Roman construction projects going on. Work opportunities for a skilled carpenter.

MATTHEW 3

John the Baptist. I've always felt kind of sorry for him. Sent to prepare the way, he did so as faithfully as he knew how. But he never got in on the good parts. I guess I tend to identify with that.

Crying out in the desert. But at least he got folks to listen. Were they, too, tired of empty ceremonies and entrenched hierarchy, and ready for some action? Even Pharisees and Sadducees came for baptism “for a changed life.” Of course, these were not all the “bad guys” that they have been represented to be. Many of them were genuinely trying to be faithful. Someone has said the Pharisees were convinced that if *one* person kept the Law completely faithfully for *one* day, the Messiah would come. I guess I would have tried, too, if I believed that.

Nevertheless, John did not treat them like celebrity converts. He demanded that their lives demonstrate “worthy fruit” (results). This element is missing from most of the “diversity” talk these days. The so-called “liberals” have it *half*-right: everyone is welcome to identify with the Kingdom. But they forget the part about a changed life, in conformity with that Kingdom. The “conservatives,” on the other hand, see only the other half of the picture. They demand conformity to their list of rules (which is neither comprehensive nor consistent), but ignore the welcoming part.

The crowds that came flocking to John had a more realistic response. They came for baptism, acknowledging that they *themselves* had failed to measure up to God's expectations and needed to change. John's admonition was, “*Show me!*” Pedigree clear back to Abraham doesn't cut it. *Behavior*, producing “good fruit” is the acid test. Jesus will eventually sort things out.

And then Jesus himself shows up. Clearly, he needed no “changed life” in the sense that others did. But his life was about to change, dramatically, as he began his public ministry. What “justice” or “righteousness” was he “fulfilling”? We are not told. Is this part of his identification with our human condition? The laying-aside of his “rights”? (Phil.2) Whatever the reason, the Spirit of God confirms that what he did was right.

Who-all saw the dove and/or heard the voice? Accounts seem to differ – as they would, given varied observers reporting. Knowing what was ahead, that confirmation must have been enormously encouraging to the human side of Jesus. Perhaps the whole scene was his reaffirmation of his acceptance of the role for which he came, and the empowerment he would need, as a man, to discharge it faithfully.

Another notable piece of the scene of Jesus' interaction with John is his response to John's protest. John has rightly recognized Jesus' superiority; yet Jesus gently rejects his own prerogative. This will become a pattern throughout his period of ministry: a categorical rejection of the privileges of status, even though richly deserved.

The endorsement by the Spirit of God comes *after* his submission to John's baptism. Jesus has not abandoned who he IS: he has simply refused to avail himself of the privileges that his Being deserves. It is also an example (far too seldom emulated by his "followers") of recognizing and supporting the calling of others. John had not been certified, "ordained," or otherwise appointed by any existing hierarchical or ecclesiastical organization. His only credential was his obedience to the call of God. By his action, Jesus made a powerful assertion that he supported such obedience; that it was not subject to ecclesiastical politics.

MATTHEW 4

The temptation account. The foregoing observations are reinforced by the immediate succession of the temptation (testing) incident. Jesus had just acted faithfully, and received supernatural confirmation of his identity. Now the question comes: "Do you really intend to go through with this?"

There have been endless debates over whether the "bread" refers to his own hunger or the physical needs of the people. I'm doubtful if it is an either/or situation. And if that were the point, we would not subsequently have at least two instances of miraculous feedings of large crowds. The focus, uniformly, is **following the instructions** received from God. To take any one of Satan's suggestions would have resulted in the immediate adulation of huge crowds of people, and very likely precipitated a violent response from the Roman occupiers. This seems to have totally escaped the attention of the advocates of the unscriptural insistence that Jesus came "only to die." He could have done so easily, without the hassles of three years of trying to get the vision of another sort of Kingdom through the thick skulls of a handful of people, if that were the case.

The remainder of the chapter describes in action, the purpose he announced verbally in Luke's account: bringing light to those in darkness, announcing good news, healing diseases and all sorts of suffering, and also beginning to collect and train a few people to aid and eventually to carry on his work.

"Syria," in this stage of history, refers not to a nation, but to a large Roman province to the north of Palaestina, and at least three times as large. If *people* were coming from "all over Syria", the message was being dispersed *very* widely, and earlier than we realize, beyond the boundaries of Judaism. Fertile ground was being prepared for Paul's later travels. Jewish communities, of course, were scattered all over the sites of their former exile, and also along the many trade routes that intersected in parts of the eastern Mediterranean.

MATTHEW 5-7

"THE CONSTITUTION OF THE KINGDOM"

Makarios is a word that we truly fail to understand. In classical writings, it referred to the "reward" after death for "good" people and heroes, or even to the state of the gods. Later, it was used in more prosaic settings, to refer to a person who was highly respected, or prosperous, or fortunate in some way, or even as a respectful form of address, similar to, but perhaps more formal than the use of "*kurie*(sir)" the word usually translated "Lord" or "Master." So in this setting, although I chose "privileged" in the translation as a sort of a compromise for the sake of consistency, I was/am not really satisfied with it.

Likewise, the dative "*to pneumatī*", with no preposition, is problematic. The traditional adjectival use, "poor in spirit," while vague enough to provide fodder for plenty of pious sermonizing, is probably the least likely to be accurate, for several reasons:

1. The phrase is omitted entirely by Luke, except in a very few manuscripts.
2. All the other groups on the list are very straightforward, not fuzzy at all.
3. None of the others incorporate modifiers.

So, what is intended? (See Appendix for more possibilities) A dative denoting a "friendly relationship"? A dative of means -- *how* something happens? or agency -- *who* does it? Or perhaps a comparative dative? My guess is that the dative pertains more to the adjective than to the subject -- partly for these reasons, and partly because Luke's version refers simply to "the poor."

The church at large has little understanding of the functioning of "the Spirit". Sad, because this was supposed to be how we were to be enabled to live together in Jesus' Kingdom. Here, there is no grammatical way to tell for certain whether the term applies to the Holy Spirit (unless it is paired with "*hagios*"), or refers simply to the human spirit. Context may

provide some clues, but we must take care not to interpret context by our own cultural assumptions. Therefore, although a choice must be made by the translator or expositor, it must be a modest and negotiable choice.

It seems to me most likely that Jesus, in the “Jubilee” context of the rest of his remarks, is making the point that the poor, rather than occupying the (assumed) lowest rung of the social ladder, are eligible for a peculiarly favored position, which rearrangement requires the agency of the Holy Spirit. (Please note: the reference to the Kingdom has no connection, here, to eschatology, but describes a **present reality** brought about by Jesus. The verbs are present, not future.) Grammatically, it would be almost as valid to read the statement as a recognition of the amazing buoyancy of “spirit” one sees in some folks who are materially “poor” but exuberant in generous expressions of love and trust. However, the presence of the definite article would lean toward the Holy Spirit. Then again, perhaps he intends that we read a blend of the two possibilities.

The additional characteristics mentioned as commendable, are every bit as counter-cultural. It was as much of a stretch in the first century Roman Empire as it is in 20/21 century western culture, to see that, rightly understood, these characteristics arise out of **strength**, not subservience. After all, they beautifully describe the life of Jesus himself.

“Mourning” may refer to the grief at someone's death; it may also refer to any misfortune or disaster. The precise circumstance that is “mourned” is far less relevant than the fact that the participle is **plural**. In the Kingdom that Jesus has come to inaugurate, no one faces disaster alone! We have been brought together for mutual support! “*Parakaleo*” bears no resemblance whatever to the insipid “everything will turn out ok” version of the English (mis)understanding of “comfort” to which we are accustomed. This is another of the “tasks” of the Holy Spirit (who must surely cringe at being designated a “comforter,” all warm and soft and cuddly!) who functions to “encourage, strengthen, and instruct his people. One Word Study student referred to it as “coaching,” pointing out that a good coach teaches his team how to play the game: with a hug or a kick in the pants, whichever is appropriate. There is no promise that we will not experience disaster. In fact, it often seems to be assumed that we will. But it is NOT intended to be faced alone.

Praos is just as drastically misunderstood. “Meek” has evolved to communicate a doormat type of attitude, when the word actually carries the freight of great strength – under strict control. It is used of the taming of wild animals, in order that people may benefit from their strength. This is why I chose “gentle” in the translation. Gentleness can only arise out of controlled, disciplined strength. It is not weakness or indifference. It requires a deliberate choice. Weakness has no choice. By *choosing* to deal gently, a person or group inherits a superior role – inherits the earth! Weakness or insecurity lashes out in fear: gentleness expresses quiet confidence.

This admonition is balanced by the next: hunger and thirst for justice. being gentle does not mean caving in to evil. But justice cannot be achieved by unjust means. *Dikaiosune* is legal, not philosophical vocabulary. The separation in English into two concepts, “righteousness” which has come to have pious religious overtones, and “justice” which may be coercive, and sadly, is perceived by many to have no connection to one's stance of faith, has done serious violence to the Biblical text. These are not two concepts, but one. In the Kingdom where Jesus rules, there will be justice. Things will be **fair**. Those who obey him will treat everyone in a manner that is fair and just. And those who have suffered injustice – they will be fully satisfied! May God speed the day! There is nothing vindictive in this promise: justice is not vengeance. It is administered with gentleness. But it is justice, nonetheless.

I chose “generous” for *eleeo* and its related forms, because it encompasses both “pity or compassion” and “charity/almsgiving.” There is no true mercy or compassion that does not “grow legs” – and no sincere charity that does not begin in the heart. There is no hint of superior/inferior hierarchy here: all are in need of generous compassion, and all are able to extend it, albeit in varying ways.

What is a “clean” or “pure” heart? Here we have another dative case with no preposition to give us a clue to its intent. The structure is similar to that in 5:3. Interestingly, “clean” is the primary word, and “heart” is the dative modifier. Coherent English seems to require the translator to reverse these, but I'm not sure that is the correct solution. The older version, “pure in heart” may be better grammatically, but is even less comprehensible. It is possible that Kirkegaard was on to something when he wrote, (quote from Vernard Eller's thesis), “Purity of heart is to will one thing.” It may refer to the clarity or singleness of focus required for clear vision: If the Lord is the single focus of our attention, the chances of seeing him clearly are immeasurably improved.

“They will see God”?! *Horao* can refer either to physical sight or other forms of perception. There is no foolproof way to distinguish. I will have to come back to this one.

“Peacemakers will be called sons of God.” Interestingly, this is the only New Testament use of the noun form. The verb form also occurs only once, in Colossians 1:20, referring to Jesus having “made peace” between Jew and Gentile by

his death. This is part of a more detailed discussion of the “walls” between people and people-groups being broken down. I do not pretend to understand all the implications of this: a *few* of them may be:

1. identification with Jesus' efforts
2. obligation to confine oneself to his methods
3. recognition of the possible/probable cost: one's life
4. identification with Jesus himself, as “sons of God.”

For a discussion of the term “sons of God,” please refer to the essay “The Task of a Translator.” To “qualify” as a peacemaker, I must look beyond the “normal” divisions and barriers between people, and see, as he did, **people** that my Lord cares about, and wants to transform into citizens of his Kingdom. **Differences are not to be ignored, but rather transcended.** There's a huge difference.

This merges seamlessly into the final “beatitude” -- the hatred, persecution, and false accusation encountered **because of one's identification with Jesus**, is to be celebrated as evidence (present tense) of belonging to his Kingdom. But note again, like all the others, this is *plural*. We will “arrive” together, or not at all.

But how does one deal with this, when finding no group similarly inclined? These writings were done for existing groups – brotherhood was assumed. This question has become increasingly unanswerable and painful for all of these 50-plus years.

The salt of the earth – cleansing, preserving, flavoring ... the light of the world – shining in the darkness to show the way ... the good deeds that cause people to give praise to the Father ... all these are *corporate* results of *corporate* behavior. But where dear Lord, where is that Body of Christ?

17-19 Very early, Jesus states unequivocally that he is not “just another revolutionary” out to destroy all that has gone before. That's a major problem with revolutions: they tend to destroy indiscriminately, rather than expend the effort to discern what may have already been valid. *Kataluo*, embellished with a prefix, indicates severe and total destruction. *Pleroo* denotes completion, fulfillment of purpose. Interestingly, both words are aorist infinitives in form. The infinitive is frequently used in a purpose construction. The aorist tense is significant, indicating a specific, definitive, one-shot type of action. Just as *katalusai* conveys a picture of apocalyptic, wholesale destruction, *plerosai* describes a full and final completion. Jesus has come to create the definitive “demonstration project”, to correct all the misconceptions and misunderstandings that have rendered the “law and the prophets” powerless to achieve the ends for which their messages were intended, and to make possible the real-life realization of the Kingdom of God. No portion of either is to be negated, **until** it has all happened, all come into being, through his unique life/teaching/existence! Don't try to “jump the gun” and go around bashing things before the time.

One huge problem in “mission” efforts, in many cultures, has occurred when missionaries have made a wholesale assault on the “old ways”, destroying old customs and taboos (and with them the stability of the society), before there is sufficient understanding of the new, to create a new stability. If the old (and therefore labeled “evil”) structures are discredited, **without being replaced**, where necessary, with careful teaching, nihilistic chaos ensues. This can only be destructive.

“Justice/righteousness” must be greater, not less, than under the old system. It may – in fact, it will – be defined somewhat differently: and this is the next task upon which the Lord embarks. The following segments reinforce that point. Jesus is not advocating “free-from-the-law-so-anything-goes” attitudes. Rather, he highlights the broader implications of several provisions of the Law.

The prohibition against murder extends to the nurturing (present participle) of angry resentment, and even to contemptuous speech. It appears easy to become involved in the perceived differences in “sentences” (judgment) – the Council (Sanhedrin), hell, etc., and miss the lesson in the reference to offering sacrifice. The prescribed sacrifices in the Old Testament system had varied associations. Some fell under the category of the required “tithe”. Some were for the support of the ecclesiastical system. Some were channeled to the poor. Some were celebrations or thanksgivings. Others had a penitential flavor. The *kind* of sacrifice referenced here is not specified. Perhaps that is deliberate. Are we to understand that *any* gift or offering, however designated, is to entail an exercise of self-examination? Is the acceptability of *any* sort of gift contingent upon the quality of one's human relationships? Such a suggestion at the time of “offerings” in churches could have very interesting repercussions. Is it any wonder that this is not commonly quoted?

25-26 Nothing is said about the guilt or innocence of the accused, in this admonition to speedy reconciliation. The reference to payment makes it look like a dispute over a debt. *Antidikos* may refer to either the plaintiff or the defendant in

a lawsuit. Could the warning be against the vagaries of the legal system, where *either* party could end up as the victim, at the whim of the judge involved?

27-32 As much as “modern culture” may wish otherwise, there is simply no “wobble-room” here. Marriage is expected to be permanent, and inviolable. Opportunities for “fudging”, although apparently culturally acceptable then as well, are not permissible under Kingdom principles. Even one's thoughts are to be strictly controlled. Clearly, deviations were common in the surrounding culture. But any cause of offense is to be ruthlessly removed. Notice, though, that the initiative in this process is the responsibility of the **individual concerned**, NOT the community or any hierarchy. These are not penalties to be imposed by others. The concern is for the faithful person himself to eliminate anything that would dissuade him from a faithful life.

33-48 “Above and beyond” is the common thread here, with many specific variations.

“Oaths” in Biblical writings, have nothing whatever to do with “saying a naughty word”. They fall into three categories: a declaration of loyalty to a person or to a political or religious entity, a promise to perform a particular deed or service, or a verification of one's honesty or trustworthiness in a given situation. The prohibition seems to be based primarily on human fallibility and/or powerlessness, and a recognition that mere humans have no business calling the possessions of God into our own service. The conclusion assumes that the standard for a citizen of the Kingdom is absolute honesty, **whether or not** he has made a formal statement to that effect.

Why is “more than this ... from the evil one?” Very likely because of the implication that without the oath, one's veracity or sincerity may not be trusted, and such a possibility does not exist for the Kingdom citizen. I don't have any problem with saying, “I will do this if I possibly can,” or “I will make my best effort to ...”, but absolute statements are not ours to make.

38-39 I recently heard a different slant on this. People have tended to interpret “turn the other cheek,” as a demand that one allow himself to be beat-up-on, or taken advantage of. I heard it suggested that rather, this was instruction for an exquisite form of non-violent resistance. The argument runs, that it was legally forbidden to strike someone with the left hand. (Many cultures have taboos about using the left hand for anything but personal hygiene.) One might strike an “equal” only with his open hand. A servant, slave, or other social inferior, would be delivered a back-handed swat. This would result in landing the blow on the “right cheek” of the inferior. Turning the other cheek toward the striker, thus would present the attacker with a choice: either to cease the attack, or to acknowledge his victim as an equal, with his open hand. An interesting response to abuse. I wonder if anyone ever tried it – and what happened.

40 Likewise, the surrendering of one's cloak placed the **creditor** at risk, since it was illegal to deprive a person of what was probably his only shelter from the elements at night.

41 Same applies to the Roman soldier, who could require of a subject person one mile, but no more. The soldier could be severely punished for that extra mile.

Generosity, yes – but not without a bite!

This section has been one of the fairly rare passages where the “you's” are singular. Individual responsibility/action is required.

43-48 Now, though, suddenly we have returned to the plural. Might this not be because it is quite impossible for a person to do alone? The shift is critical. The loving response to enemies and persecutors is not only evidence of whose family/Kingdom we belong to – it is the *means of becoming* what we are intended to be. “It's only human” is no longer a valid excuse for failure to live up to Kingdom principles. We are *expected* to do/be more than others. And the only way this is possible, is together.

Here, the word for completeness is not *pleroma* but *teleios*. Some historical uses: (Oxford lexicon): authoritative or final; valid or fully constituted; accomplished, fully trained, qualified; mature; fully, perfectly developed.

For *pleroma*, the same lexicon gives: “a full complement; the sum; a piece inserted to fill a gap; full specification; filling up or completing a quota; acknowledging payment in full.”

Simply put, if comparisons are to be made, it is not to others that we are to be compared, but to the standard of the loving concern of God, demonstrated for us by his coming in the person of Jesus.

MATTHEW 6

Continuing in the same vein, we are warned against playing to the grandstands. Initially, this seems confusing, as we were admonished in 5:16 that our “light” was to shine so that people might give praise to the Father. This purpose construction must therefore be the key. The warnings in 6:1-6 are then to be understood as making certain that deeds of justice, contributions, and prayer are not done in such a way as to draw that attention and praise to ourselves. This can be delicate to balance. The interplay between singular and plural forms may be significant here.

This is especially noticeable in the discussion of prayer. V.6 would appear to advocate only private prayer, yet from v.7 on, the pronouns are all plural. Even the ones (v.14) dealing with forgiveness! Might this be because it is difficult, if not well-nigh impossible, for a lone individual truly and completely to forgive? Likewise significant is that the thing to be forgiven – *paraptomata* – refers to deliberate transgressions, not *hamartia* – the errors of immaturity or inability. If I need to absorb the pain and destruction caused by another’s deliberate act, abandoning any quest to “get even”, or see that he “pays” for the evil, I will desperately need the support and counsel of a brotherhood.

In the beginning of the “Lord’s Prayer” -- and I seriously doubt that he ever intended it to be memorized and recited – the first three phrases are concerned with God’s agenda. They are cast in *third person imperatives*. There is no such structure in English, which makes translation extremely problematic. In English, an imperative (command) is assumed to have a second-person (“you”) subject – the person addressed. Greek has such a structure; but it also has a third person form, in which the subject is expressed, not implied. No one, to my knowledge, has come up with a really satisfactory way of translating such a structure. Some use “may ... happen”, but that would be better for the translation of several different subjunctive or optative constructions that have a “wish” or “desire” flavor. It does not carry the strength of an imperative. Others use “Let ...”, as in, “Let this mind be in you ...”, but that sounds more like a request that the listener or reader *allow* something to happen – also far too weak. I have usually used “must”, but that really belongs with the use of *dei* (it is necessary). However, I think it is closer than the other options, although it is still not as accurate as I would like. The force of the grammatical construction is that the subjects, (“your name”, which implies one’s entire being/existence, not just the label by which he is identified; “your kingdom” or sovereignty; and “your will,” desires or plans) **must** be as described. All three are aorist imperatives, which indicates decisive, single action. I guess I instinctively want them to be present (continuous), but they are not, although the effects surely would persist.

None of this, of course changes the major idea that priority be given to the Lord’s concerns, not our own. Nothing optional or iffy about it..

11- Apparently, it is legitimate to commit to the Lord our daily needs, even though we were just told that the Father knows those without being asked. Acknowledging our dependence is probably a good thing.

12- *opheilemata* – what is owed . It is very intriguing how *paraptoma* got substituted in here. It only appears in a handful of manuscripts. A result, perhaps, of a developing hierarchy, who found “sins” to be a more potent tool of control than “debt”? Or a hierarchy that had become wealthy, and did not wish to confront the demand that the person praying must erase the debts of those who owed *him*? The substantial treatment given the word in the Oxford dictionary is virtually exclusively concerned with economics, either financial debt or servitude. Only later, (v.14), is *paraptoma* mentioned – perhaps as a marginally related matter.

Aphiemi is another word that has been abused, altered, and somewhat emasculated, by liturgical usage. By theologically cramming the whole of Christian teaching into a “forgiving-the-miserable-sinner-by-divinely-empowered-edict” mode, the incredibly gracious offer of a transformed life in a deliberate community of people intent upon learning and practicing the Lord’s intentions for them has almost completely disappeared. The literal meaning of *aphiemi* (allow to flow), is “to set free, to acquit of a charge, to dismiss, to get rid of, to disown, to leave alone, to send away, to set sail or march away.” This is NOT an insipid, “Oh, that’s ok, it doesn’t matter.” It DOES matter. A very drastic change is involved. The debt, or the transgression, is deliberately canceled, not ignored or forgotten. Frequently the word is used in a legal setting. The resulting bondage is broken. It is costly, to the one holding the debt or bond. This is probably another reason why, as noted above, the discourse has returned to the use of plural forms. It is much more doable in the context of a group.

16- The admonition about fasting, and the handling of “treasure” (19) are also cast in the plural, as well as singular when individual behavior is described. Apparently neither is intended to be a wholly independent, individual matter.

“Fasting” seems to have been a reference to abstention from anything, not food only, and could be voluntary (as an act of worship, probable here) or involuntary (the word is also used of famine.) The point being made, again, seems to be one’s motivation and attitude, rather than the details of the practice. “Treasure”, likewise, may be money or other valuables, but also refers to the preservation of food for the lean seasons, or for a journey. I strongly suspect that this is not intended to

encourage irresponsibility, but rather again to emphasize that we be aware of our motivations. And yet, we face the question of where to draw the line. Perhaps my brother can see where my heart is, far better than I can.

22- “Eye” probably refers to the focus of one's attention.

24- the necessity of making a choice. *Mamona* is an Aramaic word for “wealth”. the Oxford lexicon makes no reference to a pagan god, as some preachers hold.

25- I really think the reason folks get so hung-up on the “birds and lilies” thing is the failure to notice its context. There's an awful lot in life over which we have no control. Fretting over that fact quickly becomes counter-productive. How much is “enough”? Who can ever know? Jesus has spent a great deal of time talking about the *focus of our attention*, and this is no exception. What *really* matters? If those who claim to be his people dared to spend their energies on Kingdom activity, not only these, but many other needs would be met.

As in so many other situations, the dilemma becomes, how can one obey faithfully, alone, a standard intended for a community? This entire segment – 25-33 – is written, again, in the plural. Lord, have mercy!

MATTHEW 7

The interplay of singular and plural continues to be a bit of a challenge. Plural predominates, except for vv.3-5, which of necessity must refer to individuals.

Perhaps one of the most frequently abused passages is in 7-11, so commonly applied as an encouragement to human selfishness. This is entirely addressed in the plural. Might not our “asking” be noticeably refined, if subjected to the counsel/participation of a brotherhood? The assumption is also made that the father to whom the son makes a request will exercise loving discernment in its granting. Be that as it may, the asking, seeking, and calling (knocking) are all plural, although v.8 shifts back to the singular. Perhaps the point may be that the primacy of the brotherhood does not ignore or disparage the individual, but rather guides and informs, nurtures and corrects the perceptions and actions of the individuals who comprise the group.

With this as a context, the subsequent instructions can be seen in a clearer light. These principles apply to the formation and maintenance of the brotherhood that is needed for the realization of the life being described. The succinct summary of “the law and the prophets” takes behavior out of the realm of picky details, and places it squarely where it belongs: the establishment of wholesome, helpful relationships. Although there may be few who choose the “narrow way” of life, entering into it is a *plural* effort. We will find the way together – or not at all.

In this context, “false prophets” are not people who advocate some wacky philosophical or theological doctrinal deviation, but impostors who deceptively join the “flock” in order to destroy it. “Watching out” -- a present (continuous) imperative, is also a plural effort, -- not the job of some self-styled “doctrine police”, but the work of the entire brotherhood, evaluating the quality of the fruit borne by those who claim to speak for God. We are told to *recognize* them, not “judge” them – simply to be careful to whom we pay attention. The definitive test (21) is whether a person “keeps on doing” what the Father wishes. Flamboyant performances are not the key. Careful construction, according to the designated plans, is the critical standard.

Jesus was raised by/as a builder: both physically and spiritually. He could therefore speak with authority, even to those who could not recognize that he is also the supreme Architect of the universe. Honest scribes were truly trying. (Not all, of course, were honest). But they could only quote other commentators, much as many still do today. Where are those who recognize that Jesus *knows* – he doesn't need to speculate. There is no more skilled or authoritative teacher to whom to turn!

MATTHEW 8

A whole series of healings.

This has long been a problem for me. I have not found a single instance where Jesus turned away anyone who asked him for healing. And he entrusted his followers with the same responsibility. How then, to respond when it doesn't happen?

A few significant points: the leper, the ultimate outcast, was *restored to the community* according to the accepted procedure. The centurion, an agent of the enemy occupation, is commended for recognizing Jesus' authority, and for his own humble statement of inferior, “unworthiness”. *Pais* may refer either to a child or a servant. His attitude is sharply contrasted with that of people who, due to their “background”, should have known better, and recognized the Promised One. Peter's mother-in-law is restored, and immediately offers hospitality to his group as guests. And in the evening, the whole town shows up, and is ministered-to without any discrimination.

Jesus clearly is not trying to assemble a massive following. People with other priorities are discouraged from joining the group of disciples. At the same time, he demonstrates that he definitely has things under control. Maybe he doesn't have "a place to lay his head," but he commands, and a violent storm is calmed. A strange interplay of vulnerability and power. Of course, the provision of shelter lies within the ability of mere people. The only thing lacking there is the will to make such provisions. The forces of nature are quite another matter. But how then should his people deal with natural disasters? Do what we can, for sure – but should not faithful disciples, if we could just be properly linked to Jesus, be able to reach far beyond that?

And the herd of pigs: granted, this was out of Jewish territory, and pigs would certainly have been considered expendable. But it was someone's livelihood. It likewise seems odd to compromise with demonic powers. Although the drama of the situation would certainly have served to assure both the patients and the observers that deliverance had truly taken place. One would wish for a bit more complete reporting! Why did the townspeople ask Jesus to leave? Bad for business? Fright at his power over the supernatural? Just the sense of being out-of-control? Interesting that they could handle the man's dementia – it was easy to exclude him. But a person who had been healed – that was much more frightening.

This whole chapter seems to have more questions than answers.

MATTHEW 9 A Paralytic Man Brought by Friends

Jesus is impressed by the faithfulness of the *friends*. Nothing at all is said about the "faith" of the patient. The man simply does what Jesus tells him. That bears little resemblance to the "requirement" that a person "claim" healing before it can occur, or subscribe to a list of propositions "by faith."

Please notice the tense of the verb, in Jesus' reply to his critics (v.6). "The Son of Man HAS authority on earth to take away failures ("forgive sins")." This is a PRESENT TENSE. Why then do "theologian-types" insist that only his *death* could enable that? His authority depends upon who he IS, the God of all creation, not upon any single event.

Matthew leaves his lucrative tax office and throws a party. His associates and Jesus' other disciples are an odd mix – neither much favored by "nice people," but not particularly congenial with each other, either. Probably pretty amazing to see them together. Jesus is able to recognize that they are ALL "oppressed", just in different ways.

Even people who represent themselves as his followers seem to have trouble with that concept. If a person feels slighted or stomped-on, the usual reaction is to find a more vulnerable person or group to "stomp" in his turn, rather than to make common cause with others who have had a raw deal. One sees this in churches as well as businesses, governments, and society at large – even families. Incredibly sad, and short-sighted. In the presence of Jesus, of all places, we should find commonality and mutual support. "Lord, have mercy" is no respecter of persons – or status of any description.

This casts instructive light on the following section about "new wineskins." The old models of relating, where status and position determine one's sympathies and associations, simply cannot work in the new society that the Lord has undertaken to create. Everything is new!

A few people "got it" (v.18). A "ruler" came and knelt before him – an itinerant preacher. And Jesus went with him. On the way, he responded with kindness to the touch of a woman whose hemorrhage made her even less "acceptable" than a woman was anyway, to approach a man in public. Conventions of any sort, *if oppressive to someone*, were readily disposable: even though, earlier, the healed leper was instructed to follow standard procedure to document his cleansing. **Jesus does not trash all existing customs – only those that damage people.**

He then proceeded to revive the little girl, to give sight to two blind men, and to banish another demon. "Preaching the good news of the Kingdom, and healing all sorts of diseases and maladies" -- these are inseparable. The good news was that he cared! People matter – regardless of their social position. To people with a stake in the system, (34), that is demonic. It threatens to destroy their dominance, which they claim to have been assigned by God. But Jesus' sympathy is with the crowds, who need shepherding, not oppression. The sheep I used to care for, depended upon my care –imposing regulations on them would have served no purpose. The "workers" needed for the "harvest" seem to require but one qualification: the Lord's generous, wholesale, indiscriminate care for his sheep.

MATTHEW 10 The disciples commissioned to service

Jesus had no problem with delegating authority. His ministry was augmented, not threatened, by the successes of his "student assistants." It looks like even Judas participated. He had every chance to make the right choices – what went wrong?

The message was initially offered to the people who had the “background” to receive it.

8 – It is only appropriate to share freely whatever we have been given. 9-10 – maintenance support seems to be ok, but that's all. 11- How do you find out who in a community is “worthy”? Sounds like whoever pays attention. We are instructed to offer blessing and peace: it just won't “take” if inappropriate. How long do you wait before “shaking off the dust?” I think there are times that we waited too long. I don't know about not-long-enough.

17f – Hostility is not an anomaly. Messengers of the Kingdom need to be watchful. It is a present imperative – a constant concern. Respond to it with faithfulness. The hostility of some leads to opportunity for others – even rulers, and Gentiles. The message will be provided as needed. We should not be surprised to receive the same abuse that Jesus did. But fleeing to another area may be prudent.

26 – Prudent – but not afraid. How long, Lord, till the hidden things will be revealed?

The “division” thing is hard. We've tried to raise the kids to choose ways of faithfulness. We give thanks when they do. But clearly, it doesn't always “work.” Where do we focus our attention?

The use of *psuche* in 28, and again in 39, bears attention. The primary meaning, in the Oxford lexicon, is “life.” There are occasions, as in Homer, where it is used in the sense of “departed spirits,” but a careful study of the New Testament uses turns up none of these. Another frequent reference is “the conscious self or personality,” which fits most of the NT usages, as does simply counting living individuals, as in the account of the shipwreck in Acts 27. I would commend this study to you, as one that would influence your understanding of many passages. This has induced me to use “self” or “individuality” for *psuche* in many places, as that concept fits well with other aspects of what Jesus is saying in these cases. Your study should include other words translated “life” – *zoe* and *bios* as well.

“Finding oneself” is not a modern concept. But the effort is still as destructive as it ever was.

It is significant that Jesus gives ample attention to the reward in store for those who have been kind to his messengers. I welcome this with delight, as so frequently (as did the first century followers) I have found greater kindness in people on the “outside” than in those who claim to know his ways.

This draws attention to another difference between Jesus' attitude and that of many who claim to represent him. Although he is warning the disciples of the perils they may face in their assignment, he repeats, in vv.19, 26, 28, and 31, his trademark, “**Don't be afraid!**” His own confidence grew out of the certain knowledge of who he was, and ours may as well. The assurance of the Father's care – and of course, ultimate triumph – provides a sense of worth that is not dependent on one's ego. It transcends both self-focus and the fear it engenders and replaces both with glorious identification with the purpose of all creation.

MATTHEW 11

John the Baptist

Sometimes I really identify with John. After all – he did his level best to be faithful – and look where it got him. I can't blame him for asking what was going on. I'd also like to know.

The only answer he gets, is a report on those who are being helped. Even that would be nice to know. It is important, however, to note the things Jesus mentions – the same ones he listed from Isaiah, in his “inaugural address” quoted in Luke 4. These are the evidence of the fact that he is indeed the “coming one.”

It's to the crowd, not to John or his messengers, that Jesus praises what John has done. And critiques those who refuse to listen. All this happens after John's messengers have left. Wouldn't this have been encouraging to John? Jesus tells the crowd that not only he, but John also, is the fulfillment of what had been prophesied. Yet is John not a participant in the Kingdom? This seems strange. He also does not explain in what way the Kingdom is suffering violence, unless 16-19 constitute that explanation.

The comparison of contemporary cities with the ancient Tyre and Sidon and Sodom, which were notorious for their willful ignorance of God's ways, is harsh. It is significant, though, that the reference to “judgment” uses the word *krisis* without a prefix. This requires us to read it as “discernment,” or “sorting-out”, rather than “condemnation.” It is important to make this distinction, as English readers have tended to assume that to judge is categorically to condemn. This is the source of much misunderstanding. Either positive or negative prefixes may be used with this root word – in which case, the outcome of the “judging” is clear. However when no prefix is used, the reference is simply to *evaluation* or discernment, and not to the outcome or decision.

25-27 – To what is this a “response”? That is not clear. The quote morphs from a prayer addressed to the Father, into a statement to the listeners. Clearly, the “program” of the Kingdom is not accessible to “figuring out.” It depends entirely

upon revelation. And it is entirely dependent upon Jesus. Maybe he is just encouraging us to “hang around” and learn his ways by living them. Of course that resurrects the old problem: where to find a group, a Body, in which to do that?

The transition to the invitation to rest and refreshment, where all labor together in a well-fitted yoke, seems oddly placed. But maybe not. John is discouraged. People are tired of waiting. “Exhausted and burdened” is a pretty good description of our world. I was surprised to discover that the word in v.28, translated “rest” in traditional translations (“give you rest”), is not a noun, but a future active verb! The “you” is a direct object – accusative case – not a dative, which would be needed if it referred to the recipient of a gift. This evokes the image of our Old Order neighbors plowing their fields with a team of horses. After a few rows of the heavy work, they would “rest” the team before going on. This was not a cessation of the work, but a pause to re-charge before returning to the task at hand! Such an image blends well with the following references to “my yoke”. When a draft animal was being trained to a yoke, it was paired with one already trained. The lead animal had to be “gentle”, in order to teach. It is significant that Jesus specifically rejects the status game. Neither creatures nor people can work well together if they are striving for dominance. Both yoke and burden must be perfectly fitted and tailored to the capability of the animals. Refreshment is found, not in lack of work, but in work and equipment, leadership and partnership, perfectly suited to the workers. A major difference between faithfulness and “standard Christianity” is whether one reads the whole paragraph together, or simply touts v.28 as the “sitting on a cloud doing nothing” sort of “rest”! (Thanks to my brother-in-law, Bob Martin, for correcting and enhancing those memories of our neighbors!)

MATTHEW 12 The Sabbath – the “Sacred” bread – the “Sanctuary”

Jesus does not display a sanctimonious attitude toward any of these. It is *people* that are important in his Kingdom.

Verse 6 – Without a noun or pronoun subject for *meizon*, which needs to go with *ton hieron*, “the temple”, as a comparison, Jesus could be referring either to himself (“someone greater”) or to the new kingdom order (“something greater”) that he is establishing. In either case, the point, illustrated by the healing incident that follows (9-14), is that it is ministering to the needs of people, rather than the old obsession with rules, “holy” places, rituals, etc., that matters. The hierarchy, obviously, got the message loud and clear since their immediate response was to plot to destroy Jesus. And yet today, the hierarchy of what purports to be his church still plots to destroy anyone who challenges their established patterns, which they control with an iron fist. Jesus simply left them to their own devices, and continued with his healing work.

18-22 – The juxtaposition of “judgment” with “hope” (trust) for the nations (Gentiles) is intriguing. Another of many places where, contrary to the teaching of the hierarchy, Jesus presents judgment in a very positive light. For those who follow him, its result is hope, not destruction.

22-33 – Those exercising control have a sick need to attribute to the evil one any activity or message that challenges their domination. But Jesus is not intimidated. He minces no words about the seriousness of refusing to acknowledge the Holy Spirit, or attributing his work to evil spirits. Discernment is needed, to be sure: but those who lightly attribute the unfamiliar to the evil would do well to take heed.

38-42 – Jesus then proceeds to relate historical events to their expressed attitudes, and the results. Associating his own death and resurrection with Jonah, he identifies his critics not with the ancestors of whom they are so proud, but with the hated outsiders, citizens of Ninevah. He consistently welcomes the “outsider” who proves more faithful than those who “ought to know better.” It is not the status or wealth of the “queen of the south” (presumably Sheba) that is highlighted, but her eagerness to **learn** from the wisdom with which God had endowed Solomon. Here again, judgment is the revelation of who's on which side – not the meting out of retribution.

43-45 – An admonition that even a person whose life has been cleansed is not out of danger unless he has filled that new life with helpful “stuff”. A “vacancy” **will** be filled with something. This is a serious challenge to those who are eager to “make converts” or “save souls.” Are those rescued or “saved” people going to end up in better or worse condition?

46-50 – Jesus identifies his “family” as those who **DO** the will of the Father. He says nothing at all about intellectual assent to any propositions, even if those are true. He only highlights **behavior**. How did this get so thoroughly lost from “Christian teaching/”doctrine”?

MATTHEW 13

The discussion about parables seems to contradict much of Jesus' apparent eagerness to **reveal** to people the principles of the Kingdom – until you get to v.15, and discover the active voice verbs. Their hearts *were dulled* (passive) because they *did not listen* (active) with their ears, and *they closed* (also active) their eyes; in both cases a deliberate (aorist) choice. In contrast, the disciples are spoken of in the *present active* -- “your eyes *are looking*” and your ears *are listening*”. It is the

present active of continually *paying attention* that renders one “blessed” or “privileged.”

Most discussions of the parable of the sower focus on how the “seed” of the word is received. Little attention is paid to the preparation of the soil. I guess this is due to the lack of agricultural background of many of those who do the pontificating. It is certainly true that in the scattering of seed, not all of it will land where it should. But a prudent farmer wastes as little as possible. Effort spent in picking rocks out of the field, in breaking up the hard ground, and clearing the undergrowth, is not wasted – and will give a greatly improved yield. The more common interpretation, which tends to “blame the victim”, leads to arrogance on the part of those who “sow the word”. Jesus carefully prepared the soil into which he sowed.

24-30 – In this instance, however, it is not our job to pull weeds. How many times has good grain been lost to the Kingdom by overzealous weeding? Notice, this is **after** the seed has begun to grow. It says nothing about the preparation of the ground.

31-32 – Does our identification with the Kingdom result in the provision of shelter for others? Here, even wild creatures find protection when seed grows as it should.

36-43 – The sorting-out will occur in God's own time – even then, it is not our job. The definition of the weeds is significant: much has been made of the botanical identification of the weeds. Except for the point that they look very much like real wheat, that is not terribly important. **Jesus'** definition of “weeds” is much more so: “all who cause others to fall” and “all who do (practice) lawlessness”. These he will eliminate from the harvest.

44-45-- The Kingdom is worth any price. Notice that the person takes his action with total delight! This is no sanctimonious, long-faced “sacrifice”! It is a joyful exchange.

47-50 – Once again, the sorting is not our job. It happens “at the completion of the age”.

51-58 -- The folks at Nazareth lost out because they could not accept the Word from a person they considered to be an “ordinary” member of the community. People really haven't changed much. Except now, you don't even have to be in your hometown to be ignored – just unconnected with the resident hierarchy-in-charge, or their masters.

MATTHEW 14

John's martyrdom was the result of getting crosswise of people with power, by challenging their right to do as they pleased. But Herod the tyrant shows himself also a victim of his position, since he needed to save face by following through on an offer he should never have made. Powerful people are powerless to utter three words: “I was wrong.” And inevitably, destruction results. Sometimes – maybe often – maybe even usually – innocent people get caught up in that destruction. John's disciples did the only thing left to do – they buried the body, and then went to tell Jesus.

13-21 – Matthew connects this with Jesus' withdrawing for a time of solitude. Some of the other writers attribute the withdrawal to the hectic press of the crowds who were following him as they had followed John earlier. Regardless, they continued to follow. Perhaps they too had heard of John's execution, and needed encouragement or comfort. We aren't told. But Jesus pitied them.

The disciples were practical: “These guys need a dinner break – send them down to McDonalds!” The miraculous provision may have been as much an emotional, psycho-social provision as a physical one, if the assembly was occasioned by the trauma of the loss of John. How rarely is this the case any more. The provision of even light refreshments to enable folks to share their grief, or their spiritual search – such a small gesture, but so nurturing to the wounded spirit – has been displaced by the catered meal (at a fee, of course). Seldom is a group “fed” for no other reason than that somebody cares.

22-33 – This is the first place where Matthew records one of Jesus' “I AM” statements – accompanied, as usual, by his admonition not to be afraid. Afraid of what? the storm? These guys knew the sea, boats, and storms. Some things can be handled, with the wisdom of experience – some are totally beyond control – and this appears to have been one of the latter. Or were they afraid of seeing a “ghost”? Jesus' words, his familiar voice, would reassure. But the storm was still blowing when Peter got the bright idea to see if it was really Jesus. (Notice: it was Peter's idea – not Jesus'.) Peter was a fisherman. He knew the situation. Where did he get the nerve to make such a request? Or to follow up on the invitation? You just don't **DO** things like getting out of your boat in the middle of a lake – even without a storm going on. Was he beginning to catch the faintest glimpse of what Jesus was truly saying, in using that forbidden phrase?

Jesus' response to Peter's failure to “make it” is also instructive – extremely so. Volumes are written and preached about the observation that Peter did not start to sink until he focused on the storm instead of Jesus. But what is missed, is that **no disaster resulted!** Both verbs – *ephobeisthe* and *edistasos* – are in the aorist tense – a “snapshot” event, not a description of his attitude. The picture I get is a momentary “Oh my gosh, what am I doing here?” when we are told that he “was

frightened” (passive), and Jesus’ “Why did you hesitate?” (a better translation than “doubt”) is sort of “You *almost* made it!” After all, Peter immediately called out to Jesus, who wasted no time in grabbing him and helping him to safety. It was **after** they were both safely in the boat that the wind quit.

The response of the other disciples, “You really are the Son of God” flashed back to his original *ego eimi* greeting. This, remember, was God’s burning-bush statement. As in most languages that conjugate verbs by person and number (which English does not), the pronoun is grammatically unnecessary, and used only for emphasis. But because of its ancient context (the LXX was the Bible they usually used in the first century) that particular statement was culturally forbidden to mere people. Jesus’ continual use of it infuriated the powerful “religious-types”, because they knew it was a very deliberate announcement of his identity.

34-36 This acknowledgment is then immediately vindicated by the healings that followed upon their arrival ashore.

MATTHEW 15

Interesting contrast: nitpicking over violations of “tradition”, while “tradition” provides loopholes for ignoring the very clear instructions of God. How many other situations fit that pattern? Perhaps any, in which the focus is distilled into a “Doctrine of...”. What will it take to get people to recognize that such “worship” is an exercise in futility?

And such a statement is always offensive to those who derive their power over others from highly defined ceremonies (“sacraments”) and traditions (“creeds”). Both are diametrically opposed to the life Jesus lived and taught, where “holiness” is defined by behavior that actually benefits someone else.

Jesus is not tentative in his denunciation of such attitudes: “You all take away the authority of the Word of God because of your traditions!” (6). This is an accurate description of all such theologizing. A serious charge.

12- “The Pharisees were upset”. surprise, surprise. Did anyone really expect that this information would make Jesus back down? Neither did it precipitate a big argument. He simply shrugs them off – 14 – “Let them go!” These men have made a choice to prefer their own power to the power of God. They will not ultimately prevail.

15-20 – The heart is revealed by behavior, not by meticulous observance of regulations.

21-28 – This encounter is very puzzling. It does not sound like Jesus. Indeed, he has already ministered mercy to “outsiders.” One observation is that as a Canaanite, the woman had no automatic “in” with a “son of David”. Was she initially trying to use a “formula” that had “worked” for others? That would connect somewhat with the theme of rejecting rote traditions. But v.24 is still problematic. More light needed on this. However, the woman’s plea changes, as she accepts the role of “dogs”. This still does not sound like Jesus. It seems out of character.

29-31 – The healings seem indiscriminate here. Surely there were outsiders in this crowd as well. In any case, the result was that the people “glorified God.”

32-38 – Another crowd-feeding. This is not the first time. Had the disciples forgotten what happened before? Interestingly, there was more left over than they started with, as the other time.

MATTHEW 16

The officials were looking for a “sign”. What would they have considered that to be? Were not the many miraculous manifestations a “sign from heaven” to anyone who cared to look? Or are they demanding “fireworks upon request” like some ostentatious folks today? Is such obsession with glitz and glamor an element of “the yeast of the Pharisees”?

5-11 – There is probably some significance to the quantities of leftovers mentioned – I have heard several complicated explanations, but none are plausible. He may just be reminding them that there is no dearth of provision for physical needs.

13-20 – Interestingly, this conversation regarding Jesus’ reputation and actual identity does **not** include his signature *ego eimi* statement, but uses the infinitive indirect discourse form. He leaves the discernment totally to the disciples – to the revelation from the “Father in heaven”.

I suspect the phrasing of the response to Peter is deliberately ambiguous. The change in the form of *petros* (a masculine form) to *taute te petre* (feminine) suggests that it is not Peter himself that is intended. But what **is** intended? There is no feminine noun nearby, except *ekklesia*, “church”. I would be inclined to agree with those who suggest that it refers to the confession itself, even though there is no noun to that effect, since a feminine form certainly cannot refer to a man. However, uncharacteristically, the second person pronouns and verbs in v.19 are singular, not plural as is usually the case. Clearly, *autes* refers to *ekklesian*. It is the church – the assembly of his called-out people – that will not be defeated by “the gates of hades.” This probably is connected to his subsequent teaching about his own death and resurrection (which

Hebrews 2:14-15 connects to **the total destruction of the power of death**, and not to any esoteric “sacrificial” implication.)

Peter misses this message, very humanly reacting that such a fate (he doesn't get the “resurrection” part) must not be inflicted on the One he has just identified with the Eternal God! It seems a bit extreme for Jesus to identify his concern with Satan, until one realizes that this is a repeat of the original temptation, to bypass the “hard part” and obtain the crown without the cross. Jesus is saying that death, the ultimate enemy, can only be destroyed by his facing it, **and coming out triumphant on the other side!** Which he did.

The long view – that is what is so hard for our limited human understanding. And it gets confusing. I believe I want to get “lost” in the work of the Kingdom, and get frustrated at being denied the privilege. I don't think I am fishing for recognition, but how can one “lose” oneself in the work, if not even allowed to become involved? I think the message is to refuse to cut corners, but I really need clearer instructions or help to understand. Oh, Lord, please come and sort things out!

MATTHEW 17

I have not heard a clear discernment as to whether 16:28 belongs at the end of the previous discourse or at the beginning of this one. I reject the theory that Jesus was mistaken about the coming of the End Time. But was he referring to the Transfiguration experience? Or to Pentecost? Or to the church as the Kingdom? Or, later, when he said that those who follow him will not “taste” death, was the emphasis rather on the “some” (i.e., not all) who were there that would be among the faithful? It seems to me that anyone who pontificates about one single interpretation has not carefully considered all the possibilities.

Luke (9:28-36) says that the conversation with Moses and Elias (Elijah) dealt with Jesus' coming ordeal in Jerusalem. Matthew is not specific. Is Peter's suggestion of building “tents” a desire to make permanent the “holiness” of the site of such an encounter? Clearly that was not the purpose of the experience, as evidenced by the voice out of “the bright cloud” -- presumably indicating the presence of God in Old Testament style – saying, “Listen to him!” Is “shut up!” an implied prefix to that imperative?

The three disciples are scared witless at the encounter; probably correctly interpreting it as a rebuke. But Jesus responds in characteristic fashion: “Don't be afraid!” **Correction is not condemnation!** If only the contemporary church could realize that! In fact, correction is the very antithesis of condemnation, since, if heeded, it can prevent such a dire outcome! Churches have become so sensitized to the charge of being “judgmental” (which is improperly equated with “condemnatory”) that they have copped out of the responsibility to point out needed corrective measures. This courts disaster.

9-13 -- It is not yet time for the announcement to be made publicly. “Elijah” -- the role of John the Baptist – was not generally recognized, even as Jesus has not been. And they still don't “get” the part about the resurrection.

14-21 – The other disciples had been trying to follow instructions, but it wasn't “working”. Jesus must have been frustrated, thinking, “And I have to leave the whole program in the hands of these guys?!” But clearly, my own trust/faithfulness is also just as deficient, as is that of virtually everyone I know, if healings/deliverance is the criterion. But how to increase it, having no faithful body from which to learn?

22-23 – Again, Jesus comes back to his impending death and resurrection. **He has never mentioned the death without the resurrection!** Another place where churches have failed to discern or follow his pattern.

24-27 – This was the temple tax, which is why he truly did not owe it. But it was not the place he chose to make an issue. Other battles were more pressing.

The provision is odd and unusual, even for him.

MATTHEW 18 Interpersonal Relationships in the Kingdom

This entire chapter is devoted to trying once again to make the point that **there is no room for status positions of any kind in the Kingdom.** Not only does Jesus refuse to designate anyone as “the greatest”, but he dismisses the whole question as an unfaithful preoccupation.

Children trust – unless they have been so abused that they cannot. Status centers on the self. Jesus corrects the focus, to center on the “little ones”, who are to be nurtured, not alienated or caused to fall. **Anything** that detracts from focus on the Kingdom is to be cast away. (10) **No one** is to be scorned or devalued. How very different congregations would be, were this to become common practice! Notice (3-4) he does not say the child **is** the greatest. He says that the **trust** of a child is to be the model for attitudes in the Kingdom, and the treatment of children is the test of faithfulness. I strongly suspect this

refers both to actual children, and to young, immature adherents to the Kingdom. 12-14 seems to be a confirmation of this.

15-18 – Instructions for addressing error. Never is the person violated or disparaged. Even if, unrepentant, he is relegated to the position of a “Gentile or a tax-collector,” one must remember how Jesus treated people in those categories. It's **not** the modern, “Oh, that's ok, it doesn't matter what you do.” It **does** matter. The unrepentant individual is no longer to be considered a brother. But every effort, in kindness, must be made to win him back. The judgment (18) is to be that of the corporate body – the “you's” are **plural**, not singular. V.15 refers to private efforts, but when those fail, the group is the arbiter.

19 – This too is plural. It is not a random insertion, but an integral part of the brotherhood process. In this case, it probably refers to asking for wisdom in the above situation. The tenses in v.18 support this interpretation. The perfect passive of *dedemena* and *lelumena* combined with the future tenses of *desete* and *lusate* really can't come out any other way. The Body needs to pray for discernment as to **what has already been “bound” or “set free” in heaven**, in order to know what should be done in a specific situation. **It is not a blank check!** And it is not the job of some hierarchical official.

21-35 – Interestingly, this passage is dealing with **debt**, not “**sin**”. Peter's original question uses *hamartia*, “failure to hit a mark” -- often translated incorrectly as “sin” which, if used at all, should be confined to *paraptoma*, “deliberate transgression.” Jesus, however, in the accompanying parable, changes the words altogether, to *opheiles* which clearly refers to financial debt, and continues that usage throughout. Why is this so universally ignored? In other places, Jesus deals with personal offenses, but this is not one of them.

An interesting observation was made in a sermon, that the “standard” for forgiveness came from the prophecies of Amos, which repeated “For the three transgressions of --- and for the four”, in which case Peter would have assumed that he was being very generous, in adding them together!

MATTHEW 19

1-10 -- Discussion of divorce, celibacy – does this also apply to other gender questions? Or is it a wider question about “the Law”? It looks like an affirmation that Kingdom standards are much higher than those of the law, since those have been adapted “because of your hard hearts.” One thing is clear: uniformity is not expected: faithfulness is. Other deviations are not mentioned, although they were very common in classical Greek culture.

13-15 – The status problem again. Children were assumed not to be worth the attention of “important” people. And that is exactly the type of people who comprise the Kingdom.

16-22 – Having just placed the Kingdom above the law, Jesus now tells an inquirer to observe the commandments. Knowing the young man's emptiness, is he just still trying to make the point that the Law just doesn't cut it? Bondage to the law is really no different from bondage to possessions. The word change is interesting. The man's query was how “to have eternal life”. Jesus' reply is “If you want to be complete (*teleios*) – some translators say “perfect” -- it can also mean “finished.” Perhaps all of these help to define “eternal life”, especially since the final instruction is, “Come along and follow me.” That's really what it's all about.

I don't know if there is any truth to the speculation that this fellow may have been Joseph of Arimathea, who was there, with Nicodemus, at the cross. But I don't see how anyone can be adamant one way or another. And I am convinced that “hanging out” with Jesus is all there needs to be for “eternal life,” whatever else it may entail.

23-30 – Why, then, does Jesus say it is “very difficult” for the “rich” -- and who are the “rich”? The disciples are obviously confused, because culturally, wealth was equated with “blessing” much as it is in the “blessing cults” of our era. It is also clear that it's just as easy to be selfish with a little, as it is with more resources. Been there, done that. So I don't think he's referring only to the quantity of assets a person has. When our bank account was down to 13 cents that time in North Dakota, I was not generous. I was scared. And much more focused on finances (or lack thereof) than I was when our situation was more comfortable. But I have not forgotten that time and hopefully, learned from it. The part about having “left houses, family, fields” would be impossible if people did not have them in the first place. So perhaps the question, as often before, is one of attitude. Some writer has spoken of “holding lightly” all one possesses, considering it all expendable for the sake of the Kingdom. There is a “feel” of truth there. Resources can enable service, and generosity. People with means, indeed, supported Jesus' own activity. It makes an enormous difference what a person **does** with any available resources. This is another of many places where, I believe, the counsel of a faithful brotherhood is essential to discerning ways of faithfulness. And I guess I am more hung-up on that part than on the resource thing. After many years of being able to give away only limited amounts, it was such fun to be able to write checks to causes that seemed to be Kingdom-work, with Uncle John's bequest.

But how many times have we left property – not to mention alienation from family – because we thought it was a step of faithfulness? And yes, we've always had a place to live – but what about the people part? Where, dear Lord, where are the parents, brothers, sisters, children, that are supposed to be part of participation in the Kingdom?

I guess everyone interprets the “first/last” part to their own advantage – but what did Jesus **mean**?

MATTHEW 20

1-15 – Critiques of the vineyard-owner's generosity virtually always overlook the fact that the folks hired last had been looking for work all day. And a denarius for a day's labor was a survival wage – not luxury. The late-comers had spent the day wondering if their families would eat at all that night! Far more stressful than being gainfully employed!

These commentators also display a lack of understanding of agricultural life. When a harvest needs to be gotten in, time can be critical. The owner could have been recruiting all day because the harvest might spoil – by being overripe, or perhaps threatening weather – if it was not finished. The final push to finish by the end of the day may have made the work of the later recruits more necessary, and therefore valuable. We do not know -- .

17-19 – Another warning of what was ahead – and, again, with the promise of resurrection.

20-28 – A blatant grab for status (get Mom to ask!) precipitates yet another, even more explicit statement that **the Kingdom is not organized like the rest of the world**. Jesus' rejection of the ways of the world systems was not because he was ignorant of how they worked. He knew – very well – but emphasized that in the Kingdom there is a different standard. Service – even the tasks usually assigned to a slave – is the ultimate “greatness”. Reminiscent of Sarah Leatherman's response when I complained that the 7th Street church people wanted nothing to do with us unless they needed something -- “Take it as a compliment!” she quipped. “That's how they treat God!”

28 – Jesus' own assessment of why he came: to serve (minister to needs), and to become a ransom (secure the release of captives).

29-34 – The inclusion of this vignette seems at first like an afterthought, unconnected with what has gone before – even an interruption. But it is a practical illustration of the point Jesus has just been making. He has been trying to explain the counter-cultural attitudes needed in the Kingdom. He is trying to prepare them for the trauma that is coming, with the hope of the resurrection. These are really BIG issues.

Even at such a time, Jesus has pity – actively – on two blind beggars. “The crowd” had tried to shut them up. More important things were going on. But Jesus stopped, and addressed their concern. A demonstration of Kingdom values.

Notable is the comment, almost off-hand -- “They looked up” -- often a phrase indicating that their sight was restored -- “and followed him.” Is not that what happens any time a person really “sees” who Jesus is, and what he does? And that really only happens when normal cultural expectations are set aside for some expression of his mercy. If people do not follow him, is it perhaps because they have been told by the crowd to shut up, and no one has violated custom sufficiently to meet their need?

MATTHEW 21

1-10 – Clearly, this event conformed sufficiently to the anticipated prophetic symbolism that people recognized it as an announcement. But from there, they jumped to their own conclusions/expectations. John is the only one to identify the “branches” as palms, which would have made even more of a political statement (since they were considered symbols of freedom). But the enactment of Zechariah's prophecy (14:4) was enough to get things thoroughly stirred-up.

12-17 – The indignant “cleansing” of the temple area would almost seem to play into their expectations. A ground-swell appeared to be building, causing consternation among the powerful, who had made handsome profits from the oppressive system. The system had no room for any deliverance from financial abuses, healings, or the exuberant praises of children, all of which fit very well with Jesus' announcement of the purpose of his Kingdom in Luke 4. Here, he simply allows his behavior to speak for itself – no explanations of theologizing -- and goes home to bed.

18-20 – The “fig tree” thing never made sense to me until we had one. Jesus seemed to be acting capriciously – almost “in a snit”. And that does not seem like Jesus. But a fig tree buds out little figs **before** any leaves appear in the spring. So if this one had leaves, but no sign of fruit, it was a barren tree. Some folks make a big deal out of a fig tree being a “symbol” of Israel – but interestingly, they completely ignore passages like this one, where its failure to bear fruit is condemned (see also Luke 13:6 f)

21-22 – Another puzzle, to which I do not pretend to have an answer. Part of the understanding we lack, I'm sure, lies in the

fact that it is addressed in the plural: it is not intended as a “magic show” for the aggrandizement of an individual. Is this yet another place where we lose out because we do not allow ourselves to be formed into a Body?

23-27 – The bigwigs challenge Jesus' authority. He declines to give a direct answer, although he more or less identifies the source of John's validity with his own. The hedging on the part of the rulers is a clear indication that they are playing politics, not seeking for the truth.

28-32 -- The parable makes the previous point abundantly clear. What you **say** is irrelevant. **Action** reveals one's loyalty. And the political-types don't see what's right in front of them.

33-41 – A vineyard is another traditional symbol of the people of God. The rulers took great pride in being its designated keepers. Yet they have consistently ignored the Owner's messengers – and are about to kill his Son. (See Isaiah 5:1-7, Jeremiah 12:10-14, and other references in the prophets)

42-44 – Jesus finally becomes extremely explicit: the vineyard will be taken away from its abusers, and given to a nation (*ethnei* – same word as used for “gentiles”) ---that will render its fruit to the Owner.

45-46 – The rulers are understandably irate – I suspect they were sufficiently familiar with the prophecies that they could not refute the statement on Biblical grounds, so their only recourse was to kill the messenger.

MATTHEW 22

There really is no break in the thought here. Jesus continues to expound about the Kingdom.

1-14 – For the fourth time, he runs the same theme by again: those originally invited to the party were too busy about their own affairs to bother to come; some were even overtly hostile to the bearers of the invitation. So the doors are thrown open for anyone who comes, and the arrogant abusers are destroyed. But what of the guy who had not dressed for the occasion? Some say that “robes” were traditionally provided by the host. If this is true, then the offender had refused the gracious provision. I hope it is, because the penalty seems extreme if the poor guy simply had no appropriate attire.

15-22 – The question of Caesar's tax. What “belongs” to whom? The owner's “image” identifies his belongings. With all the fuss made about “the image of God”, why is that never brought into the discussion of this passage? Whether the “image of God” refers to the individual or the species (Please see a fuller discussion in *Citizens of the Kingdom* chapter 2), neither is ultimately the property of the state or its ruler. Accordingly, both individual and species are subject to the command of the Owner, and not a regent. There needs to be more attention given to “what belongs to God,” rather than “what belongs to Caesar.”

23-32 -- “Theologians”, who prefer theorizing about God to actually living for him, are still hung up on what happens after death. Jesus is concerned about the faithfulness of the **living** to God. **Everything about God is present tense.** Getting hung up on either the past or the future is to ignore “the Scriptures and the power of God.” It is enough to belong to him. That **present** condition redeems the past, and assures whatever future may be in store. Obsessing about the details of either constitutes unfaithfulness.

34-40 – Ever the politicians, the Pharisees are energized by their opponents being stymied. I wonder what the lawyer wanted/expected? These Old Testament (Dt.6:5 and Lv.19:18) quotations represent two of the rare instances where the second person singular is used. Probably it is necessary there because it is the condition of entry into the Kingdom/Body, which of course has to be an individual commitment. Do we realize that this “whole-self” love of God and neighbor really does summarize, and define, any and all other regulations? *Krematai* refers to an article “hung up” in the temple as a votive offering, or something wholly devoted to a person or purpose, or to “hanging up” one's shield when a war is over.

41-46 – Is Jesus just trying to confuse them in their own games/arguments? Perhaps; but there is something more profound here as well. The Jewish tradition was waiting for the restoration of the kingdom of David. (Many still are.) Jesus makes the point that the Kingdom he is offering is far beyond that – and that even David, whom they so highly revere, recognized in some sense that one much greater was promised. It is said that these words were used in coronation ceremonies when Israel was a kingdom; so the promise was often repeated – but never realized, because of unfaithfulness. Much more detail is available in the letter to the Hebrews.

MATTHEW 23

1-7 – Even hypocritical officials, when they give proper instructions, apparently are to be given basic respect. They are not, however, to be accepted as examples of appropriate behavior, nor accorded the adulation they seek. This launches another strict warning against the seeking or assumption of **any kind** of status among the followers of Jesus.

8-11 – They are flatly forbidden **any** honorific titles: specifically, “Rabbi” (“teacher” -- or perhaps “reverend?”); “Father” (why do so many “priests” ignore this prohibition?); and “leader” (while churches promote “leadership training”, etc.) **Serving** is the **only** permanent assignment. (**Not** “servant-leadership”!!!) One could observe that the desire for position “dies hard” -- but the tragedy is that people are not even convinced that it needs to die at all! (Please refer to chapter 8 of *Citizens of the Kingdom* for a fuller discussion of leadership.)

13-32 – Lots of picky details are the delight of people who seek a following for themselves. With minute detail required, of course an interpreter will always be needed – sort of like the US tax code! (23) Justice, mercy, and faithfulness get lost amid the mass of regulations. External appearances obscure genuine faithfulness. The repeated word “hypocrites” can be treated as either a noun or an adjective. An adjectival use would carry the flavor of “the hypocritical ones among the scribes and Pharisees”, allowing for the existence of a few honest ones!

33-39 – Even Jesus is frustrated with the blindness of those who were intended to be preparing people for his coming. Now the time is approaching when it will be too late. 37 will always evoke the image of Dave's banty hen, Snow White, killed by the neighbors' dog. We found her with the bodies of her chicks huddled under her wings. She tried!

MATTHEW 24

1-3 – The temple complex is no longer serving its intended purpose, so will not be preserved. All the expensive adornments mean nothing.

4-28 – This portion appears to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD. Wars, persecutions, the desecration of “holy places” all took place at that time, and have also many times both before and since. The message to the faithful is still (v.6) “Don't panic!” The ones who persevere in faithfulness will be rescued (kept safe) through it all. (He doesn't say physically) 25-27 Jesus has warned about many hazards and deceptions. Don't believe **anyone** who pretends to have a secret formula. It will be unmistakably obvious when he comes.

29-31 – The scene seems to shift here. *Eutheos* is used in many different contexts both temporal (“immediately”) and adverbial (“suddenly”). I don't know which this is.

32-44 – People get fixated on some specific portion of these “signs”, and miss the message that, for people who are not anticipating his coming, everything is going along in a very normal fashion. The true message is in v.42, “Be watchful, because you **don't** know.”

45-51 -- Keep faithfully following instructions. That's all the preparation the loyal ones need. Abusing people from positions of responsibility is never acceptable, and will not go unpunished.

MATTHEW 25

More teaching about the Kingdom

1-13 – The point here is being prepared for a possible delay. It follows the admonitions that we cannot know the time of the Lord's coming. The refusal to share oil supplies is a bit of a puzzle. The girls who do not share their surplus are not criticized. Why not? It obviously is not the point of the story. Responsibility is. Perhaps we are to learn that there is no virtue in “faith” that leads one to act irresponsibly? “The Lord will provide” has been used frequently as an excuse for irresponsibility. Those who do so are not “trusting the Lord,” but shifting their responsibility to the shoulders of others. **Jesus never encouraged anyone to be a parasite.** Organizations that require it are badly mistaken.

14-30 – That understanding would fit well with this parable immediately following. A “talent” was a huge fortune. It refers to a weight, or to the monetary equivalent of the weight in gold or silver. The exact value varied in different systems. One source gave the weight at 50 to 80 pounds. Not an insignificant trust.

This is an admonition to make careful use of resources entrusted to us. They are not ours. The amount of the return on the investment – actually, in this account, the first two servants both doubled the amount entrusted to them – does not appear to influence the commendation. (Luke's account – 19:12-27 – differs slightly). But in both cases, only failure to use the resource is penalized.

31-46 – The sheep and goats. Notice who this is. “The nations” – *ethnoi* – is the same word as that used for “Gentiles.” These are people who have not had the centuries of preparation afforded to those who congratulate themselves as being “chosen.” And yet, Jesus invites them into “the Kingdom prepared **for you** since the foundation of the universe”! Far too often, this story has been used as a weapon in the “faith vs. works” warfare, and no attention paid to the intended inclusion of “outsiders” **from the very beginning.** Patriarchs and prophets were all charged with the blessing of the world – but few really latched on to it.

It is also significant that in neither the commendation nor the condemnation does Jesus say a single word about what these

people “believed,” or failed to “believe.” Neither does he allude to “forgiveness” or “sins”. There is only one criterion: **behavior**. Although in their response, both groups addressed him as “Lord,”(the word is a common form of polite address, like “sir”), neither had any idea that it was he to whom they had offered (or failed to offer) merciful service. The service is very basic: food, clothing, shelter, water, hospitality, care for the sick or imprisoned. Nothing showy or spectacular here. And he speaks, to the faithful, of having offered it to his brothers. That is the title he gives to his followers.

This gives me great hope for the folks, and they are many, who have shown us kindness, but whom I have been unable to find a way to introduce to him. Jesus has taken note of their kindness. Indeed, we must encourage all such service, for the sake of any person willing to offer it! Strange, that this has never been included in anyone's official definition of “evangelism”!

It is also instructive, that those who offered no service, did not ignore obvious need – they never even saw it! Lord, open our eyes.

And their fate was not prepared for people at all – but for “the devil and his messengers.”

MATTHEW 26

Another warning of the impending execution. This is the first time it has not been accompanied by a reference to the resurrection. I wonder why? Does it have anything to do with the mention of the Passover?

3-5 --- The plots are being made by the very people who should have been the first to welcome him! “Not during the feast” -- Several historical accounts note that the Passover was a prime time for rebellious activity, and Roman security was high at those times. Since it was a **festival of deliverance** (from Egypt), it was a natural venue for “patriots” bent on throwing off the domination of Rome. This is corroborated by the comment of the governor when Paul was captured (Acts 21:38). Trouble was expected at Passover.

6-12 – the woman with the jar of myrrh. Matthew does not identify her. He sets the scene at the home of “Simon the leper”, as does Mark (14:3-9). Luke places it much earlier(7:36-50), and identifies “Simon” as a Pharisee, and the woman as being of ill repute. John (12:1-8) transfers it to the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, and names Mary as the woman. Is this a single incident, or several? Perhaps it does not matter. The point is, Jesus graciously accepted the act of honor, offered lovingly, in the spirit in which it was given. There are times when “practical” is not the best choice.

14-16 – Judas could not handle this. Was it this incident that pushed him over the edge? Everybody tries to get inside Judas' head/heart, but nobody can. The bigger need is to make sure our own lack of understanding of Jesus' ways does not push us likewise into thoughtless betrayal.

17-25 – Jesus' identification of the betrayer seems so clear, from our perspective. Why didn't the others jump Judas and prevent his treachery?

26-30 – Even though he has just been identified as a traitor, Judas is still present in the group. How, then, can people insist that this remembrance be restricted to the participation of those they have deemed to be “faithful”? What a contradiction! And how can they make a magical, “sacred” ceremony out of a simple, symbolic act – part, and yet not part, of the familiar Passover celebration? Hebrews defines “covenant” in terms of a will (9:15-18), which takes effect only after a person's death. It would be interesting, if one could do so reliably, to find out the details of a first-century Passover observance, and assess how this departed, if at all, from custom. Sadly, I distrust most writings on the subject, as they so obviously are geared toward proving some obscure point. I really believe Jesus had no intention of creating a “ceremony” -- please refer to chapter 12 of *Citizens of the Kingdom* for a more complete discussion of the topic.

31-35 – Jesus foretells not only Peter's denial, but the scattering of all the rest. Why do people pick on Peter? Again, a reunion is promised. All profess loyalty, even in the face of death – but Jesus knows better.

36-46 – Even Jesus needed the support of brethren – and didn't get it. He recognizes their human frailty (41), but this is not mentioned as an excuse, but as an admonition to watchful prayer. How has it become a standard cop-out?

47-56 – Much is made of the “betrayal with a kiss”, ignoring the fact that this is the standard greeting in many Mediterranean and Eastern cultures yet today. It is accompanied by an expression wishing the person “peace,” and that is the greater issue. Might the violent reaction be an attempted compensation for having psychologically/spiritually deserted him in the Garden? It would also be interesting to explore the parallel between this garden scene and the one in Genesis. In both cases, people held their own perception of their self-interest of higher importance than their loyalty to God. One could carry that in multiple directions.

50 – *Hetaire* is used for “friend” only three times in the entire New Testament, all of them in Matthew. It is a generic sort of

word, deliberately avoiding "*philos*". Used also in 20:13 (the master to the complaining vineyard worker) and once referring to children's playmates (11:16). The departure is significant. Judas is greeted as an associate, no longer as a true friend.

52-53 – Jesus makes clear that he still has a choice – but has deliberately rejected violent defense – human or supernatural.

57-67 – the sham trial. This was contrary to both Roman and Jewish law. It was forbidden to take legal action in the middle of the night. In the search for false testimony, the priests had no success. Jesus' silence was a rebuke to the entire proceeding. He finally gives them what they want. They find the truth blasphemous.

This is not uncommon in churches that have become "corporations." No doubt they would apply the same label to much of this document. Truth – or Scripture – always rattles the cage of the powerful.

Meanwhile, Peter is a spectator. This time, by his own choice. (58)

67-75 – Matthew records three different people/groups recognizing Peter. Mark has the same servant-girl the first two times. Luke has three different people. John includes a relative of the man whose ear was cut off. Considering his outspoken nature and dominance in the group of disciples, Peter was probably easy to recognize. Peter was torn between his desire to be near, and to be "safely" separated. You can't have it both ways.

The rooster's call brought it all back. His bravado – Jesus' matter-of-fact statement – and the bravado crumpled. Perhaps we should all keep roosters.....?

MATTHEW 27

1-9 – The encounter between Judas (the pawn of the "establishment") and the Council is instructive. Their "official duty" would have been to recognize his remorse and lead him to make things right. Only problem was, his error was at their behest. Judas himself was just "collateral damage." This is the pattern when "religion" becomes institutionalized – the CEO's and such really don't care about individuals.

Of course, the Kingdom is not individualized either. Jesus talked about "losing oneself" in its interest. But his version of lost individuality is the **exaltation** of people as members of his family/Body. Theirs was /is the **crushing and discarding** of people who are no longer useful to their political ambitions.

But all the while, of course, they had to be careful in the disposition of "blood money", even though it had come from their own hands! Apparently, no one sees the irony.

11-31 – Pilate, too, was a pawn. The difference was, he knew it. A petty politician in an undesirable posting; he was smart enough to see through the Jewish hierarchy's ruse, but not gutsy enough to throw them out of court. Pilate's assignment was not to do justice, but only to maintain some semblance of order in a fractious provincial backwater. A riot undoubtedly would have cost him his job, if not his life. He was caught in a nasty bind: either cede his authority to these conniving underlings, or risk a riot and dismissal. The life of Jesus, whom he knew to be falsely accused, was worth less to him than his own. Life was cheap in the empire, even more blatantly so than it is today. No reason to risk personal disaster to save an itinerant preacher, even if innocent.

---I wonder what Pilate's wife had dreamed?

I would not be surprised if the mockery he obviously must have condoned was a reaction to Pilate's realization that he had abdicated his own authority.

14 – 23 Some MSS have "Jesus Barabbas". The Hebrew "Barabbas" would translate "son of the/a father". Both names could apply to both men, with very different implications. The one is designated as the leader of a rebellion, a thief, and a murderer. The other "came that (people) might **have life**." The system chose the former to release.

32-38 – Some say that the offering of (presumably) drugged wine was a gesture of mercy. I don't know. There is also no explanation of why Simon was forced to carry the cross: no basis in the record for the elaborate mythology of Jesus stumbling and being unable to do so exists in any of the gospel accounts.

38-44 – The triumphant mockery of the hierarchy is evidence that they thought they had won. They were too blind to see that this death would destroy the power of death!

46 – There is some sort of translation problem here. I don't have access to Aramaic, but the Greek *egkatelipes*, most commonly rendered "forsaken", has as its primary meaning listed in the Oxford (Liddell-Scott) lexicon, "to leave behind, as in a race," and only secondarily an alternative, "to abandon." Only Matthew and Mark include this quotation. (Bauer's lexicon adds, "allow to remain.") A lot more has been made of this statement than the text can substantiate. It could as

easily be read, “Can't I please come home now?” as the dire and dismal theological intricacies that have been spun out of Jesus' painful cry. If that is correct, then it was quickly answered in the affirmative, with the added exclamation point of the destruction of the temple veil! (See the treatment of the torn veil in *Citizens of the Kingdom*, chapter 8.) The earthquake, the opened graves, and resurrected faithful people testify that this was no case of abandonment!

57-59 – Joseph buries the body in his personal tomb. This is a disciple of whom we have not heard, unless the speculation is true that he is the “rich young man” mentioned earlier. But he shows himself to be a courageous and faithful follower. It had to be risky, to approach Pilate with such a request!

62-66 – The Jewish rulers are still nervous, and seal everything up tight – how pitiful! -- against the power of God!

MATTHEW 28

1-- Curious who was the “other Mary” -- his mother? Or one of the others? With such a common name, it's impossible to know. In 27:56, Matthew speaks of “the mother of James and Joseph”, but it seems odd, if these were Jesus' brothers of those names, that he himself is not mentioned. Doesn't really matter. They came at first light. Mark says it was to finish the burial rites that had to be skipped because of the Sabbath. Matthew doesn't speak to this. 2-- I love the picture of the earthquake giving the heavenly messenger a hand with the carefully sealed stone, which the latter proceeded to sit upon, in utter triumph. **He didn't come to let Jesus out** – he was already gone from the tomb – **but to let witnesses in**, to see the evidence!

5- And immediately they were entrusted to carry the wonderful news to the frightened disciples. How can hierarchy-types look at that, and insist that the messengers of the risen Lord have to be male – or have advanced degrees – or be approved by some vetting committee? **The only Biblical qualification is the realization that Jesus is alive!!!** Sadly, many of those duly vetted, trained, and approved, lack that only, essential qualification!

Both the messenger (5) and Jesus himself (10) repeat Jesus' trademark instruction: “Don't be afraid!” Additional evidence that it was really Jesus.

11-15 – The guards report, quickly hushed up by the “powerful”. They apparently hoped that, since their seal and guard did not “work”, bribery would. Pathetic.

16-20 – The disciples kept the appointment – even though they were “uncertain”, they worshiped. *Edistason* is the same word, same tense, used in Jesus' words to Peter when he tried to walk on the water. The modern English understanding of “doubt” has done a great disservice to all of whom the term is used. Confusion or uncertainty is more evident in most usages than the undercurrent of refusal to accept that is implied in “doubt”.

18-20 – The so-called “Great Commission” has to be one of the most abused sections of Scripture. There is only one imperative verb: *matheteusate* “-- make disciples.” All the rest are participles, subordinate to that. And the participles are present active, indicating continuous, ongoing activity. “As you are going,” or, “wherever you go,” would be far more accurate. “Continue baptizing..... teaching them to follow instructions ...” This is the recipe for the Kingdom. It is **everybody's job** – all of it. Hierarchy-types have usurped the baptizing and teaching, while trying to put their supposed subordinates on a guilt-trip about “going” and corralling “disciples” to haul into the institution. Actually, they only want converts they can readily manipulate, not real disciples. But everything here is plural. And it is all part of one command: “Make disciples.” It is in this effort that the constant presence of Jesus is promised.

MARK

As with the other writers, there is much speculation about the authorship of Mark's gospel. He has been variously identified as the "John Mark" who later traveled with Paul and Barnabas; the one whose mother hosted some of the early church gatherings (Ac.12:12) and was a sister to Barnabas; the young man who was carrying the water-jar (usually a woman's task, but he could have been doing this for a widowed or disabled mother) to the house designated by Jesus for the Passover supper; the young man who escaped from the Garden arrest scene without his outer garment; or even the kid who offered his lunch for Jesus to share. There is no real reason to discredit any of these, though none can be definitively substantiated. Mark is the only one who mentions the Garden incident. John, however, is the one who involves the little boy in the lunch affair, and he, too, was young.

In any case, from his writing it is clear that Mark was not a literary person. He writes like an excited kid, starting far too many sentences with "and" or "immediately." He does not use a large vocabulary.

Some very old fragments of manuscript have been identified, so I do not credit arguments for a much later date of authorship. Some consider it to be one of the earliest New Testament writings.

This is unquestionably a person who is totally sold on the conviction that Jesus is indeed the promised Son of God. Portions of Matthew and Luke appear to have their source in Mark's account, which leads one to believe that it was considered authoritative among the early believers.

MARK 1

Mark dives right in, announcing his account as "the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, Son of God."

A condensed version of John's ministry serves as a backdrop for Jesus' baptism, with its heavenly announcement. Please see the treatment of *aphiemi* in Matthew 6. The temptation period is also abbreviated, as is John's arrest. What Mark is eager to relate, is the excitement engendered by Jesus' public ministry.

1:8: Most MSS have no preposition before "water", although they include "en" before "Holy Spirit". Therefore, the loud and insistent controversies over the amount and location of water required, have no basis in Scripture. For fuller treatment, see chapter 10 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*.

Regarding the use of "messenger" in 1:13, please see the note in "The Task of a Translator."

The perfect tenses in v.15 are significant. The time "*has been*" fulfilled. The Kingdom "*has arrived*." We are not dealing with speculations about the future here. A perfect tense indicates a past action or event that has an effect on the present, and probably also the future. The imperatives, on the other hand, are present, indicating that they are process-oriented. "Get about the business of changing your mind and behavior, and becoming faithful to the new message!" *Metanoete*, remember, is NOT "I'm sorry I did something awful" (or got caught!), but rather a total change of the direction and focus of one's life.

Jesus begins immediately to recruit assistants – Peter, Andrew, James and John, who walk away from their fishing business. According to John's gospel, they had been among the followers of John the Baptist, and so would have had some introduction to what was going on – their action was not as sudden as it may appear from this account. Nevertheless, it was a huge commitment.

That first Sabbath in Capernaum must have been dramatic. Jesus' authoritative teaching was immediately backed up by a demonstration of his power over demonic forces, adding to the perceived authority of his message. The series of healings that followed attracted more than enough attention.

Jesus withdrew to pray, but was easily persuaded to be back among the people who needed him. People from the whole region are seeking him out, even in remote places.

This (39-45) may (or may not) be the same incident as that described in Mt. 8:4 f. In both cases, Jesus instructs the healed man to follow the usual custom, in being certified as having been cleansed. He does not violate custom, except when the custom violates *people*.

MARK 2

1-12 All the Synoptic gospels include this event, as well as the argument of the "experts" regarding Jesus' right to "forgive sins/remove failures." Jesus insists that the success of the healing demonstrates that he HAS (present tense) this authority. Notice that he *does not argue* with their assertion that "only God" can do such a thing. That is absolutely correct. What his critics fail to realize, is that "God" is exactly who he IS. Notice also that nothing is said about his own death – which many sincere people (sincerely wrong!) insist to be the only grounds for "forgiveness." It is his **being the Eternal God** that conveys that authority – nothing else!

13-17 Presumably, this is Matthew, called Levi in this account. The whole affair matches Mt.9:9-13. Frequently, people are known by multiple names. Might he have been of the Levitical tribe?

18-22 and 23-28 The new Kingdom cannot be crammed into the old patterns that did not work. This is further elaborated in the epistle to the Hebrews. Questions on fasting and Sabbath regulations could indicate a Levitical connection. For a renegade Levite to become a tax collector would have been extremely offensive to the religious power structure. Such a connection would cause this section to cohere more than other possibilities.

Compare the last paragraph with the end of the previous chapter. Jesus instructed the leper to follow the established procedure. Here, he sanctions the violation of regulations. The difference is his continual theme, “people matter!”

MARK 3

The same theme continues. Healing on the Sabbath – in the synagogue. Jesus' question implies that to refuse to do good IS to do evil, and to refuse to save life IS to kill, when either option is in our power.

This is too much for the hierarchy, who immediately set in motion plans to destroy Jesus, in company with the followers of Herod, whom they “officially” despise. Politics has always made strange allies.

7-11 Here is additional evidence that very early, people from Gentile areas were included among those who listened and followed. Idumea, Tyre, and Sidon were all outside the pale of “acceptability.”

13-18 The “Twelve” are listed. Matthew is named here. If this is “Levi”, are he and James brothers? Both are termed “son of Alphaeus.” (2:13). More important than precise identification is the purpose for which Jesus called them: (1) to be with him, (2) to be sent out to preach, and (3) to have authority to cast out demons. The order is essential. Don't get the cart before the horse.

22-28 Discussion about demonic vs. Holy Spirit power. People are far too quick to categorize things like this. Make no such accusations without very careful discernment. Indiscriminate labeling is dangerous.

21, 31-35 Family is redefined among the followers of Jesus. People who are together in Kingdom work are on a whole different level. It is not all that unprecedented for the physical family of a disciple to consider him deranged. But Kingdom brethren are assumed to *understand!*

But notice: Jesus defines his family as “whoever **does** (present tense) the will of God.” Again, he says absolutely nothing about subscribing to a set of intellectual propositions.

MARK 4

The general ideas of the parable of the sower / seed / soil are treated in Matthew 13.

10-12 The quotation from Isaiah seems different from Matthew's version. Mark uses a *hina* + subjunctive construction, which would imply purpose. The LXX version of Isaiah 6:9 looks more like Matthew's simple statement. This needs more work.

13 Note the interplay of *oida* and *ginosko*: the former indicating a figuring-out type of understanding, and the latter the knowledge gained through experience. The two are not usually related. Presumably, Jesus is saying that it will require the experience of association with him, to figure things out correctly. But this must be subject to further study.

The major message appears to be that singleness of attention/direction is basic to faithfulness.

It is interesting that the *order* of the hindrances to faithfulness as Jesus lists them (v.19) is the direct opposite of what is usually “preached-at” people. We normally hear that “desires” (same word root as covetousness) for other things” leads to the pursuit of “riches” which then escalates one's “worries about this life/age”. As a matter of fact, everyday worries are a threat to everyone, not just the wealthy, and can sap one's energy very effectively. This quickly leads to the deception that wealth would solve one's problems (it does solve some, but creates others); and “desires for other things” increase with one's means, blurring the line between “want” and “need”. The order that Jesus chose hits all of us, not only the wealthy.

21-25 To me, this speaks of absolute openness, transparency, and honesty – rare commodities in the 21st century American, corporation-style church. It is a complete non-sequitur to pretend that a person or group participates in the Light of the Lord, while keeping many procedures, decisions, and policy matters secret not only from the public, but from their own membership. The warning to “be careful what you listen to,” surely includes awareness of the transparency, or lack thereof, of those who presume to “lead.”

26-32 This is encouraging. Even if I don't see the planted seed growing, the harvest *will* come. Oh, for grace to keep believing that! And true Kingdom seed will provide shelter for other creatures as well (32).

35-41 Jesus was not upset at the tempest. It was not his time yet – and he must have really needed a nap. His very presence should have been enough to reassure them (and us!). If he's there, it's ok. They are even more frightened when the storm quits at his word. They have never seen power like this. Neither have I! But why is it scary? I suspect that his question, “Don't you all have any trust?” was addressed, not to their fear of the storm, but to their frightened query “Doesn't it matter to you?” He has been giving his entire life to make the point that people DO matter to him.

MARK 5

First a storm of nature – now one of demonic origin. Matthew (8) has two men, but it sounds like the same incident, following a storm at sea. Mark adds a p.s. missing in Matthew – when Jesus is asked to leave, the man wants to go along. Who wouldn't? But he was known in the Decapolis, and could bear testimony to what had happened. And he did. It would be great to know what happened to this man. Might he, rather than Paul, have been the first “sent to the Gentiles?”

21 Jairus' daughter. Matthew simply calls him “a ruler.” Mark names him, and designates him “a ruler of the synagogue,” as does Luke. By his deferential approach to Jesus, we are reminded that not all the members of the hierarchy structure were “bad guys.” Jairus in particular – he came on behalf of his daughter: in a culture where sons were all that really mattered.

All three synoptics place these three healings together: the demon-possessed Gentile of the Decapolis, Jairus' little girl, and the woman with the hemorrhage. There has to be a reason, and I believe it is the lesson in diversity. **People matter**, to the Lord who created us – whether acceptable to the society in which they find themselves or not.

MARK 6

1-6 Rejected at Nazareth. The people's rejection even inhibited Jesus' own power! No wonder it diminishes ours! Even so, he healed a few. To most of us today, that would seem monumental! But to Jesus, minimal. “He couldn't do much there.” Oh, to even reach his “not much” level!

6-13 It's after this debacle that he first sends out the disciples – not on a wave of glory. Probably good for their egos. “Copper” (v.8) probably refers to “small change.” Their assignment is definitely NOT “door to door.” They are to stay put during the visit to each village. And shake off the dust where they are not welcome. Welcoming and listening are coupled here. Poses a problem where one is welcomed, but has no listeners! Then what? We have usually had an either-or situation. Some places, we are welcomed, but no one listens; other places, we have been decidedly unwelcome, but found a few listeners.

14-29 a flashback on Herod and John. v.20 is curious: Herod was afraid of John (probably because he spoke truth), yet “protected” him. Nevertheless, Herod lacked the courage to stand against Herodias' wiles. Worldly power can't tame fear. It is that fear that haunts him, deciding that Jesus is a resurrected (or reincarnated?) John. Herod's pride in his power induced his flamboyant offer to Salome – the same pride that prevented his retracting the thoughtless promise.

30-34 The disciples return from a successful mission, and are called away to recuperate – or debrief. But this session is interrupted, as usual, by the following crowds. Jesus does not insist on a “private retreat”, but pities the people who have no compassionate leadership. The “shepherd” figure communicates care and protection, not authority. They had plenty of bosses, both political and religious. What they lacked was the shepherding that he knew they needed: leading, healing, provision, protection – love.

35-44 Mark's account of the feeding is minimal and matter-of-fact. The disciples recognize a need; Jesus sends them to inventory resources; he then proceeds to use available resources in a quite systematic manner. The disciples think of going to buy more provisions -- how contemporary! -- but Jesus uses what is there, giving thanks. He then passed it to the disciples, to distribute to the crowd – allowing them to participate, and experience the provision *for others*. Dare we say from this that *everything* he gives to a disciple is *for the purpose of (hina)* distribution to people in various kinds of need? And goodness knows, there was plenty left-- more than they started with. When I receive a provision from the Lord, must I not then look around and ask, “Where is this supposed to be distributed?”

45-52 Like Matthew and John, Mark follows this with the walking-on-water incident although Mark and John do not include Peter's adventure. All include Jesus' *ego eimi* statement, however (see Mt.14 for elaboration on this phrase.)

48 – Even though he had withdrawn to pray, Jesus remained alert to their needs and their fears. He did NOT set the example of lonely introspection that people through the ages have associated with “holiness”. When his people needed him,

he came.

53-36 When they land, they are again besieged by people in need of healing of all kinds. No one seems to have been turned away.

MARK 7

1-14 There's nothing wrong with hand-washing. In fact, it's often a good idea, as are many of the principles of the law. It's when a good idea/ practice becomes a ritual ("Doctrine") unrelated to its original purpose (healthful cleanliness) that it becomes a problem.

Likewise, many things that are called "doctrines" contain a kernel of truth. But they have been overlaid with so much philosophizing, rationalizing, and theologizing, that, as Vernard Eller once put it, "The kernel of truth is swimming in a bucket of hogwash," and (v.13) the very Word of God is made "void" /empty. The issue is not cleanliness, or care of parents, but the tyranny of ritual / dogma / *doctrine*. (V.16 does not appear in most manuscripts.)

14-23 External observances are not forbidden: they are simply to be subordinated to the things that really matter. *Koinoo* is related to the whole family of words of which *koinonia* and *koinoneo* are also a part. The root refers to the concept of "common", which has many ramifications. This particular form, however, took on the flavor of being profane or unclean, as opposed to "holy" which meant anything or anyone "set apart" from common use, for God. Therefore, I have chosen to represent it with "unholy". The concept does not imply overt evil; simply the lack of "holiness." Jesus characterizes "evil things" such as the ones he listed, as *rendering* a person unfit for the presence and service of God, rather than failure to observe a particular ritual.

24-30 Matthew's account identifies this woman as a Canaanite; Mark's as a Greek. Luke does not record the event. Of course, one must remember that "Greek" was often used to apply to anyone who was not a Jew. Jesus' response seems to contradict the willingness he displayed in ch.5 to minister to outsiders. None of the standard "explanations" are satisfactory, but I do not have an alternative--

13-37 especially when the next series of healings also takes place in Gentile territory.

MARK 8

1-10 Matthew and Mark are the only ones to include two feeding events. They are similar, but here there are slightly more provisions, fewer people, and less leftover. I suppose people could construct something "profound" out of that, but I see no point in trying to do so. The initiative is Jesus', this time.

10-13 On this occasion, Jesus rejects the demand for a "sign", out of hand. What did they want? Were not all the miraculous healings and provisions a "sign" of who he was?

14-21 There was apparently some significance to the amount of leftovers – but Jesus does not explain, except to press the point that provision of bread was not the problem that needed to be addressed. Matthew is more specific (16:11-12). I am not impressed by the fantasies spun by people who think they have some esoteric understanding of numbers.

22-26 Several interesting things here, perhaps significant. This man required a "second touch" for his complete healing. Jesus does not criticize him for that. Additionally, had he not responded honestly to Jesus' question, his vision would probably have stayed blurry! So much for folks who insist on the "claiming" of healing that has not happened yet!

27-31 It is *after* Peter recognizes Jesus' real identity that Jesus begins teaching them how their *definitions* of that identity need to change. Discipleship was never represented to be a "first class ticket to Glory"! Jesus' use of *dei* (it is necessary) is significant. He does not say *why* it is necessary – (an "oversight" that many self-styled teachers have undertaken to correct!) -- but warns Peter, when he protests, that he is not "thinking like God." Perhaps he realized all the speculation that would ensue, down the centuries!

34-38 Not only the Chosen One, but all who belong to him, must choose the loss of "self" for the Kingdom. Please see discussion of *psuche* in Matthew 10:28. The connection to Jesus' coming in v.38 is not clear, although it appears in parallel passages.

MARK 9

Please see Matthew 17 discussion of the transfiguration event, for a more complete treatment.

Mark does not connect "the coming of Elias" with John as specifically as Matthew does. He also goes into much more detail in the following incident of the epileptic/demon-tormented boy: the interview with the desperate father, whose "if you

can help” is so painfully familiar. Who can fail to identify with the father's anguished, “I do trust you – help my lack of trust/faithfulness!” Having seen many wonderful things the Lord has done, why do we still find it so hard to trust for our own impossible situations?

In both Matthew's and Mark's accounts, it is the *disciples'* lack of confidence, not the father's, that comes in for criticism. They had experienced greater privilege, in their travels with Jesus, and consequently were expected to demonstrate greater trust. Jesus' question (16) “Why are you arguing with them?” (the scribes), is instructive. **Arguing “theology” is not productive.** Only clear demonstrations of the power of God can convince anyone.

Earlier, (6:7) the disciples had been empowered to give orders to spirits “in Jesus' name”. This is also evident throughout the Acts account. But Jesus gives the orders in his own name – emphatically, with the inclusion of the pronoun *ego*. And he orders the spirit not only to get out, but to stay out.

It does not appear to matter to Mark whether the boy had actually died or not. People thought that he had, but when Jesus took his hand, he got up, as had Jairus' daughter. The same word, *aneste*, is used in both instances, and is later used, mainly in Acts, in accounts of Jesus' own resurrection. These are simple aorist tenses. The ancient Easter greeting, *Christos anesteken* is a perfect tense – quite different in flavor. (Please see grammatical discussions in the Appendix.) Most often, *anistemi* refers simply to getting up to go somewhere or do something, although Jesus frequently used it in reference to his own resurrection. It is frequently used as a synonym to *egeiro*. Neither word is specific, so one cannot pontificate in either direction. Both can refer to recovery from illness, arousal from sleep, and actual resurrection.

28-29 One would wish for more explanation here!

30-31 Another reminder of Jesus' coming ordeal, and resurrection. Why were they afraid to ask? If the previous scene was indeed a restoration from death, as well as from possession, perhaps it is to serve as a reminder of Jesus' power over death – that it is not permanent.

33-end Another lesson forbidding “in-group” status. There is NO “inferior” assignment. Please refer to chapters 6 and 8 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*. Please also notice that here, as before, Jesus does not say that the child IS the “greatest”, but that welcoming children is tantamount to welcoming him. “Greatness” is ignored because in the Kingdom, it does not exist.

38-39 Clear instruction that anyone doing the Lord's work is to be received in cooperation. The focus (42) is to be that no one be a cause of another's falling away. Eliminate *any* detriment to faithful following.

41 – This is reminiscent of the longer treatise in Matthew 25, and is more significant than usually realized. We need to acknowledge the sacredness of even minimal kindness of anyone to one of the Lord's people.

43-47 It is interesting that here, these seemingly extreme measures are set in the context of a status-bid, whereas Matthew places them in the Sermon on the Mount, where the requirements of the law are revised and reinforced. Evidence, perhaps, that we are not to waste energy defining who is “in” and who is “out”, but rather to recognize all genuine contributions to the Kingdom.

49-50 References to “salt” are often problematic. This is no exception. Unlike most writers and speakers. I choose not to make something up!

MARK 10

1-10 Jesus addresses two important questions at once, here: the authority of the Law of Moses, and the specific issue of divorce. First of all, please notice that Jesus attributes the instructions of the law to *Moses*, and not to God (3). Not only that, but he specifically says that Moses “wrote this command” (5) because of the hardness of their hearts. He then proceeds to reveal God's original purpose in the creation of male and female. There are other instances, as in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere, where Jesus **overtly corrects** parts of the law, or at least their understanding of it. This is a clearer distinction than most.

Secondly, in the light of this statement, I do not see how anyone can condone divorce if they respect the words of Jesus at all. “Cultural” arguments are ridiculous. First century culture, though one-sided, condoned such things as readily as the 20th /21st, if not more so. But Jesus does not. What he doesn't address, is the condition of those who ignore that prohibition. But discerning people certainly would not acknowledge anyone who defied the words of Jesus, on this, *or any other* matter, as a teacher or leader of his people!

13-16 Again counter-culturally, children are NOT a nuisance. They are to be welcomed and loved into the Kingdom.

17-31 I think people usually miss the message of this incident, getting tangled up in *who* must “give up” *how much*, and not seeing that this guy is *asking the wrong question*, as are most “evangelicals” even yet. They want “eternal life” off in the future somewhere – but the eternal life of which Jesus spoke starts NOW. Eternal life, as defined by Jesus, starts with the first step anyone takes in his direction. *Chremata* is a very broad word. It can refer to money, merchandise, property, heirlooms, substance, or even debt! Like so many other situations, this seems to be a question of focus. If we want to be part of the Kingdom, “stuff” needs to become nothing more than a way to support Kingdom efforts, not an end in itself. This is another way we desperately need brethren, to help sort out our motives, attitudes, and decisions. How else can I tell if “stuff” is hindering or helping my progress?

28-30 certainly seems to promise a brotherhood; note that it also includes persecution. And Jesus' statement does include a future element to “eternal life, also. It *includes* the future, but is not confined to it.

31 – the “first and last” conundrum keeps showing up – frequently in status questions, but here that is not the case. Not sure how it fits in this situation.

32-34 Jesus keeps trying to prepare them for the coming showdown in Jerusalem, but they just don't get it. They are frightened, but keep following. This is the very definition of faithfulness.

35-45 The status message still hasn't gotten through. Mark records the request for position coming from James and John, while Matthew attributes it to their ambitious mother. 42-45 is *crucial* to understanding Kingdom principles. Please see chapter 6 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*. Jesus' teaching does not violate “the way the world operates” because he doesn't understand. It's because the *world* doesn't understand. He is deliberately changing the rules, not acting in ignorance. Yet those who call themselves his church continue to adjust and modify the message to make it “relevant”. In doing so, they make *their* message supremely *irrelevant*, conforming it to a culture that does not acknowledge him. Why can Christian people not see that **we are intended to be a counter-culture**? “It shall not be so among you all” is the theme-song of any true follower of Jesus.

46-51 Immediately upon receiving his sight, Bartimaeus began to follow Jesus. The crowd had tried to shut him up, as he cried out for Jesus' attention. This becomes an acted lesson on the status question just dealt with.

MARK 11

1-10 This is clearly an obvious, deliberate connection to the Old Testament (Zechariah 9, and several psalms) references to the Messiah's coming. All along, Jesus had been trying to correct their erroneous perceptions of that event, to no avail. Here, he accepts their enthusiasm, and does not appear to try to steer it, although the next day was another story.

11-14 and 20-21 Please see the note at Matthew 21:18-20.

15-18 A definitive break from “God for Profit.” Notice the inclusion of v.17 “for all nations,” and remember that *ethnoi* also translates “Gentiles”. Matthew and Luke both omit that phrase, although the whole of the source prophecy (Isaiah 56) deals with the inclusion of all people in the Lord's welcome.

11:22 – “have faith in God” – NO. “God” is a genitive (possessive!) case, and therefore must refer to GOD'S faithfulness, not a person's. The standard “magical” interpretation does not fit here.

23 represents a shift to the singular, although 24-26 return to the plural. Matthew presents it entirely in the plural. Curious discrepancy. Please see notes in Mt. 21:21-22. The word *diakrithe* refers to debates or arguments, not “doubt” as usually rendered.

25-26 here references *paraptoma* not *opheleimata*, as in Matthew.

27-33 Challenge to Jesus' authority – please see note at Mt.21:23-27.

MARK 12

1-12 Virtually the same as Mt.21:33-45, although the pointed, specific statement aimed at his critics, of Mt. 21:42-44 is missing in Mark's version. But they still definitely get the point (v.12). The hierarchy has not handled the Lord's vineyard responsibly.

13-31 Parallel to Matthew 22:15-40. Please see notes there.

32-34 The inclusion of one thoughtful scribe's response is unique to Mark. A reminder not to summarily dismiss a whole category of people, but to commend those who are “not far from the Kingdom.”

35-37 parallel to Mt.22:41-46, q.v.

38-40 A warning against the pompous behavior of “religious authorities.” Mark focuses on their attitudes, whereas Matthew focused on their failure to follow their own teaching. See Mt. 23:1-12.

41-44 Parallel to Lk. 21:1-4. Lacking in Matthew. Jesus here is speaking to the extent and cost of the widow's gift, not the validity of the system to which it was given. I'm not sure how this relates to the responsibility to give where funds are not used honestly. It's hard to imagine that should not be a concern.

MARK 13

Parallel to Matthew 24 and Luke 21, q.v.

Real estate has nothing to do with a faithful church. The size of a building does not impress Jesus. It's interesting that Mark places this discussion immediately after the account of the widow's gift. The repetition of “Watch out” and “Don't be upset” runs like a refrain. That is a hard balance to achieve, because things that require caution *are* upsetting.

Matthew gives more detail, but the message is the same: political persecution of the faithful, idolatry, and general upheaval. The idol mentioned *could* be the gold image of the emperor installed in the temple, but could also refer to flags in churches --- and the attitudes that condone such things!

But he *will* come! How long, Lord?

MARK 14

1-9 Parallel to Mt. 26:6-12, q.v. I love Jesus' statement, “Let her be. Why are you all giving her a hard time? ... She did what she could.” I pray that he may be able to say that to critics of my small, often abortive efforts at contributing to the Kingdom!

10-11 Parallel to Mt. 26:14-16, q.v.

12-16 “Someone,” (*anthropos*) probably does mean a man in this instance, since that would be unusual in the culture, and thus a means of identification. Some people think this could have been Mark. There's no way to know, but he does include more detail than Matthew. Luke follows Mark. (22:7-13)

17-21 Mark does not identify Judas specifically here, as Matthew does. Luke does not deal with the prediction of betrayal at all, except briefly in 22:21..

22-27 Parallel to Mt.26:26-30, and Lk.22:14-20. I honestly don't see that Jesus here was “instituting” some sort of ceremony, but rather directing that the very simplest meal – bread and wine – should serve as a memorial of his life of self-giving. Please refer to *Citizens of the Kingdom*, chapter 12.

27-28 All the gospels include the prediction that all the disciples will scatter, and the promised reunion. Not only Peter, but all of them, refuse to accept that. I think tradition has been too hard on Peter, since *all* protested by declaring their faithfulness, and *all* fled.

32-42 Parallel to Mt.26:36-46, q.v. Luke is more detailed (22:39-46).

43-52 Parallel to Matthew's account, q.v.

Only Mark includes the story of the young man who fled without his robe, leading to the guess that it was he. Again, this cannot be certain.

53-65 the kangaroo court. It is a sad day when truth is labeled “blasphemy” by religious leaders and authorities, but it is not rare. Jesus was not unaware that his repetition of *ego eimi*(62) was exactly what they wanted, as evidence.

54, 66-72 Much is made of Peter sitting to get warm at the enemies' fire. It certainly did not discourage him from the temptation to “pass” or blend in. Being isolated from faithful brethren, even though he may have thought himself *more* faithful for being there – at least he had not run away – also pushed him toward pretending to identify with his surroundings.

MARK 15 (Compare with Matthew 27 and Luke 23)

They didn't bother Pilate until dawn. That may have been bad enough, for a profligate flunky of Rome – he may have had a rough night and preferred to sleep in! No such conditions for the accusers. Night and darkness was well matched to their nefarious scheming. I have heard that their law forbade night time court sessions -- don't know if that is true or not. But in any case their fake trial was conducted on the sneak.

Poor, gutless Pilate. He was skilled at brutally putting down rebellion (see Lk.13:1), but at a loss to deal with a man who didn't even offer answers to false accusations. For centuries people have analyzed Pilate's behavior – and of course no one knows what was going through his mind. Nor can we know why the crowd was (apparently) so easily manipulated by the priests. Where were the crowds that had been fed, healed, etc.? Whoever these people were, who were hastily assembled at dawn, their voices prevailed.

Most likely, the vast majority had no clue what was going on. They were busy preparing for the ritual observance of the Passover Sabbath. So insidiously does ritual feed into gross injustice!

Please see the discussion of Barabbas in Matthew 27.

Mark is more precise about identifying Simon the Cyrenian. Alexander and Rufus must have been known to the audience. Might they have joined the believing group already before Jesus' death? Or at Pentecost? There was an Alexander with Paul in Ephesus, and a greeting is sent to Rufus in Rome, but neither is an unusual name in that area, so there can be no sure connection.

22-39 closely parallels Matthew's account, even to the vocabulary. Both speak of “darkness”, whereas Luke refers specifically to an eclipse. The records of the taunts of the religious leaders who think they have “won,” are nearly identical, as is the misunderstanding of Jesus' prayer as a call to Elijah, and the gloriously triumphant ripping of the veil of the temple. (See chapter 8 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*).

42-47 Joseph shows considerable courage in his request to Pilate. It cannot have earned him any “points” to identify with an executed man. His position as a “noble counselor” would have secured access, but could certainly also have been at risk.

The women were there, and saw where the place was – so there is no way they could have gone to the wrong place the next morning. Mark apparently had not heard of the rulers' scheming to seal up the burial site.

MARK 16

I am impressed with the women. They only expected to pay final respects to the body of one they loved, and were worried about the logistics. How to get in? No wonder both the message and the messenger were terrifying! A resurrection, after hope had died? Is that even remotely possible?

Some people are absorbed in fighting over what appears to be three different “endings” here. That is silly. Regardless of when each became included in the narrative, the inclusion only happened because it was accepted as accurate by the early brotherhood. The flowery language (insert) after v.8 does not sound like the same writer – but so what?

From v.9 on, the style reverts to a more similar one.

Probably v.12 refers to the Emmaus incident, but that must be acknowledged as speculation.

15-18 Mark's version of the commission is more detailed, and adds some elements seen in Acts to the ones mentioned by Matthew.

The important news is, that the uncertain mourners were transformed into advocates and demonstrators of the power of the risen Lord! “Modern” scholars would be better advised to seek to join them, than to pick bones and rationalize about what “couldn't” be authentic!

LUKE

The writer of Luke's gospel is generally acknowledged to be the Luke who traveled with Paul. He may have been a Gentile, and if so, would probably be the only Gentile writer represented in the New Testament. I choose to use his own introduction (found in 1:1-4) as the basis for introducing his work, and adding information gleaned from other NT references.

Luke does not claim to have witnessed the events of which he writes here, having come on the scene about the time Paul went to Macedonia. In fact, there are historians who ascribe to him the identity of the “man from Macedonia” (Acts 16:9) who persuaded Paul to make the journey there. (They comment, only partly tongue-in-cheek, that Luke was probably converted in Asia during the period of “what next?” indecision described in Acts 16:6-10, and became so insistent in his invitation to Paul to preach in his home territory that his “nagging” invaded Paul's dreams!) Luke represents his work as being to compile and organize the information given to him by those who were eyewitnesses. He writes as a scholarly person who has done careful research. Perhaps he is sorting out the facts from the circulating flights of fancy, of which extra-canonical literature has plenty. He may have engaged in his research in order to clarify his own understanding, as well.

The writing is addressed to “Theophilus” (the more common spelling, “Theophilus” is simply a Latinized version of the name). To translate it literally as “friend of God” is a possibility, in which case it could be understood as a sort of generic address. However the honorific title *kratiste*, equivalent to the modern “your honor”, gives a clue that this may be an “apologia” or explanation directed toward some person of official standing. Whether or not he was a believer is uncertain. However, he has heard the message, probably in some detail. Luke is not trying overtly to convince his correspondent; he is trying to reassure him that the word he has received is reliable (v.4).

Luke also states that “many others” have also been in the process of recording their version of what went on. We have only four in the received canon. However other “apocryphal gospels” exist, along a varied spectrum of credibility, both in “incidents” recorded (the fantastical “infancy narratives”), and in theological interpretations (works attributed to Peter, Thomas, and others.)

In addition to the “we” passages in Acts, Paul speaks of Luke in Colossians 4:14, in which we learn that he was a physician – which explains his frequent interest in Jesus' healings, and in the details of both John's and Jesus' unusual births. He is included in the greetings sent to Rome (16:21), referenced as Paul's “co-worker” in Philemon 24, and mentioned as Paul's only companion in II Timothy 4:11.

The companion works of Luke and Acts have been speculatively dated about 75 AD, which would place them after Nero's severe persecution, and provide reasonable grounds for seeing them as a careful presentation of evidence to reassure a sympathetic official that, although unashamedly counter-cultural, the Christian movement did not set out to be deliberately subversive. This line has not always been very carefully drawn.

LUKE 1

Elizabeth and Zachariah

5-7 Both are commended for living faithfully. This statement gives the lie to the popular assumption of the culture, that Elizabeth's barrenness was a punishment for some transgression.

8-17 It's *in the process of faithfully fulfilling his duty* that Zachariah gets the news of what the Lord is planning. And “all the people” are together praying at the time. How much do we miss, by neglecting to come together to pray? And most likely, none of those people had any clue what was happening. Zachariah was unable to tell them. Unfortunately, even now, since the Body was created and enabled, and things ought to be more readily shared, they are not.

The message begins as do so many of God's words to people: “Don't be afraid.” I am deeply convinced that this is a valid test of the authenticity of anything that someone claims to have received from the Lord. People who are trying to live in faithfulness are consistently *reassured*, not frightened, by genuine messengers. This message is one of great joy, and great responsibility. No such thing had happened for many generations, as far as we know. So it's no wonder Zachariah was troubled, and needed that reassurance.

18-20 The logical question, then, is why was he “punished” for his questioning? Maybe he wasn't. Maybe he needed the time to prepare, to get things figured out. *Episteusas* is an aorist tense: it would not refer to a constant state of lack of trust or “belief.” I think he was trying to figure out how such a thing could happen, given the couple's physical condition.

21-25 He must have “sorta” believed it, because he acted on the hope, and Elizabeth became pregnant, presumably in the

normal way. It's interesting, that whereas many women would customarily try to conceal themselves when they began to "show," Elizabeth hid herself until she did! Her condition was evidence of God's grace!

Gabriel and Mary

26-38

"Don't be afraid" is the greeting again. Mary is addressed as *kecharistomene*-- a *perfect passive* participle --"one who has been given a gracious gift". This designation has nothing to do with Mary herself. It is a gift bestowed by God's grace -- and like all *charismata* -- is neither a reward nor a personal possession, but a trust to be shared with the people of God.

Mary is as baffled as Zachariah -- but she is not criticized. She gets an explanation. Of course this is much more unusual than the former conception.

There has been an inordinate amount of fuss over the translation of *parthenos* as "virgin" or "young woman." This is just plain silly. There were plenty of young women who were not virgins -- and plenty of Greek words with which to label them. Although applied to both Athena and Artemis, whose reputed (mythological) behavior might have been questionable, (though they were said to scorn "normal" feminine pursuits), when applied to mortals, its moral implications were not doubtful. Mary's reported conversation with Gabriel, revealing her confusion at his message, would also tend toward confirmation of that understanding.

It is also interesting that discussions of the trinitarian nature of God do not pick up Gabriel's reply to Mary as an illustration of the truth of the unity of Father, Son, and Spirit.

Elizabeth's pregnancy is offered as a sign of the power of God being operative in all of this. Please note that *no sign was requested*. The initiative was Gabriel's (or God's).

37 --*rhema* refers more to the specific content of a message -- it is more particular, or more practical -- than the more general (or theoretical) *logos*. Therefore, "declaration" or "message" is the best choice here. The double negative construction is very strong, even though it does not appear beside the subject: in fact, that communicates added certainty. "Not a single thing that God has declared will ever lack power." The power of God is inherent within his message. In the Word itself lies the power for its fulfillment. It can therefore be received with all confidence.

Mary and Elizabeth

39-56

Both women are given prophetic insight regarding Mary's assignment. This must have been a tremendous encouragement to both. "Greatly blessed is she who trusted that there would be a fulfillment of the things told her by the Lord." "Trust" is again an aorist tense. Does this communicate grace for those of us whose trust grows thin with waiting for fulfillment? "Told" is a perfect participle -- begun in the past, with effects carrying over into the present.

All of Mary's statements of God's work are cast in the aorist, implying that this has all already been accomplished! We don't often think of it that way -- but it fits well with the above treatment of v.37, as well as Jesus' statements later regarding prayer ("what has already been done in heaven...").

56 -- curious about this: didn't she stay to help with the baby?

57-80 -- John's birth and naming. When all the instructions had been obeyed, Zachariah's speech was restored. He is given to understand not only his own son's assignment, but how it fits into God's larger purpose: deliverance, mercy, light, peace.

LUKE 2

The edict of a pagan emperor resulted in the fulfillment of the prophecy of where Jesus should be born. It is sad that so often, those who claim to be the Lord's people are so obdurate that he has to use rank unbelievers to accomplish his purposes. But the Creator and Upholder of everything is equal even to that challenge!

It isn't all roses for those who willingly accept his ways, either. A major journey, whether on foot or on donkey as tradition claims, is no fun in the ninth month of a pregnancy! I've written elsewhere of the distortion of the birth story by long tradition -- ("A Word for the Much-maligned Innkeeper", *Gospel Herald*, Dec.4,1984) -- and will only say here that a well-kept stable would have been far more comfortable than an inn, with its one, crowded, common room.

8f -- This is a clear indication that this must have happened in the spring, for only at lambing time would the shepherds have attended their flocks in the field at night, instead of herding them into a sheepfold to be watched by a single guard. Lambs could be stepped-on in such crowded conditions, and it would be much harder to discover and attend a ewe that needed help; so keeping them in the field was preferable. There, they would be safe, and not become separated from their mothers.

10 – the already common greeting: “Don't be afraid! Your God has come to set things right!” This has to be a part of any message truly from the Lord. It must inspire praises, and “great joy for all the people”! Anything else is the most sinister heresy!

So many, through the centuries, have memorized the words of these “verses”, and so few latched on to the actual message! Read them slowly, as if for the first time!

21-24 Normal cultural practice is observed, *when it does no harm*. There are more important things to challenge.

25-35 Elderly Simeon, just and devout, was waiting. For the much-preached “forgiveness”? NO!! For *encouragement* (*paraklesin*)! Lord, open people's eyes to your real purpose! And Simeon also understood that this was for “all people” (31), and specifically notes Gentiles and Israelites!

33-35 It is hard to see these words as a “blessing”. Our human minds would think it more of a curse! The concept of “blessing” must be simply participation in the ultimate work of God. Need more light here.

36 – would like to know more of Anna's message.

41-52 – Does this trip compare to a “bar-mitzvah”? Perhaps.

You wonder what was going on during those three days. Where did a child eat and sleep? We don't know the culture.

Significant uses of the word “father” in 48-49. They didn't “get it,” but clearly, Jesus did.

Yet he went home and subjected himself to their parenting. For a LONG time. And people say his “sacrifice” was only on Calvary? I don't think so. Thirty years of obscurity, followed by three of trying to teach thick-skulled assistants and self-seeking crowds, is not to be sneezed at.

LUKE 3

John's version of baptism, in many ways, seems to be more typical of present-day teaching than that advocated later by Jesus' followers. See the treatment in *Citizens of the Kingdom*, chapter 10. Whatever else may be included, John is clearly heralding a drastic change. He uses the figure of highway construction. With typical cultural arrogance we assume that modern grading and blasting equipment “started” the radical transformation of a landscape that occurs during road-building. The folly of such an assumption is made plain to anyone who has walked or driven along first-century Roman roads! Many are smoother and sturdier than our “modern” superhighways. and even earlier massive projects were undertaken in preparation for the arrival of a conquering king or general. “All flesh” indeed sees the enormity of such projects, where hills are scraped into valleys to prepare a level, straight thoroughfare.

It is clear from John's message and from people's reactions, that all understood that a *change of life* was expected. His instructions are reminiscent of the long-neglected Jubilee.

John stresses that he is only starting the process. He does not try to reach beyond his assignment. This was “**good news**” to the people (v.18). Look back at vv.8-17. Food and clothing were to be shared. “Pedigree” doesn't count. Taxes are limited to what is just. Soldiers are admonished to do no violence! The harvest is to be sorted, and only good grain preserved. This is “judgment” that any sincere seeker after the Lord will welcome most joyfully!

Even the oppressive ruler must hear the truth. Of course, (v.20) there is a price to pay, and John paid dearly for his faithfulness. But “good news” had been turned loose in the world, and the King (21-22) – the *true* King – is acknowledged to have arrived to administer it!

23-37 This genealogical account is traced through Joseph's line, all the way back to Adam. 77 people are mentioned, as opposed to only 42 in Matthew's list, which starts with Abraham. Many, but not all, of the names match. It is not unusual for some to be added or omitted in such listings, as the distinction between “father” and “ancestor” is fuzzy. Getting hung-up on such matters is silly.

LUKE 4

1-13 Luke's account of Jesus' temptation is parallel to Matthew 4. Please refer to notes on that one as well. Note that Jesus **did not argue** with the devil's boast of dominion over the powers of the world. The offer was real. But it is not the way Jesus chooses to operate. If ever an “end” could justify questionable “means”, this would have been it. But he correctly sees that the intended “end” would have been destroyed by unfaithful “worship.” Oh, that the people of God would realize that fact! Please also refer to chapter 6 of *Citizens of the Kingdom* for a more complete discussion. Note also that the devil only departed “for a while.”

14-15 Having successfully passed the test, Jesus returns “in the power of the Spirit.” I don't think the implications here have been adequately explored or addressed. Far too often, the term “the power of the Spirit” is attributed to people or

“ministries” that do not at all follow Jesus' pattern of refusing splash and glamor. Here, his power is manifested in his *teaching*, not fireworks.

18-21 Jesus' announcement of his *own* version of his purpose – his “mission statement”, if you will – is quite different from the “doctrinal” versions to which most of us have been subjected. It totally escapes me, how universally the “church” seems to ignore this very obvious statement, in Jesus' own words, when they pontificate about “why Jesus came.” He did not say a word about dying, or even forgiving. No rhetoric about anyone's “eternal destiny.” His announced agenda is eminently practical. Good news to the poor. Release to the captives. Sight to the blind. Freedom for the “broken” or oppressed. The announcement that the Lord's “accepted time” HAS (perfect tense) arrived. Sounds much more like Jubilee than “judgment.” In fact, he deliberately omitted the Old Testament (Isaiah 61) ending of that passage, which speaks of a “day of vengeance.” Everybody knew what the “old version” said. But he skipped it. Why do so many insist on going back to the old ways, of oppression and bondage? Is it so much more fun to clobber people, than to set them free? And not only does he say that's what he *intends* to do, he announces that it *has been fulfilled* – a perfect passive tense.

22-30 So the people did what they still do: questioned his right to say such disruptive things. “Give us a show! Don't expect us to change anything!” They want the domesticated, housebroken god of their tradition: either one who entertains and coddles but does not demand, or the other, who delights in the destruction of his (read, “their”) enemies. Jesus refuses to be or to represent such a god – declaring his availability even to foreigners, and maintaining that this too is not without precedent. This is too much. He goes from “favorite son” to outcast in seconds. But they are powerless to attack him, and he calmly walks away.

31-41 In Capernaum, his teaching is accepted. The observation that “His word had authority” harks back to Gabriel's message to Mary (1:37). These are probably also connected to John's writing about the Word.

Jesus' words and actions overtly declare war on all the powers of evil. A demon-tormented man in the synagogue, Simon's mother-in-law, and apparently all the suffering people of the village, are healed. There must certainly have been suffering folk in Nazareth also, but the difference appears to have been whether people were willing to listen to his teaching. Is that what blocks the activity of his power yet today?

42-44 Jesus simply will not be owned, or managed. He is “sent” to spread his message everywhere.

LUKE 5

1-11 This is a more detailed account than Matthew or Mark gives, of the calling of the first disciples. Matthew makes no mention of the large haul of fish, or of Peter's reaction. The encounter is significant.

Peter obviously sees in the incident much more than “Thanks for the use of your boat.” His is a typical Old Covenant reaction: sensing the presence of God, he tries to withdraw, assuming that he would not be welcome. And far too many churches have capitalized on such reactions, thundering judgment. But not Jesus. He brushes Peter's qualms aside. “Don't worry about that, Peter. I have a job for you!” Is it any wonder that they followed him? Where did all the “sinfulness / unworthiness” come from, anyway? Certainly not from Jesus!

12-15 It would not have been necessary to flaunt the Law and touch the leper. Jesus had healed many people with only a word. But here is an interesting juxtaposition of violating and observing custom. A touch of kindness, followed by instructions to follow the conventional procedure of giving evidence of cleansing. Jesus says it is “for a testimony to them” -- to whom? Probably the rulers.

Several places, (4:41, 5:14, etc.) people are admonished *not* to tell what had happened. It is not clear why. Perhaps being constantly badgered to heal would / could have sidetracked Jesus' teaching? He does not say. But he heads to the desert to pray. Perhaps to maintain the correct focus?

17-26 Is the dispute over the connection between healing and forgiveness, or the validation of who Jesus is? Notice that **he does not argue** with the statement that only God can forgive / take away failures / sins. But that's exactly who Jesus IS. Note his statement (present tense) in v.24: he HAS authority to do so: therefore, obviously it is not predicated on his death, which is still a couple years away. The man's healing bears testimony to that authority. As in the parallel accounts, (Matt.9, and Mark 2), it is the faithfulness of the friends who carried him to Jesus, not his own, that is commended.

27-31 Levi's life is transformed. Matthew, who may have been the man, gives more detail (9:9 f). Changing lives is what Jesus is all about.

33-38 Things are different now! Counter-cultural behavior is the order of the new day. The old patterns simply cannot be adequate for the transformed lives of Kingdom citizens. Parallels in Matthew 9:14-17 and Mark 2:18-22, q.v.

LUKE 6

1-11 These events are parallel to those in Matthew 12 and Mark 2 and 3, q.v. Jesus is so wonderfully practical! v.9 – why is it so rarely recognized that to fail to do good that is within one's power IS to do evil, and to refuse to save someone IS to destroy him? These remarks, in both cases, are directed to men who exercise power over others. How do they apply to those who have none? But we must be vigilant to see any place where we do have opportunity to do good if we are to be faithful.

12-end – The rest of the chapter is a sort of a summary of Matthew 5-7. Notice again the interplay of singular and plural. Most of these instructions are plural. They require a brotherhood. How can one follow them alone?

Singular forms occur only in vv.29 (clearly an individual's dilemma) and 30. These are personal violations. Interestingly, even here a form of “passive resistance” is advocated – see cultural note on Mt.5:38-39 – that will result in causing the attacker to be seen as a lawbreaker. After another long plural section, there is a return to the singular in v.41, again referring to inter-personal behavior. Interestingly also, though, the statements about “enemies” (27 and 28) are *not* singular, but plural. This is also the case in v.35. These are *collectively* defined, and to be confronted collectively. There seems to be a clear distinction between an “enemy” (*echthrous*) and a garden-variety abuser. This distinction needs to be sorted out with great care.

There is safety – both physically and in terms of integrity – in confronting “enemies” as a collective group. One is less likely to get carried away in the passion of the encounter, and violate the principles of a godly reaction, and also slower to apply the “enemy” label. That is a term used too loosely in the late 20th and early 21st century. The slightest offense is used as an excuse to apply it to almost any individual or cultural group. This is not valid.

According to Jesus, the only thing to be dealt with on an individual level is (1) being personally abused, or (2) interaction between brethren. The rest should be handled by/in/with the counsel of a brotherhood. This would be helpful even in personal affairs.

43-45 is not provided for the purpose of labeling or accusing people, but simply for discernment. To whom should one listen? This interpretation is clear from its immediate context, the challenge with which Jesus follows it: “Why do you call me Lord, and not **do what I say?**” The evidence of who one's “Lord” is, is very simple. Who calls the shots? Whose instructions do we/they follow? Not “talk about”-- **follow!**

46-49 Compare Matthew 7:21-23. The preceding and following topics are the same, though the wider context is somewhat different. Matthew includes some warnings not covered by Luke. But the general drift of the conversation matches, although Matthew's account is perhaps more “in-your-face.”

LUKE 7

1-10 Matthew (8:5-13) calls the sick person the “child” (*pais*) of the centurion. Luke calls him a “slave” (*doulos*). In v.7, the centurion himself uses *pais*. There are a number of other places where the term is used to apply to some sort of a servant. The lines are muddy, culturally. It would be difficult to make a firm case. *Doulos* consistently refers to a slave. Liddell/Scott (Oxford) lists under *pais* (1) a descendant, whether son or daughter; (2) a young person, explaining that *neos* is often implied; and (3) one's condition – referring to a slave or servant. This could bear further cultural study. In any case, the person was important to the centurion. *Entimos* may refer to honor or esteem as well as economic value.

It is interesting that he sent Jewish elders as advocates. Jesus was already on their blacklist. And they were forbidden to have any dealings with the Romans. So who were these guys? And the centurion himself is uncommonly humble, although he clearly understands his own authority, and has no problem ascribing similar *exousia* to Jesus. Although he has never personally encountered Jesus, his *pistis* – sometimes translated (not by me) “faith” -- is commended. (“trust” is a better choice.) One would have to speculate that though the centurion's “trust” in Jesus was displayed, “faithfulness,” which is usually my preferred word, would have to refer to the child/slave. This is an interesting use of the word. In any case the healing is granted.

11-17 In contrast, nobody even asked Jesus to do anything for the widow or her son. This was sheer mercy and care. Here again, love trumps culture. Touching a corpse rendered one “unclean.” You just didn't DO that. It is clear to everyone that God has intervened. This incident is unique to Luke's gospel. It would certainly have impressed a physician!

18-28 Jesus' response to John's emissaries is right in line with his previous discourse and behavior. “Are you the one?” is answered with “Look and see!” The evidence is right there in front of you. The things on the list he quoted when he

inaugurated his ministry – healings, resurrection, good news! No respect is offered to finery and pomp (25). There is work to do. The *behavior* of the messenger, not its fancy trappings, testify to the authenticity of the message.

29-30 People's standing with God is *revealed, not determined*, by their acceptance or rejection of the baptism that would have identified them with the Kingdom. “Christians” have failed to make that distinction. Baptism is not a magical “key” or “ticket” to “get in”. It has no inherent power. But it *does* reveal where and who – and **whose** – a person is.

31-34 back again to the one critical question: who is calling the shots? Who is giving the directions?

36-50 Luke places this account considerably earlier than any of the other writers. It may be the same event, or it may not. There are ways in which Luke organizes information by subject matter, rather than chronology (that, remember, is what he himself says he set out to do), and this certainly fits with accounts of Jesus' favoring people over conventional norms.

His host had neglected common courtesy (Please refer to *Citizens of the Kingdom*, chapter 11) – as a deliberate affront? But why, then, did he extend an invitation at all?

I think the most significant element, which is overlooked by everyone I have heard or read, is in Jesus' choice of the preposition *eis* in his farewell to the woman -- “Go INTO peace.” This will be an entirely new thing for her. The common phrase would have used *en*, the preposition that implies a steady state, condition, or location. *Eis* carries the active (accusative) flavor of motion or purpose. His blessing enables her to *enter into* an entirely new dimension of life – which is true for all of us, as we are released from the weight of our failures, and gifted with the power to live in the Kingdom. (One manuscript does use the more conventional *en*, but only one such is listed in the Nestle text. Perhaps some copyist decided to “correct” the grammar!)

LUKE 8

1-3 Another departure from convention: women of means, who had been healed, are welcomed among the disciples! Not only that, but they had possessions of “their own” (*autais*) with which they paid the bills! How can anyone claim that the Scriptures demean women? Even more significantly, this was perfectly ok in first century Greek culture, even though women had little or no status among the Jews. Somehow, the notion has arisen that Peter (with Cornelius) and Paul (in Macedonia) and those who fled Jerusalem after Stephen's death “started” taking the Word to the Gentiles, breaking cultural barriers. The barriers did exist – but they were not the first to ignore them. This is one of many instances where Jesus, although not overtly challenging the culture, simply ignored it when it would have abused someone. Our calling as his followers, also, is not to go out of our way to be obnoxious, but to simply live the Kingdom, where everybody matters and is valued and needed.

4-18 The Sower parable is also found in Matthew 13 and Mark 4. See comments there. Luke warns to “watch out *how* (*pos*) you listen”, while Mark says “what (*ti*) you listen to.” Is there a difference? Perhaps, in attitude at least. Taken together, I hear an admonition to be discerning: obedient but not gullible. Matthew does not include this admonition. Again, in v.16, transparency is called for.

19-21 Oh, to be included in this family! Why are the siblings so unlike the Elder Brother? Listening is not enough. Doing is what counts.

22-25 I think there has to be more to this incident. Luke and Mark both place it in a similar context. Matthew groups it with a series of healings. All, however, follow the quieting of the storm with the account of the Gadarenes (Mt.) /Gerasenes (Mk), across the lake from Galilee – Gentile territory. This is clearly the case, since people were raising pigs.

Some folks glibly characterize it as “two different kinds of storms” (climatic and demonic), but I doubt that it is that simple. One thing is clear: Jesus CAN command anything in the world that he created. Why he often doesn't, is another question, and one for which glib answers are not satisfying. One could observe that (25) wind and water obey him, and demonic power must, while people often don't. That also opens a host of other questions.

The local population's reaction to the healing is also of interest. When they saw this man, sane and clothed, with Jesus, they were terrified. Demon possession they could deal with: simply chain up and exclude the victim. But sanity and submission to Jesus were beyond their willingness to endure. When they asked Jesus to leave, he did. He has chosen not to force himself on anyone. Neither must we. But for us mere people, who are trying to live for him, there appear to be fewer alternatives. “Lord, to whom shall we go?” I expect the healed man faced that dilemma also – but he must have had a “home” to “go back” to. He proceeds to “preach all over town.”

Parallel passages in Matthew 8 and Mark 5, q.v.

It is unclear whether v.40 belongs here, as a result of the healed man's “preaching”, or with the next section.

40-56 This must have been a desperate situation for Jairus. He cannot have been unaware that the “powerful people” had already decided that Jesus was “*persona non grata*”. But his concern for his daughter outweighed his concern for his own status. Barriers are falling all over the place. A daughter was not a whole lot of an asset, as even yet in much of the world. But clearly, she matters to her father, and Jesus honors that.

The trip of mercy is interrupted by yet another woman. Not only is she breaking taboos by virtue of her gender, but also by her affliction, as a hemorrhage rendered her ceremonially “unclean.” We are among a lot of very desperate people. All turn instinctively to Jesus. And they are not disappointed. The cultural violations are not even noticed. All that matters is the people and their needs.

Jairus does not even have time to complain about the interruption: Jesus reassures him that he'll take care of it, and he does.

There's a real puzzle here: Jesus had sent the formerly demon-possessed man home to “tell what God has done for you”-- this in a Gentile area. Yet here, as several other times, people are told *not* to tell what had happened.

Interestingly, in v.55, Luke notes that “her spirit (*pneuma*, “breath”) returned”-- NOT, as subsequent distortions of the message would have said, “her soul”. This is instructive. *Psyche*, while clearly connected with one's being, is NOT some entity that “departs” at death. *Pneuma* is also used in all four crucifixion accounts, along with the verbal form *exepneusen*. Obviously, this is yet another situation where “doctrine” has nothing to do with the actual text.

LUKE 9

1-10 Before sending them on assignment, Jesus (1) calls the twelve together, (2) provides the necessary resources (both *dunamis* – ability – and *exousia* – authority), and (3) gives instructions. Somehow, the modern institutional “church” seems to have decided that a few cursory instructions are enough, as long as the authority of the hierarchy is duly acknowledged. Just one more way it is not deserving of the label, “church”. The coming together is essential: the reinforcement of shared identity and purpose will be desperately needed when conflict replaces the initial blaze of glory. The power and authority is *supernatural* (over demonic powers), not logistical nor financial. A corporation can provide logistical support, but not the “power and authority” needed for Kingdom building. That can only be delegated by Jesus himself. His instructions, indeed, depend upon a culture that assumes hospitality; yet he recognizes that it will not always be extended. The sent-ones are not to waste time and effort on places that do not respond.

How is that supposed to be applied, all these centuries later? I wonder if we should have left some places sooner? But we lack directions as to where to go, as well as folks to be “together” with, and “power and authority” for the job.

These guys, though, seem to have gained a hearing, despite a deeply entrenched institution. So much so that even the political bigwigs heard what was going on.

10-17 The “debriefing” is interrupted, but Jesus continues talking about the Kingdom and healing. Which of the feedings parallels with this one is unclear. In any case, sharing what they had was sufficient, and then some. In this case, as in the others, the crowd that was fed had been listening to Jesus' teaching all day, unwilling to leave. They were not “baited” to come for a free meal. Clearly, feeding anyone who is hungry is also part of our mandate (Mt.25), but these situations are different. A faithful group discerns.

18-22 How is it that when Jesus was praying privately (*monas* – alone), his disciples were “with him”? Clearly, the inquisitive crowds were not there; but he cannot be “alone,” as we understand it.

This appears to be an exercise to see if they are getting the point; and to distinguish the revealed information from the local gossip. This is clearer in the parallel Mt 16:17. “Not telling,” in this case, seems to be connected with the necessity (*dei*) of Jesus' rejection, death, and resurrection. Exactly what that connection is, is not clear.

23-27 Identifying with Jesus is not a “glory train”. “Self-denial” is not “giving up candy bars for Lent.” *Arnesastho*, an aorist imperative, is a definitive act – disowning – abandonment – of one's own identity. *Harato* – pick up – is also an aorist imperative, but the insertion of *kath' hemeron* – daily – creates an intriguing blend of continuous effort along with the decisiveness of the aorist. Normally, a “daily” activity would be spoken of in the present tense. I suspect the apparent discontinuity strengthens the absolute nature required of the commitment, and the acknowledgment that keeping it will require continuous attention. It probably refers to both imperatives, not only the nearest one.

24 – *Psyche* is used throughout. In 25, the more common *heauton* is used. Matthew uses *psyche* throughout both parts of the statement. This would suggest at least a degree of equivalence. In either case, a complete repudiation of individualism seems evident.

26 – our loyalty must be clear, and absolute.

27 is puzzling, unless it is to be understood as referring to the formation of the church as the Kingdom. Some commentators

equate it with the glory seen at the next-mentioned transfiguration, but there's much more to the Kingdom than a vision, however glorious.

Another factor is the use of “taste”, which occurs specifically connected with death in John 8:52 (a promise to those who obey), and Hebrews 2:9 (he “tasted death” for/ on behalf of all of us). Some blend of these two strains may be intended. Please see notes on Mt.17.

28-36 Luke's version of the Transfiguration is the only one to note the topic of the conversation between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah – Jesus' approaching death. But he makes no reference to Jesus' explanation as does Matthew (17). Contrast the two responses to a glimpse of glory: Peter's “Let's build a memorial” (i.e., “sanctify” a geographical location), with God's “Shut up and listen!” I'm afraid most churches tend to go with Peter.

37-43 Luke deals with this scene much more matter-of-factly than does Matthew. Jesus simply takes over where the disciples had failed. Did his physician experience make him more sympathetic? Jesus does express frustration at their inept handling of the situation.

45 – Why were they afraid to ask? Ashamed of their recent fiasco?

46-48 A slightly different slant from that in Matt.18:1-5. Here, it is simply a question of welcoming/caring for the child. There is less concentration on the greatness dispute.

49 -- “Outsiders” doing good work are not to be forbidden or scorned. They are doing the Lord's work, whether they know it or not.

51-62 a series of brief encounters.

54 – Interesting – having just failed to heal the epileptic boy, they now think they can call down fire from heaven? That was not one of the powers they were given. And totally contrary to Jesus' methods. What a disappointment it must have been for him, after all this time, that they would see retaliation as an acceptable response!

58 on – The point seems to be that distractions are simply not to be countenanced.

62 – Quit looking back!

I need this one. I have no desire to *go* back, but do far too much “Monday morning quarterbacking.” “If only's” are not allowed!

LUKE 10

1-20 This is much more detailed than the previous sending-out. Again, a culture of hospitality is assumed. Not sure how these instructions apply when this does not exist. Wonder if/how it applies to “churches.” v.3 – there are no illusions about “security” issues. v.5 is significant: wish everyone peace, and leave it to the Lord to sort out. It is not clear whether the warning in vv.12-15 is a part of what they are instructed to say, (v.11), or Jesus' commentary on the consequences to the named cities. 16 definitely represents a return to his instructions. Notice how absolutely the messengers are identified with Jesus and the Father. Some folks spin big yarns about v.18 as if it were ancient history – the text, however, represents it merely as Jesus' congratulatory response to the report on their trip.

The statement and warnings of 19-20 are reminiscent of the post-resurrection commission in Mark 16. *Dedoken* is a perfect tense. This authority (*exousia*) has already been bestowed. It includes physical protection as well as protection from “the power (*dunamis*) of the enemy.” The last phrase of v.19 has a textual variant that tends to confuse this issue. Some manuscripts cast the verb in the future tense – *adikesei*– and others in the aorist subjunctive – *adikese*. If the future reading is correct, Jesus is saying that no harm/injustice *will be done* to his emissaries. This clearly is not the testimony of history, or the implication of v.3. A subjunctive main verb, on the other hand, indicates *exhortation or prohibition*, which would be expressed as “may no injustice harm you,” or “make sure *you all* do no injustice.” These are three widely divergent readings. It is a very strong statement, as the negatives *ouden* and *ou me* are piled together. The singular form of the verb argues against the latter reading, although it would fit well with the warning in v.20 against becoming intoxicated with the power they have been privileged to exercise. The hortatory subjunctive reading seems most realistic; if we adopt the future reading then we must assume it means no *ultimate* harm will be done, despite the hassles which he also liberally warned about. I can only conclude that while any of the three readings has important lessons for followers of Jesus, it would be arrogant to assume that one could choose among them. I have chosen to leave the commonly accepted meaning in the text, but acknowledge that it may not be the best choice.

20-24 Jesus really wants us to know what a huge privilege is ours. It can only be known by revelation – the honor of participation in Kingdom building. **And it can only be revealed to participants.**

25-37 The context here is remarkable. The lawyer did not realize that he had answered his own question. He didn't know that **“love” is an active verb**, rather than an intellectual or philosophical speculation. Apparently, this summary of the Law must have been generally accepted, despite the centuries of accretions that had been added.

This parable parallels very well with the judgment scene in Matthew 25. The problem there was seeing/hearing. Both groups asked, “When did we see you---?” The difference was acting on what they saw, *without* recognizing that it was Jesus.

In this parable, all three “saw” the same scene: they focused and responded differently. After all, the priest and Levite “correctly” saw that they would be rendered “unclean” if they touched a man who was bloody, or worse, dead. **Following protocol can be spiritually deadly.** The Samaritan had no “purity” to lose, and thus was able to offer the ministry that the wounded man needed.

38-42 I feel sorry for Martha. She was just trying to be a good hostess! But she also needed to recognize that Mary's attention was also offering hospitality and “service.” I'd like to listen to the conversation when Jesus was helping them to understand each other!

LUKE 11

1-4 I copped out here, and translated the opening lines of the prayer as if they were subjunctive or optative, when in fact they are aorist imperatives, as in Matthew 6. Please see the discussion there on the various grammatical forms. Much of the prayer is recorded similarly, though in abbreviated form. Note that in v.4, Luke uses neither *opheilemata* (debts) nor *paraptoma* (transgressions), but *hamartia* (failures to measure-up) as what we need to have “taken away.” He does speak of the people who are indebted to us (*opheilonti*) as the ones *we* are to release. I have never heard anyone deal with these differences in choice of words. **THEY ARE NOT SYNONYMS!** A few manuscripts use the perfect, rather than the present tense of the final verb. This would create an interesting alternative.

5-8 Luke follows this immediately with additional teachings on the subject of prayer. The first appears only here. The reluctance of the friend is puzzling, as is the rewarding of the suppliant for being a pain in the XYZ! A similar puzzle occurs later (Lk.18) in reference to the widow and the judge. Luke is the only one to record these: maybe the other writers couldn't figure them out either! It does not seem like the only purpose should be to contrast a man's unwillingness to respond with God's opposite attitude, although the following passage might support that.

9-12 The present tenses in the asking, seeking, knocking would indeed encourage persistence, but the illustrations about the father show no reluctance. They do not, however, deal with a situation where the request, if fulfilled, would be harmful. v.13 implies that the “asking” should be for the gift of the Holy Spirit, whereas Matthew's version (7:7-11) refers simply to “good things.” “Father in heaven” should be translated “Father give the Holy Spirit **from** heaven” – the preposition is *ex*, there is no *en*.

Luke, of course, is writing from the other side of Pentecost, which Matthew *might* not be, although that is not clear. It needs to be noted however, that Luke also records that all these instructions are addressed in the *plural*. There's a lot more here than meets the eye. It requires serious exploration by a faithful brotherhood.

14-23 All the synoptics make note of this controversy. Luke combines and embellishes the accounts in Matt.9:32-34 and Mark 8:11. The reference to a divided kingdom or “house” is intended to separate most definitively the activity of Jesus from that of demons. While using it as a warning against disunity may also be true, it is not the primary context of the statement. Jesus is making it exquisitely clear that he has **already** overcome the power of the evil one, as evidenced by his casting out of demons. He has **already** carried away the weapons of the enemy. The Kingdom is a **present** reality (20), and needs only to be acknowledged, and sides must be chosen.

24-26 Casting out evil is not enough. It must be replaced with the life of the Spirit – cf. v.13.

27-28 Compliments are not the point. Jesus never endorsed the veneration of his mother. “Blessedness” (*makarioi* again) comes **only** from hearing and observing the Word.

29-32 Jesus turns back to the “sign” question raised in v.16. The seeking of a “sign” is illustrative of their refusal to see the signs that *had* been offered. In the cases of both Ninevah and Sheba, the foreigners accepted the message, and consequently were themselves included. Presently, his own people were creating their own rejection.

33-36 Here we are back to the infrequent singular form. The key is what an individual *does* with available light. One's eye is characterized as either *haplos* (single, simple, plain, straightforward), or *poneros*(evil). Refer back to Mt. 5 discussion of a “pure” or “clean” heart. Anyone or anything that is not singly, deliberately focused on/in the Light, is by definition evil.

37-44 This feeds into a discussion of what it is to be “clean”, which validates the connection with Mt.5:8. The Pharisees made life extremely complicated, with all their regulations. Jesus does not immediately set these aside, but *subordinates* them all to the “justice and love of God” which is primary. Note v.43: the attention must go to God, not to those who presume to represent him. Note that “bathe” is the same word as “baptize”(v.38).

45-53 The intricacies of regulations (“doctrines”?) and the building of monuments just doesn't cut it. Not only is it an exercise in futility, but it cuts well-meaning people off from the real thing. Jesus is not ignorant of the fire he is kindling. There is a long history of rejection of God's messengers. People in authority will need to answer for those they have excluded from the Kingdom.

LUKE 12

1-3 **Total transparency** is required of all who presume to lead or to teach the Lord's people. If this simple principle were observed, countless incidents that have brought devastation to individuals and shame to “churches” would be avoided. Fewer impostors would seek “leadership”, and fewer individuals and congregations would be victimized.

4-7 Jesus rightly understands that the “excuse” for secrecy is often fear – self-defense. But the disciple needs no self-defense, when serving the One who has defeated even death!

8-12 Our security lies entirely in our adherence to Jesus. The disowning in v.9 is the same word as in 9:23. It definitely makes more vivid the situation represented by the watered-down term, “self-denial.” The aorist forms are used here, also. This passage reverts to singular forms. Individual responsibility is assumed. The reason for the stern warning against speaking against the Holy Spirit becomes obvious in v.12. He is our only defense! 11-12 are addressed in the plural again.

Instructions from the Holy Spirit are given **as needed** – not ahead of time, not after-the-fact. We need to be constantly tuned in. Interesting that this trial scene is also plural.

13-32 The request of this man who apparently was being cut out of his inheritance seems at first to be irrelevant. But not if seen in the larger context. This man sees only the injustice done to him personally, which may have been true. However, Jesus corrects the focus. Greed is a very personal thing. Jesus has been trying to shift our thinking to the group. This is the problem for the “star” of the following parable.

It never occurred to this landowner to spread the bounty around. His focus is entirely on himself. In his musing, *psuche* occurs three times in two sentences. His condemnation is in his own words. His conversation is all singular.

In v.22, therefore, Jesus makes sure they don't miss the point. “That's why I said to *you all*...” The specifics are less the point than the focus. One of the markers that clearly distinguish Kingdom people from the “nations of (genitive – possession – belonging to) the world” is this matter of focus. Notice, he does not deny the genuine needs of earthly life; just obsession with their importance, and the extent to which they run our lives.

Note carefully in 31-32, both the provision and the gift of the Kingdom are addressed in the plural. **Individuals** who hop on this teaching like a bandwagon quickly become parasites. But a **group** that chooses a Kingdom way of life can be mutually supportive and still have abundance to give (33-34).

This portion can only be understood as a unit.

35-48 Behavior in the Kingdom until the King arrives is simple: constant watchfulness, and constant attention to Kingdom attitudes and interaction. How careful are those put “in charge” of a job or of provisions, to assure that no one is abused? Let no one who has an “in-charge” assignment forget that he is still a slave/servant! Accountability, upon the King's arrival, will be FAIR.

49-53 When the Kingdom is offered, it is necessary to choose sides and burn bridges. No one can remain neutral.

54-56 People learn to forecast weather by observation. It should be obvious by now to anyone paying attention, that the King was present.

57-59 The Lord's version of justice is quite different from what the world calls a “justice system.” Jesus has spent a lot of time and effort redefining “justice”. In fact, that may be one of the primary tasks of the Kingdom. Justice/judgment is

neither vengeance nor punishment, both of which are high on the world's agenda. Kingdom justice is gracious and fair. (57) This admonition could apply equally, whether addressed to the plaintiff or the defendant. One generally assumes it to be referring to the defendant, but it doesn't say that. And realistically, a judge in a kingdom of the world could swing either way. V. 59 implies that the question is one of debt.

LUKE 13

1-5 Suffering disaster is NOT specific retribution for some infraction, as was/is commonly assumed. It does sound like a re-orientation to the Kingdom *may* avert some things, but no such direct connection should be assumed.

6-9 I do not understand how people who insist so strongly on the application of *some* references about fig trees to Israel as a political entity, can justify ignoring this parable. Jesus walked among them “seeking fruit” for three years. The “caretaker” (the Holy Spirit?) asked to give it special care for one year more – the early church after Pentecost? -- as a “last chance – and the vast majority still refused the Kingdom. The bearing of fruit – or not – is the criterion for the continued existence of the tree.

10-17 This woman was in the synagogue, a place forbidden to anyone with a physical defect, and, some say, to women categorically. Yet Jesus called her, and touched her – definitely against tradition. Naturally the bigwigs are upset. Again, Jesus' compassion turns convention on its head, revealing it for the oppressive system that it is. At least this time, his critics had the decency to be ashamed.

18-19 Despite a small beginning, the Kingdom grows to provide shelter, even for the birds.

20-21 It continues to grow, affecting everything it touches, creating nourishment.

22-30 One must accept the invitation while the door is open. Just seeing and hearing is not enough. One must be a participant. Those excluded are they who are workers (*ergatai*) of injustice. It is not a particular act, but a character trait, that is highlighted. That's why I phrased it “you who *practice* injustice.” The word is not a verb, but that seems most clearly to carry the idea.

The picture (29) is of people flocking into the Kingdom from all over. (30) The “first and last” shows up many places. I would like to understand that better.

31-35 Time is winding down. Jesus doesn't let Herod intimidate him; but Herod will not be the one to pass the sentence. It is almost as if he is now following a script. It must be clear that the authorities in Jerusalem are the guilty parties.

This (34) will always remind me of Dave's bantie chickens, when we lived in Pennsylvania. They had free run of the yard, and bred prolifically. But one morning, we found Snow White lying in the lane, and her brood of chicks huddled lifelessly under her wings, all victims of the neighbor's dog. She could fly reasonably well, and could have escaped, but she had died trying to protect her babies. Perhaps as a child, Jesus had seen something similar.

Those who oppose the messengers of the Lord will eventually reap what they have sown. But that is not a cause for rejoicing, but for mourning. Jesus did all he could to prevent their destruction. It was they who were unwilling.

LUKE 14

1-6 Here is another demonstration of appropriate observance of the Sabbath. People matter.

7-14 Teaching against playing status games is directed at both ends: first the guest, who is not to assume a position of honor on his own, and then the host, who is warned against a “social climbing” guest list.

15-24 The figure of a feast takes a different slant. The first two excuses are obviously phony – who would buy property or draft animals sight unseen? The rude refusal of the original guests has opened the door to all. Luke makes no mention of the man in Mt.22 who had refused the requisite robe. The emphasis here is on the ones who passed up their chance to join the festivities.

25-34 Jesus goes on to emphasize that it is not just a party. There is cost to Kingdom participation: it must be an absolutely primary commitment. Nothing else may take precedence. The reference to the cross in v.27 must have been puzzling, as it hadn't happened yet.

Both family (26) and possessions (33) must be viewed as expendable. Yet in other places, people are admonished

to look after “their own” (family members), and to make wise use of belongings. I’m guessing it’s a question of priority, but can’t be dogmatic. 34-35’s reference to “salt” is still problematic. Each use is in a different context (Mt.5:13, Mk.9:49-50, and Col.4:6.)

LUKE 15

All of these parables demonstrate concern for something or someone who is lost. Trying to push analogies beyond that is unfruitful. They can however provoke some interesting questions, especially regarding the attitudes of searchers for those “lost”.

1-7 The lost sheep. No one says how the poor creature got lost. Had he wandered off in search of a tempting tidbit of grass? Fled from the threat of a predator? Been rejected by a mother ewe? Or bullied by siblings? All of these would be familiar to anyone who had raised sheep. All can have instructive parallels among people.

Notice the shepherd’s behavior. He does not scold or punish the wanderer. He scoops it up and carries it home. A reasonable question is provoked by v.7: *are* there any who do not “need to make changes”? I doubt it.

8-10 The lost coin. This may refer to the woman’s dowry, in which case her marriage would/could have been jeopardized. Coins were often worn as jewelry, for safekeeping, so its loss would be obvious.

11-32 The lost son. this passage raises many questions. Remember that a parable is usually designed to teach one lesson: in this case, certainly, the welcome of a wanderer, regardless of the objection of the one who had “behaved.” But other questions are not addressed:

-- Was the younger brother just a rebel, or was the family so dysfunctional that he found it unbearable?

-- The older son, who culturally would have inherited twice as much anyway, was assumed to be responsible for the welfare of his siblings. He obviously resented that.

-- Why had the son who stayed home not been extended any privileges? Or was he exaggerating in his complaint?

LUKE 16

1-9 I have no resources to make any sense out of this. One is tempted to view it as sarcasm – i.e., “Do you think that would do any good?”, but that is not Jesus’ usual way of communicating. There has been a somewhat plausible suggestion that the “manager” may have been an extortionist “collection agent” who had jacked up the debt for his own profit.

10-13 This makes more sense, and seems to contradict the former parable. Faithfulness is required, whether little or much is involved, and loyalty must be absolute, and singular.

14-17 Public opinion has no ultimate value. Jesus, I think, is recognizing that there is a huge difference between the true intent of the Law, and the complex system that has been built out of it. Sort of like the corporation model of “church” vs. the real thing?

18 may be related here to the discussion about the Law. Elsewhere, (Mt.5:32 and 19:9) it is in more overt contexts. Here it seems out of place, unless Jesus is just trying to counteract the rationalizations constructed by the “authorities.”

19-31 The story of the rich man and Lazarus is another story that suffers from an abundance of interpreters. I will offer only a few observations.

The rich man, even in torment, still assumes that he should be waited-on by poor Lazarus. Had he been one of the lowly servants in the sumptuous house?

Dogs – considered unclean – were the only ones who pitied Lazarus.

Those who refused to “hear” the prophets did indeed not accept the evidence of the Resurrection: they tried to discredit the reports!

If they *had* paid attention to the prophets, Lazarus’ condition would not have been so desperate.

Where the rich man ended up had *absolutely nothing* to do with what he “believed.” In fact, he probably subscribed to all the correct “doctrines” and would have declared that God had “blessed” him with his riches! It was his *behavior* toward Lazarus (and probably others) that landed him in the fire!

LUKE 17

1-2 The word *skandala* is usually misunderstood, due to its English cognate, “scandal.” The first recorded use in Liddell/Scott is “the stick in a trap on which bait is placed”! This indicates a deliberate attempt to ensnare an enemy, not

an accidental fall. People are *going* to try to deceive the followers of Jesus, and cause them to be trapped. The warning here is against *becoming* such a person.

3-4 “Watch out for each other” is probably the best choice, introducing Jesus' instructions for mutual correction. This situation refers to *hamartia* – error or failure – and NOT *paraptoma* – deliberate transgression. Such a brother is more likely to listen. He is then to be “set free”. This is not the often shallow “forgiveness” of “ok, it doesn't matter.” It DOES matter – it affects a person's connection with the Kingdom! Setting him free might require more than one encounter. Here, the instructions have reverted to the singular form. When possible, infractions should be handled on an individual level. However, when that doesn't work, the version in Matthew 18 describes the involvement of the brotherhood.

5-6 seems to be an insertion. I've not been able to discern a connection, unless it is simply the difficulty of the previously described technique.

7-10 Obedience or service does not place the Lord in our debt. Our job is simply to follow instructions. But the designation of “uselessness” is to be our own *self*-diagnosis: not applied to anyone else!

11-19 Gratitude to the Lord is quite another matter. The inclusion of outsiders is stressed again. Note that the grateful leper is compared favorably to the “insiders”.

20-25 Speaking of the Kingdom only in the future tense is in serious error. The Kingdom exists wherever the King is acknowledged and obeyed. However it is not always apparent. It is for such times that Jesus warns against impostors, whom we are *neither* to follow *nor* persecute. Unfortunately, in the corporation model of “church”, it seems to be a choice between those options. Both choices are wrong. Our only mandate is faithfulness, not policing. (25) If even the Lord of Glory is considered “worthless” by the present culture (religious and/or secular), dare I complain?

26-37 Jesus has made a clear division between talk of “the Kingdom” and talk of his return. Too many folks equate the two, and confuse many.

Matthew 24 incorporates some of 26-33 in his more detailed description of the destruction of Jerusalem. Mark 13 is closer to Matthew's account. In both, some things seem to point to the 70AD destruction, and some to a later, more global return. Many writers have become wealthy pretending they could sort it out. To me, the message is clear: be alert and watchful, and remain faithful. 26 and 28 imply a state of “business as usual” until the time comes.

LUKE 18

1-8 Is God reluctant to do justice? That is hard to imagine. The point, of course, clearly stated in v.1, is persistence. And we are cautioned against reading more into parables than was intended. But when is “quickly” (*en tachei*)? An equally valid translation would be “suddenly.” Is the question of faithfulness with which the story ends, a rebuke for giving up?

9-14 Here also, the point is clearly stated at the beginning: spiritual arrogance, and scornfulness of others. The Pharisee even prayed “*pros heauton*” (to, or toward, himself)! This is really no prayer at all, but a “big brag”. It is also interesting that the tax collector uses a different word, *hilaskomai*, rather than *aphiemi*, the one usually translated “forgive,” (a poor translation, as noted before.) *Hilaskomai* referred originally to pagan efforts to appease the gods; it is used only one other place in the New Testament, in Hebrews 2:17, where it refers to Old Testament sacrifices. I think it is clear that this guy does not understand the change of life called-for. Nevertheless, he is “justified” (perfect passive) **rather than** the braggart. Perhaps Jesus is saying that there is more hope for ignorance than for arrogance. This understanding would fit with the final statement, which appears also in other contexts (Matt.23:12 Lk.14:11, Jas.1:9, 1 Pet.5:6.)

15-17 KIDS ARE INCLUDED. They are NOT a nuisance!

18-30 This guy wanted a check-list, a grade card. He has checked-off his duties since childhood, but senses something missing. The conversation is singular. His “stuff” seems to have been holding him back from following. See the discussion in Matthew 19:16-30.

28-30, I guess, will always be a puzzle to me. We never hesitated to leave a place, people, or stuff, when there seemed to be a Kingdom reason. But so far, they have all been exercises in futility: brief chances to do a little bit of good, that soon evaporated. It just doesn't compute.

31-34 Jesus is very explicit about what is about to happen – but nobody seems to get the picture. Is this why the next incident recorded involves a blind man?

35-43 Might this be a lesson for those of us who are marginalized? And for the bystanders as well? Perhaps we cannot always see that it is Jesus who is coming. Someone is needed to explain the commotion. But take care not to try to silence one who is calling out for Jesus!

And if in the position of the one calling, refuse to be silenced!

When the need has been met, there is only one appropriate response: to follow Jesus, glorifying God!

LUKE 19

1-10 Luke is the only one to record the incident with Zacchaeus although it bears a flavor similar to the calling of Levi/Matthew. Interesting to compare Zacchaeus' spontaneous decision to divide his wealth with the poor – he must have had plenty left, if he could also make four-fold restitution to those he had defrauded! His commitment is accepted and commended as evidence that “deliverance (*soteria* – salvation)” has come to his household. Compare this to the previous incident with the “rich ruler” who turned away. Their socio-religious status was at opposite poles, and as usual, Jesus stood conventional culture on its head.

Can *kathoti* be read as result, as well as cause? As in, his action has qualified him as a son of Abraham? The tense of the verb is simple present indicative, so no clear case can be made. But the observation that “the Son of Man came to seek and to rescue the lost” could grow out of that restored relationship.

11-27 This may or may not be parallel to the parable of the “talents” in Matthew 25. There are very significant differences. Here, each slave was entrusted with the same amount – about 3-4 months' wages. Matthew has it apportioned “according to ability”. This one also notes that the trip was political: to receive kingly authority, and that he was opposed by “his citizens” who campaigned against his appointment. In Matthew's account, the commendation for faithfulness was identical. Here, the income varied, as did the rewards, which were proportionate to the gain. But in both cases, the unused resources were given to the one who had earned the greatest return. The destruction of the political opponents occurs only here.

It would be helpful for a brotherhood to consider the implications of the differences between the two stories. It is interesting that Luke places this parable immediately before Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, while Matthew separates them significantly, and Mark does not report it at all.

Might the political notes in Luke's version have been deliberately included because of what was about to happen? He often organized his narrative around subject matter. This would connect the “citizens who did not want him to be king” with the servant who failed to use what had been entrusted to him.

This would place the entire chapter in an interesting political framework: the arrival and subsequent rejection of the King, and its tragic results.

29-47 See parallels in Matthew 21 and Mark 11 for notes on the specific incident of the entry, and the cleansing of the temple. All three synoptics handle these events together, although John places the temple incident much earlier in the ministry. 41-44, however, harks back to much earlier prophetic statements in Matthew. Luke is the only one to include them here.

47-48 When “leaders” fear their people, something is terribly wrong. And even greater wrong inevitably results from that fear.

LUKE 20

1-8 The question of authority (*exousia*) emerges again. No one ever questioned Jesus' power/ability (*dunamis*). That was obvious. Although he somewhat dodges the question, leaving the interrogators squirming over their evaluation of John, the implication is clear: Jesus' and John's authority – their *right* to act or to speak – is from the same source. As is ours! Parallels in Mt.21:23-37 and Mk.11:27-33, q.v.

9-19 serves as an amplification of the reply: The vineyard reference is unmistakable, having been frequently used by the accepted prophets. The “farmers” were also given authority, which they employed for their own aggrandizement rather than the harvest due to the owner. The actors are obvious – their anger reveals that they recognize Jesus was describing their own behavior. Perhaps this was a final chance given to the rulers, to recognize the implications of what they were doing. But instead of turning around, they continued along their chosen path to destruction. Parallels in Mt.21:33-46 and Mk.12:1-12. See also Isaiah 5: 1f, for one of the prototypes.

20-26 The opponents are now much more overt in their scheming. Flattery is an attempt to cloak their real intentions, but it fools no one. Their regulations deal with surface issues, not the deeper meanings and original intents of the Law. The *phoron* was tribute-money – a tax imposed by conquerors on subject populations. It may or may not be related to the census (different word) at the time of Jesus' birth. Although a census is often for tax purposes, that is not stated in the text, and was conjecture on the part of earlier translators. The *phoron* had no religious connotation; it was merely the usual demand of a conqueror.

Jesus asks for a tax coin. Technically, the temple people should not have even had one in their possession, since this was Roman money, and therefore considered “unclean” (and the rationale for the presence of money-changers in the temple). Jesus didn't have one. But the “holy” people were able to produce it.

Why “commentators” consistently miss the *eikon*/ “image” part of the conversation has always puzzled me. “Image” on a coin is a mark of ownership. Even now, nations imprint their own symbols on their coinage. Jesus' reply is at the same time dismissive of the coin/tax as really irrelevant, since it belongs to Caesar anyway, and challenging to people who could quote “chapter and verse” about who/what “belongs to” -- i.e., bears the “image of God.” Whether that is viewed individually, as is most common, or collectively, referring to his people as a whole, the result is the same. The message is, BE CLEAR ABOUT OWNERSHIP!!! The contrast between a denarius (a day's wage) and the *whole of one's life* is stark.

27-39 Looking for safer conversation, the questioners continue “majoring in minors.” Theological debate is a pious refuge for folks who would rather *discuss* God than *obey* him. Why is it so rare for people to recognize that preoccupation with “after death” is NOT what Jesus considers a primary concern? He is the glorious God of the *living*! All live (or not) in relationship with him! The dative has no preposition, so could refer to relationship, or could be agency: “by him” -- as the giver of life.

39-47 The challengers are temporarily silenced. Jesus' response shows a less than stellar opinion of the hierarchy and their prized theologians!

LUKE 21

1-4 Is this a flashback to the tax discussion? Is this poor woman the only one who took Jesus seriously? He does not comment on how the temple folks were going to use the money: it *should* have gone to care for this poor woman and others like her, but I doubt if it did. Jesus' comment focuses on her motivation and devotion, not on the wisdom of her decision.

5-35 The central, crucial thing in Jesus' response is v.8: “Watch out that you all not be led astray!” All the frightening things listed in 10-11 have been going on ever since people began to live in societies. It is no sudden, new condition. 12-19 also has happened many times to those who choose to try to follow faithfully. The gift of wisdom and words is not guaranteed to get us off the hook. They will be what is needed for faithful testimony. There is a BIG difference.

20-24 seems to refer clearly to the destruction of Jerusalem, which occurred in 70 AD, but of course it could be repeated. However, folks who insist that it is still to come, are ignorant of history.

25-28, on the other hand, sounds very contemporary. Note that the “distress of nations in perplexity” is intended to trigger *joyful anticipation* among God's people, not the fear that is usually preached. It is in sharp contrast to the fearfulness of the people of the world described in v.26. Compare Rev.18:20.

29-35 Constant vigilance is the only solution. Note that all the instructions, again, are plural. The only way we can stand, is together. It is also the only way to avoid getting bogged down in the “dailyness” of life. Oh Lord, where are your people?

Please refer to the parallels in Matthew 24 and Mark 12:41 through the end of chapter 13.

LUKE 22

1-6 Judas has clearly changed loyalties, if indeed he ever was loyal to Jesus. John (5:70) makes it sound like he never was. These two references clearly negate modern attempts to exonerate him (“he meant well”) and state unequivocally (v.3) that the betrayal was engineered by the enemy. This should make it plain to all that God was NOT pulling strings from up on a cloud somewhere. (“What does the text SAY?”)

7-13 There must have been some prior contact – reservations made? Although *anthropos* is frequently used generically (hence the translation “someone”), all the pronouns are masculine. This would have been a cultural anomaly, since fetching

water was a woman's job. This has led to the assumption that this person was Mark, and the house belonged to his widowed mother for whom he may have been caring. This may be plausible, except for the masculine pronouns apparently referring to the owner (*kakeinos*) (v.12), and the noun *oikodespotes*. It really does not affect the meaning of the account, however.

14-23 Jesus clearly knows what is ahead. But he does not go into detail about *how* the Passover is “fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.” This is one of very few places where talk of the Kingdom has future overtones. Up until now, Jesus has spoken of it consistently in the present tense.

He moves directly into the sharing of the bread and cup. He speaks of a new covenant (a word also used of a legal will), and refers to the pouring out of his blood and the giving of his body. Most people assume this refers to his serving as the Passover Lamb the next day. However, both *didomenon* and *ekchuvvomenon* are *present* passive participles, and consequently it is also possible that he is referring to the whole of his life among them, not only its end. One dare not be dogmatic about either understanding. There is also no indication that Jesus intended to be creating any sort of “sacred ceremony” or “sacrament” with inherent power or holiness, to be selectively administered by a clerical elite. There *existed* no such elite, and he had forbidden any positions of status among his followers. His instructions were/are that among his people, the sharing of anything as simple as everyday bread and wine was to trigger memories of him. (See *Citizens of the Kingdom*, chapter 12.) He does point out that the traitor is present. So much for a “closed” communion system!

24-27 It is as if he is realizing the potential of this observance being co-opted by status-tripping “leaders” that Jesus immediately adds another prohibition against such attitudes. How sad that his instructions are so universally ignored! Only one may legitimately be “in charge” -- the Lord Jesus himself.

28-30 The disciples are included in the Kingdom, but it is his – not theirs. Their job is only to follow instructions.

31-33 The “you” in v.31 is plural, referring to the group. In v.32, it is singular, addressed to Peter. Note that his very failure qualifies him – not to dominate, but to strengthen the others.

35-38 This is puzzling, because shortly afterward (47-50), he forbade the use of swords. Might it have been to demonstrate their uselessness? They are also to take other supplies – an aspect missed in the weapon discussions. The hospitality demanded in their culture can no longer be counted on. Representing Jesus is no longer an asset in the general populace.

39-46 Would anything have been different in the garden scene if the disciples had been praying too?

52-53 Violence goes with darkness, secrecy, and “the authority of darkness” -- the evil one? This statement alone should be enough to prohibit ANY secrecy in churches!

54-61 Peter loses his nerve. (see end of Mark 15.) At least he is honest/cognizant enough to realize what he did.

63-64 It was illegal to have a trial before daybreak, but not to abuse the prisoner?

66-71 It seems like Jesus has decided, “They’ve already made up their minds – let’s just get it over with.” His *εγω εμι* statement seals the matter.

The phrase, “from now on” is interesting (*apo tou nun*). This is *before* the crucifixion, the resurrection, or the ascension. I have never seen this dealt with.

LUKE 23

I have never heard the issue raised as to whether (v.3) *su legeis* should be considered as a question, “what do you say?”, or the statement “you say so,” as usually translated. Grammatically, either would be valid. The phrasing is the same in all the synoptics. I did not change it, but wondered if I should.

8-12 Herod and Pilate were both pawns of the “establishment”, united by their impossible dilemma. In both 16 and 22 Pilate concedes that Jesus is an innocent man -- yet offers to “punish” him. For what? As a gesture of compromise to the Jewish leaders?

There is nothing ambiguous here in either vocabulary or grammar. Powerful yet powerless politicians are coerced to do what they know is wrong. **Is this the destiny of all who accept power from the hands of the world?** Interesting to reflect on this in the light of Jesus' temptation at the beginning of his ministry. He never argued with the claim that the “kingdoms of the world” are the dominion of Satan. And he flat-out rejected the offer of dominion over them.

18-19 – see Mt.27:14-23 for Barabbas.

35-43 Luke alone, among the synoptic writers, details the conversation with the two criminals crucified with Jesus. He

consistently lifts up the outsider. The one who admitted his crime comes out as more just – and more compassionate than the “religious” rulers. The point is NOT, as commonly preached, a “deathbed conversion.” It is the contrast in faithfulness between the executed criminal and the “institutional church”. I wonder what he knew of the Kingdom to which he referred. He certainly had signed no “doctrinal statement”. He simply recognized Jesus.

45 Apparently some attributed significance to the association of the eclipse with the tearing of the temple veil. No one says *what* this signified -- certainly something monumental. See comments on the veil in *Citizens of the Kingdom*, chapter 8.

49-56 Luke does not mention the involvement of Nicodemus with Joseph in the burial. Only John includes him. Where were they, during all the nefarious scheming? Nevertheless, this took guts. Only the women watched. All were obedient to the Sabbath requirements.

LUKE 24

23:55-24:9 seems to imply that quite a bunch of the women were present.

9-12 Not all manuscripts include Peter's surreptitious checking out of their story.

13-35 Only Luke includes the account of the Emmaus encounter. This is not surprising, as reports seem to be coming in from all directions. The consistent testimony to the authenticity of the appearances is the cluelessness of the witnesses. They certainly weren't getting any “points” for gullibility.

36-44 Jesus scolds them only gently for their incredulity. “This is what I've been *trying* to tell you guys!” He graciously demonstrates that it is really him.

45-49 A different version of the commission. Each writer was impressed with something different. Luke chooses to summarize the entirety of Jesus' own mission as background for theirs. The promise of the Holy Spirit is unique, as is the warning: “Don't go off half-cocked. WAIT for the promise.”

50-53 Luke will elaborate on the ascension in his Acts “sequel”.

There are two qualifications or provisions necessary before undertaking the task assigned. (1) In v. 45: “He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures”; and (2) “Stay put until you are empowered **from on high**”. No endorsement from the hierarchy is needed or desirable. Just Jesus' instructions.

JOHN

Controversy over the identity of the “John” who authored this account of Jesus' ministry has been common among “scholars” and “theologians”. There are claims that it was the earliest – and the latest -- “gospel” committed to writing. There is a tradition that this John was the youngest of the twelve disciples, a young teenager at the time of the ministry, and one of Jesus' favorites “the disciple that Jesus loved” (also a label applied to Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha.) He may – or may not – have been the brother of James, one of Zebedee's hot-tempered sons; he may – or may not – have been one of the two disciples of John the Baptist who were among the first of Jesus' followers (chapter 1). Only Andrew is named – the other may not have stayed. Peter is also called “son of John” on several occasions (Mt.16:7, Jn.1:42, 21:17). Might one of the John's have been Peter's dad? He does claim to be an eyewitness, at the very end, and his writing contains some observations unique to his account.

If he was indeed a disciple, one of the twelve, and the one to whom Jesus entrusted the care of his mother, his writing, both here and in the epistles (the work, by internal testimony, of an elder leader of the church) and the Revelation that bears his name, despite dating controversies, reveals a person with a deep love for the Lord, and a depth of understanding of the implications of the things he did and said, beyond that of others. The heart that is evident in all these writings is instantly recognizable.

He handles the Greek well, but simply. Probably it is not his first language, but one well-learned. It is possible to find flavors of philosophical writers in some passages, but the concepts are handled so very differently from the fifth century BC writers, that no parallels present themselves with any insistence (unless someone is trying to “prove” some obscure point.) He uses some words that would be familiar to the student of classical philosophy – word, truth, light, etc. -- but with completely new meaning.

John's use of the language is uncomplicated enough to make his work an excellent starting place for a student translator. The work has been dated everywhere from prior to 90 AD all the way to mid-second century, which of course would have required it to have been completed, at least, by a later disciple of the apostle. The burden of John's message is evident from his opening sentence.

JOHN 1

1-5 John begins by leaving absolutely no doubt as to where he stands with respect to seeing Jesus as the personification of the eternal God. Some people interpret the use of *logos* “the word” in the philosophical sense of the classical Greeks. I do not deny that possibility, but would also suggest a simpler alternative understanding: it's all about *communication*. Historically, people had sadly distorted God's attempts to communicate himself and his ways to them (and still do). In Jesus, he is making a last-ditch effort to get the point across. *Sending* the word, and/or the light – through intermediaries, had simply not worked. *Incarnating* the Word, the Light, which had always existed in/with/as God, He, himself, chose to live among us. Notice the tenses – imperfect in vv. 1,2, and 4: this indicates continuous past activity or condition. The aorist passive in v.3 referring to creation; and a perfect “has happened”, which is active, not passive, transition dramatically to the present in v.5: the light **is shining**, in contrast to the aorist “the darkness **did not** (read, **could not**) destroy it. (The darkness tried, and failed!)

This brief paragraph, written *after* all the events described, summarizes the entire burden of the message: the Word – the Light – the Lord – **has arrived**; and nothing the darkness can do is able to extinguish that glorious presence!

6-8 The brief introduction to John the Baptist will be taken up in more detail later on. Here, the point is simply that *somebody* had to announce that the Light had been turned on, so that people groping in darkness could have hope enough to *look!*

9-13 Back to the Light. People make a big deal about the sacrificial aspect of Jesus' death. And yes, it was a dreadful thing. But it pales in comparison to 10-11. He came into his very own world, that he had created with his own hands – to his own people, that he had called, led, and nurtured for thousands of years already – and they neither recognized nor welcomed him. He lived among them, subject to all their infirmities, and to all their abuse, trying to show them his way, and they refused to see. THAT is suffering. THAT is sacrifice.

A few did welcome him, and these alone were given the *exousia* – the right – to **become** the “children of God.” It is immediately obvious that this is not a blanket label for all of mankind, but a privilege incurred by a conscious choice of faithfulness/loyalty towards his Name.

The concept of Name is not clear to our culture. In many areas even yet, one's name is not revealed to just anyone. One's name comprises all that he is – naming indicates power over the thing or person named (Adam “naming” the

animals), and may be thought to confer some sort of supernatural dominion. Becoming loyal to Jesus' Name involves a total commitment to all that he is, and all that he intends. It is not “joining a club,” but a declaration of complete allegiance.

14-18 John is clearly overwhelmed by the glory displayed here. V.14 is probably the clearest example of the error of the NIV translators in using “sinful nature” as the default translation for *sarx* (flesh). Of course, they don't use it here: but linguistic consistency would require it. My choice is “human” in all cases – as that is what it means. “Flesh”, in and of itself, does NOT, as in eastern dualism, imply anything evil. This anomaly was involved in the early controversies as to whether or not Jesus was “really” human. A dualistic understanding would not permit such a thing for God. Jesus had NO “sinful nature.” That is a concept invented by the constructors of “doctrine.” Jesus DID “become flesh” (i.e., truly human), for the sake of the redemption of humans from bondage.

John also contrasts Jesus' coming with the Law of Moses. Only Jesus “invented” graciousness and truth! Only he has revealed God to people. (17)

15, and 19-28 Back to John the Baptist. He recognizes Jesus as the one he was sent to proclaim. He draws a clear line. He does not deprecate the law, but sees that graciousness and truth did not even *exist* until Jesus created them. (thus linking Jesus again with the whole of Creation.) It is true that there are traces of such attributes before his personal arrival, just as there are virtues among people who do not know him. But, acknowledged or not, he is the *source* of all that is good and true. (18) He is also the only way anyone can rightly understand God.

John makes no grandiose claims of his own: his purpose is to prepare the way. He is under orders.

29-34 No mention is made here of Jesus' baptism. Just the “sign” of the dove/spirit. Having seen the sign, John gives witness.

35-42 Andrew and someone else (John?) hear John the Baptist, and follow Jesus. They hang out together all day. Andrew fetches Peter, who is quickly convinced. See reference to v.42 in introduction. Was this a family affair?

43-51 Philip and Nathanael are added. The conversation with Nathanael is intriguing. He obviously thinks he deserves the compliment. But he is impressed at Jesus' perception.

Interestingly, *in no case* is any doctrinal thesis presented. It is consistently “Come and see.” “Show” precedes “tell.” How did that get lost?

JOHN 2

1-10 I am not sure what Mary had in mind when she told Jesus that the wine had run out. I do know a mother often “knows” her son can “fix” a dilemma! (I am blessed with four sons!) Jesus' reply, contrasted with his subsequent action, is puzzling. Was he just too kind to let the neighbors be embarrassed?

Mary's instructions to the servants “You all do whatever he tells you” would solve almost any dilemma! It sounds so simple!

The notation that the jars were “stone” gives the lie to the speculation that flavor remained (as it would in unglazed pottery) from previous use. John also notes that they were not beverage containers at all, but were used for washing up (ceremonial or ordinary, makes no difference.) Whatever it was that happened, was clearly of a supernatural nature. The “commercial” testimony is amusing.

11 How did this “reveal his glory”? It at least showed him to be a person who cared, and who had the power to remedy an awkward situation. Interesting that the disciples' trust is spoken of in the aorist tense: which is why I chose “*began* to trust him”.

12 He is now traveling with his mom, brothers, and disciples.

13-20 John's take on the temple incident is interesting. He places it early, rather than late in Jesus' ministry. He takes care to point out (15) that the whip is used on sheep and cattle, not people. The temple, ostensibly built for worship, is not to be used commercially. The point here seems to be the commerce, not the cheating implied in the synoptics (Mt.21:12, Mk.11:16, Lk.19:46) by referring to it as a hideout of thieves.

18-22 Here Jesus redefines the concept of “temple.” No longer is a building to be viewed as the abode of God. The immediate reference is to his physical body – another indication of his being the physical manifestation of God – although John admits that the real meaning eluded even his followers until after the resurrection. After it all fell into place, it became clear that “Scripture”, or “the writing” and the “word that Jesus had spoken” were one and the same.

Only later, in the epistles, is the brotherhood of believers spoken of as the Body of Christ. But in that identification, the break from a building (real estate) is complete. The “sacred temple” is now still the Body of Christ. If

only it were so recognized!

23-25 People are impressed and enthused. But Jesus is very cautious. **Being slow to trust is NOT a sign of unfaithfulness!!!** He knew that enthusiasm is not equivalent to commitment.

JOHN 3

1-22 Poor Nicodemus! His is another of the abused stories that is used so differently from the actual situation described. He is usually portrayed as a cunning spy from the opposing “side”, ignoring the fact that he was faithful enough to come with Joseph of Arimathea to bury Jesus' body (19:39). Consider another possibility:

-- Why did he come at night? Not *necessarily* to sneak around and avoid being seen. The way Jesus was mobbed by the crowds all day every day, perhaps night was the only time one could have a serious, coherent conversation!

He begins the conversation politely, with a compliment. There is no indication that he was not sincere.

3 –But Jesus gets right to the point. He is not “just” a teacher. He is the Creator of a whole new kind of life: a Kingdom into which a person must enter by birth.

4 – This makes absolutely no sense to a Pharisee, a teacher of the law. Pharisees were not all “bad guys”. Many of them seriously believed that if someone could meticulously be faithful to the Law for just one day, the Messiah would come and deliver Israel. The kingdom of God would be established by carefully figuring out how to do that. Jesus casts such efforts aside, explaining (5) that the Kingdom has to have its source in the activity of the Spirit. Nicodemus has been thinking in terms of human effort.

The interplay of singular and plural in Jesus' explanation is carefully chosen, but virtually never carefully translated. In v.7, he speaks to “you” (singular: Nicodemus) saying, “It is necessary for *you all – humas -- plural* – to be born from above.” V.8 returns to the singular, detailing what Nicodemus does not know. It is totally the translator's prerogative whether to render *pneuma* as “wind” or “spirit”. I have given both options. Whichever choice is made, needs to be consistent.

9 – Nicodemus is totally befuddled. He must have worked on that idea for a *long* time. He appears twice again: once when he speaks out in the Sanhedrin in Jesus' defense (7:50), a *very* gutsy thing to do, given the atmosphere of the meeting – and the scene with Joseph at the burial. These vignettes reveal an outstanding level of commitment, for which he is seldom credited.

10-- It should have been expected that a “teacher of Israel” would recognize the one they had waited for so long. But Jesus did not fit the model they had created over the centuries.

11-13 Jesus stresses that he *knows* what he is talking about, because he's “been there, done that.” The reference to earthly and heavenly things is somewhat obscure.

14-15 The reference to the snake and Moses is the account of the plague in Exodus 21:5-9. There was no “logical” reason why this remedy should have “worked” and one has to scratch to make any connection with Jesus' discussion. The connections people make with the crucifixion are contrived: no snake was involved in that process. It also seems very strange in view of the prohibition against images. It could – and according to some sources, did – become viewed as some sort of magical idol.

The word, *hupsos*, is quite interesting in itself. By far the majority of uses, in both classical and New Testament writings, refer to “exaltation,” and “high honor”, as do most of its derivative words. I'm not sure how that fits with the brass snake, although there are a few references to height or elevation. (In Philippians 2:9, it appears with an intensifying prefix, *hyperopsosen* – the only NT usage.) Some other parallel should be sought: perhaps the desperate and degraded condition of people in general, and the solution provided by “looking toward” the designated symbol of God's deliverance? At any rate, the glib answers do not fit, though I'm not sure what does. Making it a reference to the cross is not believable. **NO ONE** was convinced at that time!

15-16 The verb tenses are outstanding here again. There is *not a single future* in the whole passage. “God loved” and “gave” are aorist (past) tenses. But everything else is *present*: the “ones who are faithful/loyal/ trusting” are present participles – a *continuous* state; and the purpose constructions (*hina* + present subjunctive) “may have” eternal life. It is not in the far-off future, but *contemporaneous* with the trusting / faithfulness.

This calls into question the standard interpretation of “eternal life” (*zoen aionion*). Millennia of English interpreters have assumed this to be a limitless *future* condition, which has led to the fanciful “pie in the sky” mythology. *Aionion* is clearly something other than that. The most common adjectival usage in Liddell/Scott is “perpetual”, contrasting it with *proskairos*, “for a while.” The root word is the noun, *aion*, which encompasses a huge amount of territory. It may refer to “a lifetime, an age or generation, or one's destiny or lot.” It may express “a long space of time, ages, “eternity” as opposed to *chronos* (time), or a clearly defined space of time as in “epoch.” It may refer to “this present world” as *opposed to mellon* (the future), or be a title applied to divine beings!

Its opposites are “destruction,” (*apolletai*) the presumptive result of the “judgment” referred to in the next paragraph. At the very least, *aionion* should be understood as referring as much if not more to a *quality* of life than to *quantity*. Later writers referred to “partaking of his divine nature,” which may have been an effort to articulate a definition of sorts.

17-21, in that context, is probably also a partial definition of the life/light that Jesus is offering. Not at all the thundering threat frequently preached, it is, again, an invitation to *life*!

“Judgment” is *krisis* with no prefix, and therefore carries no obligatory implication of condemnation, which would be expressed with the prefix of *kata* (“down”). The un-prefixed form indicates primarily “evaluation”. L/S gives “to separate or distinguish, to pick out or choose, to decide disputes or to decide a contest for a prize.” The noun form may refer to a medical “crisis”, or a determination to do something or to take a particular course of action. Only rarely is the reference to condemnation by a court of law.

The contrast, then, is not between classical notions of “salvation” or “loss” at some point in the future, but to make the point that Jesus came to (definitively – aorist) provide for the safety/health/welfare of the world. I chose to use “kept safe, or rescued,” for *sothe* for this reason. The provision *has been* made available. He does not see his function at this time as doing the sorting, but as providing the light by which faithful people may choose to live. This is the *krisis*, the medical crisis, if you will, the turning point of the disease of the world. People make that choice for themselves. For those who choose faithfulness, “judgment” is no threat. Far from it! They come flocking to the Light, so that their behavior may be vindicated! (21) Praise be to Jesus for such a gracious prospect! Notice – nearly every one of the verbs is *present*. Notice also that “truth” (*aletheia*) is something a person DOES – the concept has nothing to do with theoretical discussions, or lists of propositions to which one is required to subscribe.

This is a good time to look at the *lexical* meaning (dictionary definition, as opposed to theological gymnastics) of the various forms of *sozo*. Dogma has tragically obscured the wonderful breadth of blessing offered here. It is NOT – and never was intended to be – a “fire insurance policy.” I have gleaned a list of definitions from Liddell/Scott, each of which could yield its own study (which exercise I highly recommend to you all!)

sozo – the verb form: to save from death, to keep alive, to prevent destruction, to heal from sickness, to escape from danger, to keep safe, to preserve, to observe or maintain laws, to keep in mind, to remember, to arrive safely, to rescue

soter – (the person who does this) : deliverer, savior, preserver from disease or hurt, a guide, often applied to the gods' activity in human affairs, a guardian, a ruler, governor, or emperor. The customary (on occasion, compulsory) use of this term for the Roman emperor made it a capital offense for his followers to apply it to Jesus. This is like the “Jesus is Lord” statement, especially when they appear in the epistles, became a highly political statement of loyalty to another Kingdom!

soteria, the noun form: deliverance, preservation, security, a way or means of safety, safe return, safe custody, bodily health or well-being. (Probably comparable to the much-touted Hebrew “shalom”.)

25-30 John the Baptist refuses to allow his followers to view Jesus' ascendancy as competition. He reminds them that his own message from the beginning was to be the forerunner. He sees that his assigned work has been accomplished. What a gift that would be!

31-36 Jesus is in a totally different category. He's the only one who fully knows what is intended, and as such is the only authority. 33 – Acceptance of Jesus' testimony is equated with acknowledging that God is for real (the adjectival form of “truth.”) The connection with the Spirit does not appear to have made sense to the listeners yet. We are not told what folks understood of the Spirit before Pentecost.

35 – The translator must make the call as to whether this is saying that God has given everything TO Jesus, or has given everything TO the world BY the hand of Jesus. *En* with the dative could imply either, but the former option would be more likely to use *eis* with an accusative object.

36 – The definition, and the deciding factor, of life is one's faithfulness/loyalty – or disobedience – to Jesus. It is completely simple and practical, not the least bit theoretical or doctrinal.

JOHN 4

4 -- “It was necessary” (*dei*). An interesting observation. For most folks, it was NOT necessary. They would take the long way around, purposely to avoid Samaria because of the prevailing animosity. This is another incident where Jesus' behavior is decidedly and deliberately counter-cultural. Much is made of his visiting with a woman, but it was contrary to custom that he even went through the area.

Desert culture would have required travelers to have been welcomed to shelter at mid-day, which would have been brutally hot. Even today, visitors marvel at the hospitality offered even to perceived enemies. But (8) the disciples had to go into town to buy food, even though places of business would have also been closed during the heat of the day. So violations of culture were on both sides. John's succinct observation explains, "Jews do not associate with Samaritans." The reverse, obviously, is also true. The ethnic conflict is greater than gender.

6 – The well was Jacob's. Both groups traced their ancestry to him, and consequently had claim to the water. Is this reference to Joseph (5), estranged, but finally restored to his family, deliberate in this setting? Is the reunion of estranged "family" part of the "necessity" of Jesus' going by that road?

10-15 The conversation about water is also multi-layered. Is it not a statement of the *mutuality* that characterizes so much of the life that Jesus describes? It is true, as the woman observes, that Jesus has no bucket with which to dip water from the well. He too has a need, being human. But she, in turn, needs access to the "living water" that he can provide. A running spring, that requires no buckets, and feeds (or becomes) a source of "eternal life" (see previous chapter for this discussion.)

I think most people share her confusion about the water. With the reference to "the gift (*doron*) of God", and Jesus' own identity, as well as the further progress of the conversation, it appears that he *may* be referring to the gift of the Holy Spirit, but this is not completely clear.

15-25 Here again is a situation that people "milk" to prove their prejudices, each side ignoring half of the facts. It is certainly true that the woman is not excluded from active participation in the Kingdom, either by her ethnicity, her gender, or her alley-cat behavior. Yet that behavior, **the only one of the three that she has any control over, must be addressed. It is NOT "ok"**. It is Jesus' blunt analysis of her situation that moves her to recognize him as a "prophet" -- a spokesman for God. A prophet "tells it like it is."

Her effort to change the subject to "theology" is not uncommon, millennia later. Jesus' response is to deny the relevance of the theological debate about the "proper" place to worship. **There are no longer any "sacred" places!!!** Genuine worship has nothing to do with real estate. It involves "spirit and truth", both of which are incarnate in Jesus, emphasized by the "*ego eimi*" ("I AM") in v. 25. This is the first of Jesus' "I AM" statements recorded by John. This phrase, as noted before, was forbidden to "ordinary" people. It is God's Burning Bush statement. Grammatically, one can express "I am" with the verb *eimi* standing alone. The addition of the pronoun is highly emphatic, and came to be reserved exclusively for God.

It is **one's attitude toward Jesus** that determines the quality of worship. "Spirit" and "truth" are a bit more elusive. It may be a reference to the Holy Spirit and to Jesus himself (see "I AM ...the truth" in 14:6). It may also refer to one's total involvement, as *pneuma* is also translated "wind" or "breath", and Jesus has just recently spoken of "truth" as something a person *does* (3:21), encompassing one's breath and behavior, the entirety of his life. In either case, the Father is actively (present tense) seeking for such worshippers. It is in that effort that Jesus came to walk among us.

31-38 Jesus isn't hungry. Seeing that, at least partly, he got a bit of his point across was so satisfying! And it is – but so rare. The joy of seeing results is indescribable.

27-30 and 39-42 -- Recognizing who Jesus is, the villagers now ask him to stay. Again, ignoring convention, he does – and continues to enjoy their budding faithfulness, before heading on to Galilee, where, he knows, the reception will be less enthusiastic (43-44).

43-53 Some people consider this visit to Galilee parallel to the events described in Mt.13:57 f. That would seem to fit with Jesus' observation that he would not be honored in his hometown. The events John records do not look as negative as Matthew's; he speaks of the folks in Cana welcoming him, and the healing in Capernaum. Jesus' response to the father's request (48) must have been triggered by something John does not mention, and the Matthew passage seems like a plausible explanation. The rejection John recorded earlier (2:18, 23) took place in Jerusalem. Lk.4:16 f, his initial encounter in Nazareth may have been a factor also.

JOHN 5

1-9 Some people make a big deal out of Jesus' question, "Do you want to become healthy?", launching into a diatribe of blame, implying that perhaps the invalid did not really want the responsibilities of a healthy person. That seems to me to be the reaction of someone who has never had to survive, either physically or spiritually, alone. Sometimes one is powerless to take advantage of even genuine opportunity, without a hand to "get into the pool". Jesus, of course, can bypass the pool altogether; but as his people, we need to be on the lookout for folks who need that hand to get in.

10-18 And there will always be nit-pickers who reject the Lord's work because it doesn't fit their game-plan or their regulations. This healing required no "faith" (in the commonly understood sense) on the part of the man – he didn't even know who had healed him! He just followed instructions. Does this perhaps help us to define actual "faith" more properly?

The "establishment" attacks the healer: both for violating their regulations, and for correctly and honestly identifying himself. *Ison* is the operative word here: it is defined as "equal" with respect to position, to be evenly matched, a perfect copy, an equal relationship, having equal rights, referring to justice or fairness. They were right, that no ordinary person could claim this relationship with God-- they simply failed – or refused – to recognize, despite frequent demonstrations, that Jesus **was** no ordinary person. 14 has provoked speculation that the man's disability may have stemmed from some moral lapse. There is no clear evidence, but much discussion.

19-23 Jesus can do anything the Father is doing, such is their unity. In contrast to the statement in 3:17, he now says that judgment *has* been assigned to him; the purpose being that they be equally honored.

21, and 24-29 – the whole point is the giving of life! Notice again the prevalence of present tenses: those who *keep on listening*, and *being faithful*, **have** life. Such a person *has passed over* (present perfect) from death to life. This tense conveys that something has already happened, and its effect continues. The only future tenses are in vv.25, 28, and 29, referring to those who have already died, not to those presently living. (Please note again the criteria upon which these are "judged" --v.25 and 29.)

Are even the concepts of "life" and "death", which most people assume they understand, being re-defined? "Life" (26) appears to be equated with the Father, the Son, and (21) those to whom they choose to give it, described in v.24.

27 – It is also Jesus' *humanity* from which his authority to judge is derived. See also Hebrews 4:15. Note that **behavior**, again, is the criterion of judgment.

30-47 -- The key to understanding the truth of Jesus' message is his complete lack of self-centeredness. Whether the testimony of John, or the work assigned by the Father, or the Scriptures themselves, the message is one. v.30 -- "I do not seek my own will, but the will of the one who sent me." **Integrity is demonstrated by the absence of self-focus.**

37-38 -- A person's response to Jesus reveals whether he has paid attention to the Father. No one who refuses to be faithful to him can claim any connection with the Word. Even Jesus is vindicated by his behavior. (36)

39 – *epaunate* can be read as either indicative or imperative mood. It has been commonly translated as an imperative, instructing them to "search the scriptures." This is admissible from the grammar, but I think it is much more likely to be present indicative -- "you keep searching" -- because of what follows: Jesus' expressed amazement that they could do that, and still miss the truth about him. 40 – Only Jesus is the source of life!

41-47 – Those who refuse to receive Jesus are condemned by the lesser creations in which they trust: Moses, earlier writings, the claims of men who seek their own glory. All that went before was intended to prepare "a people" ready for his coming. Consequently, their lack of welcome demonstrates that they had not been "faithful" to the very Law about which they were so obsessive.

JOHN 6

1-15 -- This is John's only record of a feeding scene, and he is the only one to note that it was the contribution of a child that Jesus used. The synoptic writers say that Jesus asked what resources the disciples had. The amount is the same. If, as has been suggested, John himself was little more than a child, perhaps he would have been quicker to notice that. Or might it have been he, himself? In any case, the precedent is established that Jesus can make wonderful provisions out of the small contributions of "unimportant" people. If only his followers would realize that! It would never have happened, had not Andrew, ever the "includer", mediated the child's offer of his lunch.

Andrew had recruited his brother Peter; later, it was he to whom (12:20) Philip turned, when some foreigners wanted to meet Jesus. He never personally made much of a splash; he is mentioned only rarely. But he willingly made connections for others, as Barnabas did, much later, advocating for Paul and Mark. This is a vital function in the Kingdom, often ignored. 15 – Seeing the groundswell of support, Jesus chose not to ride it, but to withdraw from the crowd's adulation.

16-20 Why did the disciples leave without him? How did they expect him to get home? The synoptic writers on occasion say that Jesus sent them off (Mt.14:22 and elsewhere), but John does not.

It does not work, to try to get anywhere under their/our own steam, without Jesus! The storm is not as vividly or extensively described as in the synoptics. But the central message is there: the second "I AM" statement – here as the reason not to be afraid.

It is such a blatant distortion – an insult, really – to Jesus, when people try to turn his gracious message into terrifying threats! This is character-assassination of the very worst kind!

21 – This is the only version of the account that notes the immediate arrival of the boat at its destination when Jesus gets on board. Matthew and Mark say simply that the storm stopped.

22-25 – The crowd, baffled, goes home.

26-35 Jesus understands their confusion, and also that they have not made the connection between the physical and spiritual conditions. People are frequently obsessed with *separating* those aspects of life. Jesus does not carve us into pieces the way humans are prone to do.

27 – Only Jesus can provide the nourishment required for this different life into which he invites people. “Sealing” is a sign of ownership or approval.

29 – Faithfulness to Jesus constitutes “God’s work”. It is a present tense – indicating *continuous* action – not a single act or event.

31-32 – Moses was not the giver of the manna, nor was it anything but the foreshadowing of Jesus’ provision for the genuine life he offered. Perhaps it could have progressed to the “real thing” if people had been willing to follow. But that question is now purely academic.

Again in 32-34, Jesus is identifying his own coming with the Father’s gift of life. Again, it is all cast in the *present* tense. What kind of perversity relegates all this to some distant future? Or even to after Jesus’ death? What part of “present tense” do preachers and theologians not understand?

36-40 – Jesus welcomes every step that anyone takes in his direction. The *resurrection* is future. The “eternal life” is *present*, including the subjunctive purpose constructions (may have, may raise, etc.)

It is the same form, *anasteso*, in 39 and 40. This form is identical in the future indicative and the aorist subjunctive. I have chosen not to translate them uniformly, because of the context. In v.39, it is a construction parallel to “have”, and consequently fits into the purpose statement. In v.40, the reference to the “last day” pushes the implication toward the future. This is a choice, and as such, subject to challenge.

41-42 – The leaders are hung up on the I AM statement, as well as the fact of his being a “local boy.”

44-45 – People who listen to (obey) the Father DO come to Jesus. *Akouo* encompasses both concepts.

47 re-emphasizes the *present* “eternal life” of the faithful.

41-51 This whole passage is peppered with I AM. It is impossible to miss the point. **By becoming human**, God has provided life to the world.

52-59 The reference is to internalizing the *incarnation*, not the death, of Jesus.

60-71 Even the disciples are confused. The Spirit has not yet made them fully alive. The key, as always, is *present tense faithfulness*. Some just threw up their hands in bewilderment and walked off. But for those who have trusted, and learned by experience (*egnokamen*), there is no turning back – except for the one who decides to reject faithfulness.

JOHN 7

1-9 Was Jesus perhaps taking a needed break at home, without his disciples (3)? He appears to have been with his brothers, and not the others – this makes it sound like the rest were still in Judea. However, “disciples” does not always refer only to the twelve, so either conclusion is speculative.

The brothers almost seem to be taunting him, from his response. (7) “the world” (*kosmos*) appears to refer to people who are not committed to faithfulness. This, then, would even include these brothers. A strong statement: *kosmos* is earlier applied to the “world” (3:16) that is the object of the love of God, but later, in John’s first epistle (2:15), we are warned *not* to love it. Lexically, it refers to the created order, to governmental order, or to “good behavior”! Later, it was used for the known or inhabited world. The statement that “its deeds are evil”, then, is less a specific condemnation of a particular activity, than it is a statement that it is, in failing to commit to faithfulness, refusing the purpose for which it was created. God pronounced his creation “good” -- but every good thing can be used rightly or wrongly, and by embodying the *right* use of the gift of life, Jesus made the contrast obvious. I’d like to ask him why (10) he said he wasn’t going, and then went anyway. That seems out of character. 11-13 – People apparently expected him to be there, but the discussions are all surreptitious, lest “the walls have ears.”

14-18 Only those who “have studied” (under the approved hierarchy!) are expected to know the Scripture. Sounds sadly contemporary! V.17 is straightforward: people who *want* to obey will readily recognize (*ginosko*) the true source of his teaching. It’s easy to sort out: with whose status is he concerned? The truth of God’s message is Jesus’ focus. 19-24 provide very plain illustrations of the hierarchy’s abuse of the intentions of God. “Pay attention!” Note that no one is told,

“don't judge!”, which has become the in-vogue battle cry, but rather “evaluate things fairly!” There is a whole world of difference.

25-30 The only response they know is to pick at doctrinal details. In 28, the “know” is changed from *ginosko* (experiential) to *oida* (merely intellectual). Jesus' frustration is evident here. “You think you know (*oida*) so much! You don't have a clue!” **Obsession with intellectual detail (doctrine) frequently masquerades as “knowledge” when there is no experiential connection with the Lord!**

Jesus' own knowledge encompasses both facts *and* experience. Having been involved from the beginning, he knows the original intent of earlier instructions that, designed to nurture life, have been distorted to inhibit it, and enhance only the power of the hierarchy. He also knows the remedy – Living Water – the Holy Spirit, whom he was about to liberate into the world in a new and far more accessible way.

But both the masses and the scholars are still hung up on their regulations, charts, and diagrams (31-36 and 40-44). Jesus doesn't even bother to tell them that they have just described his birth and “pedigree” (from an earthly perspective). That would have been unlikely to impress them by this time. But it might also point out the comparative irrelevance of that information. Jesus needs to be recognized as being the messenger / sent-one / Incarnation of GOD, not just another branch on David's family tree. The earlier information should have sensitized the people, and their leadership, if it was genuine, to recognize him – but they had chosen their own way: institutionalization – and did not want that disturbed. (32) Their power over the people was threatened, and had to be defended at all costs. Jesus is vividly aware that his time is short, but again, even those who have begun to trust him are unaware.

37-39 is obviously written from the perspective after Pentecost, as Jesus' statement only began to make sense in that context.

40-44 – Some are nearly convinced, but most are confused. 45-49 Even the servants sent to arrest Jesus are over-awed. The statement in v.48 is characteristic of the common assumption: only the bigwigs were competent to judge faithfulness. How contemporary!

50 – Here comes Nicodemus again. (see chapter 3). He protests that they are not following their own law, but is shouted-down. Is he still trying to straddle the fence, or is he coming out on the side of Jesus? It would be interesting to ask him at what point he became convinced.

The lines, though, are now clearly drawn: on one side, the power of God to offer the life he always intended for people; on the other, the power of a hierarchy determined to maintain its position of domination. And from the perspective of the world, the hierarchy always wins, and the giving of Life suffers neglect, or outright defeat ---until the Resurrection!

Dear Lord, that's still what we need!

JOHN 8

1-11 Although this section is absent from many manuscripts, it is such a vivid representation of the contrast between a legalistic distortion of the “Law” and the graciousness of Jesus, that it deserves attention. In 4 and 5, the “holy” people claim that the woman was “caught in the act”, but they did not arrest the man. The Law (Dt.22:22, and Lv.20:10) required that *both* parties be stoned.

Jesus' “writing on the ground” has provoked much speculation. The “ten commandments?” A list of those present who were liable for similar offenses? No one knows, and such speculation is fruitless. His eventual reply, though, is unmistakable. They were in no position to pass judgment. Interestingly, the footnotes in the Nestle text include a few manuscripts whose copyists seem to have shared the curiosity about what Jesus wrote, saying that he cataloged “the failures (sins) of each of them”. These later versions were not included in the accepted text. In any case, the accusers were sufficiently honest to slink away. Interesting that the departures began with the eldest.

Notice that Jesus differentiates between condemnation (*katakrino*) and recognition that wrong was done. In setting the woman free from the sentence, he instructs her to *change her behavior*. It is NOT “ok”. She is released, AND expected to “shape up”. Why then do those who call themselves followers of Jesus seem to think that the only alternatives are either flat-out condemnation or “anything goes”? One is as contrary to Jesus' way as the other.

Jesus' statement in v.12 is a fitting end to the story. Jesus is the Light of the World (another “I AM” statement). In his light, all are transformed. Darkness, whether of evil or ignorance, is definitively banished, and we who *continue following* (present tense) live in that Light.

13-20 Another dispute over the source of Jesus' authority. He knows where he came from and where he is going. They do not. They are making their judgment in total ignorance of any evidence. He has given them plenty of evidence, but they

have refused to see. The deciding factor, which should be obvious to all, is his total identification with the Father. Compare 5:30-47.

Ironic, and significant, is v.17 - "Even in **your own law...**". The rulers make a big deal over "the Law of God," or "the Law of Moses." Jesus calls it what it is – their *own* creation. 19-20 repeat Jesus' assessment of their understanding -- "You guys haven't got a clue." And their condition is the simple result of their refusal to accept the testimony with which they should have been familiar. If even Jesus has this problem I guess it should come as no surprise when others of us do.

21-30 A whole flock of "I AM" statements in a single paragraph. This is nothing new (25). He has made his identity clear from the beginning. It is they who have refused the message.

27 -- Even Jesus does not act on his own, but according to the Father's instructions. The "failures" to which Jesus refers here have to be the fatal failure to recognize his right to the repeated "I AM" statements. 28 contains another use of *hupsōo*. (see discussion in 3:14-15). It is interesting to consider whether this one refers to physical altitude or "exaltation". It has usually been interpreted as a reference to the crucifixion, as has the snake analogy earlier. But Jesus says that's when his challengers will "get it" about his identification with the Father, and that did NOT happen at the cross. It *did* (and does) happen when people "exalt" him – i.e., recognize him for who he is. In fact, that is a prerequisite for any of what Jesus said or did making any "sense." So maybe we've all translated this one incorrectly.

29 – I admit to being very envious of this statement. Must I conclude that our being alone is a consequence of *not* doing what pleases him? It's not for want of trying.

30-32 – Continuing to live by his word is the only way to identify with truth and freedom.

33-47 Jesus does not have a high regard for genealogical pedigrees, or those who trust in them. (I am tempted to substitute "Luther", or "Calvin", or "Wesley", or "Menno" for "Abraham"!)

42 – Jesus says clearly that God is NOT the father of people who reject him.

44 – those who deliberately oppose Jesus have other parentage! The source of lies is as obvious as the source of truth. There IS a difference. 47 is pretty blunt, and should be only carefully used.

48-59 "Glory" is a very difficult word. It is used with religious overtones only in Biblical writings, both LXX and New Testament. Classical references include: expectation, opinion, reputation, or in the verb form, to think, imagine, suppose, hold opinions, or be held in honor. This confuses the issue even further. In the LXX it was used of the "shekinah glory", the light that signified the presence of God, which probably led to the NT usages. This needs the serious study of a group of brethren.

55 – The interplay of *ginosko* and *oida* is strange.

58 – This can only be a declaration of unity with God.

JOHN 9

1-5 People in general frequently want to assign blame: perhaps to avoid taking the responsibility of action in a situation? Jesus, on the other hand, saw that something needed to be *done*, to "reveal God's work." The *cause* was not presently at issue. It's interesting that in Jesus' reply, he uses a *purpose* construction (*hina*). There is a sharp difference between *cause*, expressed by the use of genitive or dative constructions, and *purpose*, indicated by *hina* and the subjunctive. Too often, people have confused the two, and felt a need to see God as having *caused* whatever happens – whether positive or negative – when in fact, the focus needs to be on his *purpose*, by which he intends to redeem the people and the situations that have been damaged or threatened by a fallen world.

It is also interesting that Jesus, speaking of the necessary *response* to the man's condition, chooses to speak in the *plural*: "WE need to do the work of the one who sent ME." (literally, "it is necessary for us"). Here, the focus is not on his identity, but on what needs to be done. Not sure about the reference to "the night when no one can work." Perhaps the time between the crucifixion and Pentecost? Even his statement of being the light of the world is different, and does not include the personal pronouns in either clause, making it simply a statement of fact rather than of divinity.

6-12 The man's healing is simply a demonstration of God's purpose: deliverance from blindness. But it provokes a discussion: "It's not really the same guy." "What on earth happened?"

The blind man's self-identification "It's me!" is, I believe, the only use of *ego eimi* by anyone but Jesus in the entire New Testament. He is not challenged on it, as he is clearly not using it as a claim of identification with God, but acknowledging his own identity, with considerable frustration.

Jesus, apparently, had not stuck around. His own "glory"/reputation was not the issue here: he had simply acted compassionately because he could. After all, he had said God's purpose was for *his* (God's) work to be revealed (3).

13-23 The Sabbath controversy surfaces again. The Pharisees had their own list of “appropriate” Sabbath behavior, and it did not include setting people free. Their list was all about bondage to the system. But according to their system, Jesus should not have been *able* to do what he did (16).

The parents become involved, and acknowledge that he is their son, but dare go no farther. The son has recognized Jesus as a “prophet” -- a spokesman for God-- but they won't even go that far. They are threatened by the displeasure of the “institutional church.”

24-34 Now things are getting ridiculous. Since Jesus has not adhered to their pattern, the rulers have decided that he cannot be “from God.” That's painfully contemporary too. As is their treatment of the man who has simply reported what has happened to him. His conclusion (32-33) should be a no-brainer. No one could possibly do such things if he was not connected to God. But again, the institution – the corporation – cannot receive the obvious from a person un-approved by its own hierarchy.

They throw him out. I guess we are in good company.

35-37 Jesus comes and finds the one who has been thrown out. (How long must one wait to see that happen?) Only then does he reveal to the man who has healed him.

38-41 “No one is as blind as the person who *chooses* not to see.”

JOHN 10

1 – Self-styled “authorities” have used this statement by Jesus as evidence that they must carefully vet anyone who presumes to enter the “sheepfold.” They have appointed themselves as the “doorkeeper”(3). But Jesus represents *himself* as both the “door” (7) and the shepherd (11) – both, again, with *ego eimi* allegations. The impostors of whom he speaks are any who are not subject to him.

This picture became exceedingly beautiful when I had my sheep. They could be clear on the other side of the pond, grazing, but if I called them by name, they came running. This was especially true of Mopsy. We assumed that she must have been mistreated by a man before we bought her, because she never totally lost her fear of men. But she would consistently come to me.

9-10 Notice Jesus' invitation: to safety, protection, good pasture. Sheep need that. I had to be constantly vigilant to pull poisonous nightshade weeds away from the edges of the pasture. One lamb died before I learned that. The “thieves”(10) come for their own profit – to find sheep to butcher. Jesus came to give life. No dire threats of eternal consequences here – just the gift of an exceedingly wonderful life.

11-16 Contrast the behavior of the Good Shepherd with that of the hired hand. When danger threatens, the Shepherd hazards (even loses) his own life! The caretaker working for wages takes off and runs away (to a more lucrative or prestigious job?) Why? that is easy. (13) “The sheep don't matter to him.” It was just a job. Why, oh why can't “churches” see this? Small wonder that institutions place so little value on Biblical scholarship, when they are training CEO's and CFO's as “pastors”. Such a tragic abuse of the word, that derives from “shepherd”!

“Knowing” in 14-15, is the same word Jesus uses in referring to his relationship with the Father, as between him and his sheep (*ginosko*). It is based on *experience*, not intellectual speculation.

My sheep and I became acquainted by spending a lot of time together. That's the only way. I knew when one had a problem (though, sadly, not always what to do about it). They knew me, also-- especially Snowball, who quickly came to sympathize whenever I was upset about something. Anyone who has cared for sheep would immediately resonate with this teaching.

17-18 Here, Jesus moves to his understanding of his own earthly life. He and the Father have it all figured out. Even the loss of that life is not the last word. His authority is clear. Note the present tenses – everything but the last phrase which states that these instructions *were* received (aorist) from the Father. This is another passage that militates clearly against the notion that only Jesus' death gave him his authority. It was his from before the Beginning!

The only future in the whole section is the reference to “other sheep” in v.16. This is another source of much speculation, none with any evidence. They *will* listen/obey, and *will* become one flock, with one shepherd. We simply do not know the identity of these “other sheep.”

9-21 If these words were not true, Jesus' critics would have been correct. Such statements would have been evidence of insanity. But the healing power that accompanied them demonstrated their truth.

22-30 Jesus' behavior gives credibility to his words. Does ours? 28 has another present tense referring to “eternal life,” evidenced by following and obeying Jesus.

28-30 This is the ultimate refuge for people oppressed and abused by the institutional substitute for the church. Followers of Jesus will *never* be destroyed – will *never* be snatched out of either his hand or his Father's (intriguingly, *harpazo* is the verb associated with the mythological “harpies”, vicious birds of prey who were said to have devastated provisions, people, and armies in ancient legends.) Why is this the case? Because of Jesus' unity with the Father. **NO** malevolent power can tear us out of his grasp. Inside or outside of any institution.

31-42 The opponents got the point. How sad, that so few who claim to follow are as perceptive. If even Jesus couldn't get the institutional types to acknowledge his work, I guess I shouldn't be surprised when I can't. 42 – but many folks did become faithful, recognizing the truth of his words and his life.

JOHN 11

1-3 This must have been an interesting family. It sounds like Mary and Martha were better known among the readers of John's writing than Lazarus was. John identifies Mary with the anointing/feetwashing scene, which he details in the next chapter. Luke speaks of a similar event in the home of Simon, a Pharisee, in which he describes the woman as being of bad reputation. But these are unlikely to be parallel, since John's description is of an event in the sisters' own home. It should not therefore reflect negatively on Mary. Probably she was expressing gratitude and devotion for what happened on this occasion.

4-9 John makes it clear that Jesus loved this family. **His delay in going to them was not evidence of lack of caring.** V.4 may be his prognosis of the disease, or may be read as a statement of purpose (*hina*). Does this precede the assurance of his love, on purpose? Did *they* know they were participating in his glory? Probably not, given the sisters' reaction to Jesus' late arrival. Be careful in interpreting apparent delays. Perhaps we only *can* understand after the fact.

9-16 Jesus has been telling the disciples repeatedly that *he* is the light. It hasn't connected. Neither has his power, repeatedly demonstrated. They are about to get an even more vivid demonstration.

16 – This is why I insist that Thomas, often “put-down” as a “doubter”, is the most faithful of all the disciples. Everyone recognizes the extreme risk in returning to Judea. They all try to talk Jesus out of the trip. Only Thomas speaks up: “Let's go too – we might as well all die together.” In this one statement, “faith” is forever redefined. No longer can the word be used legitimately as a mindless affirmation that “everything will be ok.” True faith, rather, expresses sufficient loyalty to Jesus that death with him is preferred over life without him. Everything *won't* be ok – but the faithful person will hang in there with Jesus anyway. **This** is faith/faithfulness.

17-27 Martha is annoyed at Jesus' late arrival. Does she have any inkling of what's behind it? I suspect that Jesus' statement (another I AM) is at least as much a response to Thomas as to Martha. Notice, he does **not** say, as some translators do, that the believer will “never die.” That pesky word *aion* crops up again, here in a prepositional phrase, *eis ton aiona*. My best guess there is that it does indeed mean “forever”. Death will indeed come, for most of us at least. But **it will not be permanent.** In 27, Martha perceives that “facts” are not particularly relevant to the situation: only her recognition of Jesus' identity.

28-37 I believe it is the grief of people for whom he cares deeply that Jesus finds so distressing, perhaps also mixed with frustration at their lack of understanding. Is the question from the crowd in v.37 a genuine inquiry, or a sarcastic comment? It could be either.

38-46 They had to take away the stone before they could see anything happen. What stones have we used, through the centuries, that obscure our vision of the Lord's power and work? The sealing of a tomb with a stone was a deed of finality. It was over. But it wasn't. Nothing is over till Jesus says so.

Jesus' challenge, “Didn't I *tell* you,” is necessary to get things moving. How many other places does this apply?

This is different from Jesus' own resurrection. No human hand was needed to remove his stone. And his grave-wrappings were left in place. Lazarus needed to be unbound and released into life.

45-46 The miracle provoked two very different reactions: some responded with faith and commitment, but some went off to inform the opposition.

47-53 The discussion in the Sanhedrin is so phony! The Romans had long ago “taken away their nation.” It was not the nation, but their own position that they worried about. (Note that their position is mentioned first, even in their own statement.)

Caiaphas (47-51) really did have no clue what he was saying. *He* certainly had no interest in “gathering into one all the scattered children of God.” His only concern was saving their own skins.

55-57 Betrayal is now commanded by official decree. It is more blatant here, but God's people are faced constantly with this same choice. It takes a careful, discerning brotherhood to become aware when obedience to an official pronouncement – be it “religious” or political – is betrayal of Jesus. But it is not rare.

JOHN 12

1-8 Please see the discussion in the previous chapter. Also compare the account in Mark 14:3-9, which describes a similar (or the same?) event in a different setting. Here, Judas is identified as the one raising an objection. John is pretty direct in assessing his greedy motive. He sees only dollar signs. Jesus discerns a gift of love. This is delicate balance: Jesus has always demonstrated concern for the poor. But he also sees and understands hearts.

9-11 Having received Jesus' gift of resurrection places Lazarus in jeopardy. I wonder how he absorbed both realities. Sightseers were becoming believers. This was a serious threat to power.

12-19 The entry into Jerusalem immediately after the raising of Lazarus has a bandwagon effect. John says nothing about the borrowing of the donkey, delineated in all the synoptics. They present it as a deliberate enactment of the prophecy; in John's version, even the disciples don't make the connection. The commotion seriously upsets the power structure.

20-22 Who were these Greeks? They had come to worship, so must have been proselytes. It is noted that they approached Philip because he was from Galilee. Galilee was reputed to be more friendly to foreigners than Jerusalem. It was farther from the center of power. But we are not told if this request was fulfilled. Jesus' response seems focused on the approaching finale, rather than the request for an interview.

23-32 Another of many references to Jesus' being “glorified.” Clearly here it refers to his faithfulness to his purpose, and is probably connected to his approaching death and resurrection, but specifics are lacking. 26 indicates that Jesus expects his followers to continue following and serving, regardless of the consequences. these are third-person *present* imperatives (see appendix), “*keep on following*,” and present subjunctive “*keep on serving*.”

27 –Even Jesus is stressed by the awareness of what is ahead, but he is absolutely clear about his purpose.

28-29 Perhaps we don't hear the words of reassurance because we are not properly tuned in.

31 is puzzling in the use of *nun* “now”. This is **before** the betrayal – trial – execution – resurrection. We are not told how this becomes the moment of *krisis* – crisis – judgment – for the world. But how then can virtually everyone peg judgment as an exclusively future event? There is nothing ambiguous about the word “NOW”!

32-33 John specifically identifies this statement as a reference to the cross.

34-36 People are confused again (still). They want things neat and understandable. (It *would* be nice!) Jesus returns to his identity with the Light. Notice that all the “you's” are plural again. To “walk in the Light” (35), to “be faithful to the Light” (36), thereby becoming “sons of Light” (36) is a **group effort**. It simply does not work on a solitary level.

37-40 It is not clear whether these are the same people he was addressing in the previous paragraph. The reference to Isaiah's prophecies has been interpreted as a sort of coercive destiny over which people have no control. John quotes them as if “God” is the “he” in each case. Matthew's quotation of the same passage (13:14-15) uses plural verbs, implying that it is the people who are the actors. LXX forms are plural. And Jesus' urgent instructions in the previous paragraph would hardly have been offered, had his listeners been powerless to accept his offer.

40-43 clarifies this situation. Status and prestige kept many of those hearers – even those inclined to “believe” -- from identifying with faithfulness. They were unwilling to face the consequences.

44-50 is full of purpose constructions, as well as cause and effect. It is necessary to sort them out. Look for “in order that --” to identify purpose, and “if – then” or “because” to identify cause and effect. The net result is a succinct statement of Jesus' purpose, and his fulfilling of his assignment. The results for the hearers are now out of his hands.

50 provides an interesting definition of “eternal life” -- “his command / instructions” (the Father's.) Jesus presents it as the simplest of equations.

JOHN 13

The tenses now switch to aorist. This is referring to a final demonstration of the love Jesus was trying to introduce to the disciples, the whole time he was with them. Please see chapter 11 of *Citizens of the Kingdom* for a fuller discussion of this scene. The key to setting the scene: v.1 – Jesus knew – he had always loved – and he still did.

2 – Contrast the perfect tense of *beblekotos* – a past action with present consequences – with the simple historical aorist of the rest of the passage. John does not say how long Judas had been living with this evil in his heart, but it was not a sudden nor impulsive decision.

3-- Jesus, on the other hand, is *operating* in the present tense, with the present knowledge of the Father's perfect tense gift – *everything* had been given “into (*eis*) his hands.” Please note that if/since this is the case, he still *could have avoided it*, had he so chosen. But his intended journey is happening as he speaks.

4-7 This scene is dealt with more fully in *Citizens*. This was a courtesy that was expected of any host, but was usually performed by a child or servant. Since they were not at any of their homes, it really wasn't anyone's “duty.” But Jesus is making a different point. Note the change from *oida* to *gnose* in v. 7. It will require more *experience* before Peter will understand. A lot of things are like that in the Kingdom.

Peter obviously doesn't “get it” (8). There's no way he could be more emphatically negative than with *ou me*, the double negative. This makes his capitulation (9) much more vivid, after Jesus sets the experience of his act of service as an obligatory part of association with him. Only having received from Jesus can anyone rightly offer service.

10-11 The use of the plural “you” is interesting here. Jesus excludes the betrayer from the statement, while still retaining its collective nature.

12-17 Note again the interplay of *ginosko* and *oida*. The disciples have now *experienced* what Jesus was talking about, and he can therefore explain its implications for their life together. Now they are expected to move it to the intellectual level, so they can put it into practice. (It is a present subjunctive in the conditional clause.) It's going to require constant reminders: therefore the injunction to make it habitual. The symbol is to become a teaching tool. It is not a “sacrament”, conveying some sort of merit, but a *reminder* of the way followers of Jesus are expected to live.

18-30 Judas is identified and dismissed. How could it have been any clearer? Why didn't somebody overpower Judas?

31-32 Now the references to “glory” are aorist and future. Does this imply that the “glory of God” is served by Jesus' deliberate acceptance of the situation? *Doxazo* continues to be an extremely difficult word.

33-35 In any case, it is the beginning of the end of the time Jesus will spend with them. And they are still completely confused.

There is only one hope: if they will follow his instructions to “keep on loving” as he did – present tense – it will be the way Jesus' followers can be identified. But notice, the object here is *not ton kosmon* as in the conversation with Nicodemus, but *allelous* -- “each other”! It is in the transformation of these often self-seeking individuals into a community of mutual, loving service, that Jesus' kingdom will be revealed to the world. It is not a *closed* circle, but it is a *close* one. And the mutuality has to happen before there is anything to “reach out” about! Institutional “churches” have completely missed the essential mutuality part.

36-38 “You can't follow now, but you will, later.” After practicing and learning more of that loving he was demonstrating. Peter's loyalty / faithfulness (and ours) has some growing to do before it is ready to face as severe a test as Jesus is about to undergo.

JOHN 14

1-2 This discourse begins with a *third person* imperative (see appendix). Its subject is “your (plural) heart (singular.) It is NOT intended to be a scolding for anyone who is upset. The following repeated “*Pisteuete*” (second person plural) can be read with equal legitimacy as indicative or imperative. If indicative, the implication could be that faithfulness to Jesus and the Father is the *grounds* for not being upset. If imperative (present), it is likely an admonition to keep on being faithful. Either way, the point seems to be that Jesus has everything under control.

The singular “heart” with the plural possessive is also interesting. Might it be a reference to the unity among the brethren Jesus called for in the previous chapter, and later described in Acts 4:32 “they were of one heart ...”?

Notice *ego eimi* again in both v.3 and v.6.

3-6 Jesus is not talking about geography. Thomas is. *Wherever* Jesus is, is ok for his followers. He doesn't tell them that they know – or should know – the destination. Thomas missed that. But he is not scolded – just gently corrected. It's the “WAY” (*hodos*) that matters. *Hodos* may refer to an ordinary road or path, but also to the *course*, as of a river, a ship, or a race. It may speak of a voyage, or the “way” or manner in which something is attempted or accomplished – a course of action. It was also applied to the Christian movement. “The way, the truth and the life,” then, may not be intended as separate entities at all, but as descriptions of the Kingdom from three angles. Whether the focus is the journey, the honesty [truth] (“thinking about it”), or the life (*zoe*) that is produced, his “*ego eimi*” emphasizes that it's **all** about Jesus.

Many people interpret the latter part of v.6 as exclusionary. But it is equally possible that Jesus is saying that everyone whose life is oriented toward (*pros*) the Father *has been enabled* by Jesus.

I needed to change my rendition of v.7. The verbs are perfect, and future. There is no negative connotation whatever. “If you all *have been* acquainted with me, you *will be* acquainted with the Father” is the corrected translation. It constitutes total reassurance that acquaintance with Jesus is the same as acquaintance with the Father. Why hasn't anybody challenged the standard rendition? (I missed it too, through two revisions!)

8-10 Philip, I think, is expressing the bafflement of the whole group. Although Jesus' first response is to him as an individual (v.9), in the singular, he quickly reverts to the plural. 10-11 – He insists that the evidence is plain: Father and Son are one and inseparable.

12-14 are also addressed in the plural. Faithful *individuals* will manifest the work of Jesus, but the requests which Jesus invites are to be made by the **group** – the brotherhood. We have done a poor job of following these instructions!

15-17 The promise of the Holy Spirit, likewise, is cast in the plural. Notice the phrase *en humin*. Because of its plural object, the preferred translation should be “*among* you,” rather than “in you” which has usually been very individualistically interpreted. This understanding would avoid much abuse.

18-20 It will make sense after the resurrection – again, in the plural. So many things make more sense in the context of a loving, healing, supportive group!

21-24 These are all plainly *conditional* statements. Where all the popular “unconditional” rhetoric came from, I don't know, but certainly not from the New Testament! The alternatives are stated in a very straightforward manner: “If he will.” Following instructions is *equated* with love for Jesus, and is the *condition* for his loving revelation, and the coming of Father, Son, and Spirit as “neighbors” (23). Failure to follow instructions indicates lack of love for Jesus (24). It's that simple.

25 And the Holy Spirit is provided as the reminder that all of us fallible humans need.

27 – A recap of v.1. Singular heart, plural possessive, is freed from fear by Jesus' legacy of peace. Notice the context of that gift: his impending mock trial, torture, and death. What a time to speak of peace! But he is able to look beyond, to the eventual triumph. (30) The “ruler of the world” is powerless to push him around. At least, not permanently. Jesus has set the ultimate example of following instructions!

JOHN 15

1-8 The figure of a vine/vineyard is not new. We saw it in several parables, and in the earlier prophets. But there is a difference here: *ego eimi*, “I AM.” No longer are we talking history (past tenses) or future. This section is entirely *present*. Jesus is talking about a situation that is constantly in process. There are subjunctives in the purpose clauses, but these too are present – i.e., continuous. There is pruning work done on individual branches, but the vine must grow together.

Autonomy is a silly illusion (4, 6). Jesus himself is the only source of life and growth, let alone fruitfulness.

As in 14:12-14, any requests are to be by the brotherhood. Here (v.7), it appears to be connected to fruit-bearing. It is not by any means a blank check. v.8 is part of the package. The Father's glory must be served by the fruit borne by the disciple group.

9-12 The “recipe” for joy and love. Again he urges following instructions. How can people insist that is irrelevant? Also again, Jesus sets up his own behavior as an example (13). The conditional nature of v.14 is just as clear. “IF” introduces the statements in 10 and 14.

15-17 Disciples are an integral, essential part of the plan. Note the purpose constructions in both 16 and 17. The disciples are chosen and appointed to bear fruit that will last, *in order that* prayer in Jesus' name (which, remember, has nothing to do with a formula, but refers to the whole of his being, what he's about) may be granted. And the purpose of his instructions is also delineated: that disciples may continue to love one another.

18-25 These statements, on the other hand, are *not* purpose constructions, but simple cause and effect. There is a clear distinction between the disciples and the “world.” Disciples will always be outsiders.

21-25 explains the opposition that they/we should expect to face. Obviously, the description of attitude fits the “religious” leaders as well (if not better) than the “secular” world. He draws no distinction there. The line is between those who listen and follow, and those who do not. Deliberate ignorance (21,24) is inexcusable. It is impossible to educate those who *choose* to be ignorant.

Notice in v.25 again Jesus refers to “their” law. He does NOT call it “God's law” or word. The Word (1:1) is who is now speaking! And the Word has been heard and rejected by those who fancy themselves its defenders. They view the “word” as a written code, when it is actually a **person!**

26-27 The obedient disciples are now the team that the Spirit is coaching. The assignment is to bear witness. The Spirit's task is future, but theirs is present. “The beginning” is already present, and all they need to do is “keep on.”

JOHN 16

1-4 These warnings are not attempts to terrify people. *Skandalizo* refers to a baited trap set for an animal, or a trap or snare set by an enemy. Jesus is describing dangerous territory, but he has given the instructions needed to avoid being “caught” by opponents. He will no longer be physically present to deflect attacks. Being outcasts from the established institution is a given: even (or especially) those in authority are so deceived as to assume killing to be “offering service to God.” (Sound familiar?) But the reason for the deception is clear: they have not troubled themselves to become acquainted (*egnosan*) with Jesus.

5-11 The Holy Spirit, as “coach”, has it all sorted out. The *hamartia* – shortcomings – of the world are its simple refusal to follow Jesus. This has nothing to do with the “sin” represented as deliberate acts of transgression (*paraptoma*). The “world” has chosen ignorance over faithfulness. (10) Justice (*dikaiosune*) is demonstrated by Jesus' return to the Father. This is a *legal*, not a theological word. The resurrection totally reverses the verdict passed by the legal system (the Justice Department?) The Spirit is able to exercise – and teach disciples to exercise – *krisis* – discernment – judgment *without* a prefix, and therefore not automatically implying condemnation. The “ruler of the world” has been shown to be on the wrong side, by opposing Jesus.

12 – There's a lot more that they/we need to learn, but it has to come in stages. Jesus understands that there is a limit to what they/we can absorb at one time. The Spirit will lead us *en (in)* truth/truthfulness. The preposition is not *eis* – into. This is important. In order to be led, one must already be committed to Jesus and his truth. This is not referring to beginning, but to *continuing* the journey. Prepositions matter.

13-15 The Spirit is maintaining the connection that already exists. The message/ function is not new – just the means of delivery. The Holy Spirit is now the designated intermediary by which/whom Jesus intends to communicate with his followers. This again has something to do with that elusive concept, his glory.

16-18 I think there's a reason for the interplay between *theoreite* and *opsesthe*. The disciples are puzzled by it, and if both implied “see” in the usual physical sense, their bewilderment would be strange. But *theoreo* is used of spectators at a game or race; of contemplating or considering an idea; of observation, speculation, investigation (the word from which English “theory” is derived.) On the other hand, *opsesthe* is the future form of *horao*, which is sometimes used parallel to the use of

oida, “I know”. It may be used in contrast to blindness (physical or mental). It may imply paying attention, as well as to behold an object or person. It may also refer to making provision for a person or occasion, to discernment or perception. I believe Jesus is saying that while they will no longer see him physically, they will begin to “see” on another level. They will begin to understand.

19-22 Realizing their confusion, Jesus uses the same two words again. His explanation indicates that a change in their relationship, and their understanding, is about to take place. Mourning will morph into rejoicing: a joy so complete that it can never be obliterated. The “world” doesn't ultimately win.

23-28 forms another lesson on Jesus' identity with the Father. *aiteo* in 23, 24, and 26, is not a usual word for “praying”. It is used of simply asking a person to do or give something. In fact, even traditional translations do not relate it to “prayer.” Usually it is simply requesting a favor. It is not connected with asking for information – that's usually *erotao*. The use of this word, usually used among equals, would also indicate an altered relationship. Note that all the “you's” are plural. Note also the replay of Jesus referring to “in my name.” Remember that refers to identification with all that he is and does.

29-32 “Now we get it” becomes “no you don't.”

32-33 But even after predicting their unfaithfulness, his purpose is their “having peace.” His peace is obviously a very different kind. Centered in his not being alone! And the peace contrasts *en emoi*, with expected hassles *en to kosmo* -- in the world.

33 – *Nenikeka* is a perfect tense, not future. It has already happened!

JOHN 17

1-2 Glory/glorify again: even for Jesus, the source has to be the Father. *Pases sarkos* has to be an objective genitive – none of the other uses without a preposition fits at all. The *purpose (hina)* of Jesus' authority is to give life. “Flesh”, here, has to refer to humanity. There is no “sinful nature” in sight.

3-4 More definitions: “eternal life” is acquaintance (*ginoskosin*) with the only real God and with Jesus. Pretty simple – and extremely profound. This, and Jesus' previous statement in 12:50, are the only specific New Testament definitions of the term. Likewise, Jesus offers a definition of “glorifying God”: **he has done it by finishing his assignment** (4). He is now ready (5) to resume his former position/condition.

6-8 Jesus now lists the characteristics that define the people who have been given to him: (1) he has revealed the Father's “name” (personality) to them; (2) they have followed instructions; (3) they recognized that all Jesus did and said had its source in the Father; (4) They accepted the message as from the Father, recognized the connection, and trusted Jesus.

9-19 He also has concerns for the people he's leaving in the world: he's not going to be around to keep them safe as he has in the past. In their unity (11) is safety and identity with Jesus and the Father. His legacy is (13) complete joy – together; (14) hatred from the world, where they/we don't belong, (15) protection from the Evil One – even though they are not out of the world. (16-17) It is the Word of Truth that both separates disciples from the world and incurs its wrath, and sets them/us apart for the use of God. With that equipment (18-19), they/we are sent into the world with the same assignment that Jesus had now fulfilled. Jesus himself is the pattern for *hagiasmenoi*– being set-apart (the official term was “sanctified”). I have chosen to avoid such “loaded” words because of the way they have been altered over the years. There is nothing “sanctimonious” here – Jesus was mightily involved in the messy business of life. “Setting apart” is a matter of **purpose, not status**. The operative word is “truly”. There is false “setting apart, as well.

20-23 *Hosin*, in the purpose clauses, is present subjunctive. The *continual* unity of the brotherhood, past, present, and future, with each other and with Jesus, is in view. “Glory” and “unity” are all tied up together. This is the only way the world will ever be convinced.

24-26 has a single message: **we are loved and wanted!** This soars above the intricacies of vocabulary, and the cultural ramifications of the concept of “name,” which is repeated here. (Remember, pious Jews were forbidden to speak the name of God – it was too “holy”.) The mutual identification is far beyond our grasp as mortals. One can only give thanks.

JOHN 18

1-11 The key here is in v.4. It may not look that way, but Jesus is in complete control. This is emphasized by the two *ego eimi* statements (5 and 6). Is v.6 a demonstration of God's power – to make it clear that they had power over Jesus only because he allowed it? John names the injured servant, but neglects to mention his healing (Lk.22:51).

15-16 The “other disciple” is not named. The term has been applied to more than the original twelve, but some identify this with John himself. It could have been Joseph or Nicodemus, who were members of the council and so would have been acquainted with Caiaphas. The fact is, we don't know. But here it seems that Peter's association with the “connected” disciple must have been a clue to his identity.

20 – Jesus can say in all honesty that **he had done nothing in secret**. How has his church strayed so far from that pattern?
22-23 Even the most determined enemies cannot testify that he has said or done anything wrong. The simple truth is something politicians can't handle!
15-17, and 25-27 – Peter's dilemma is dealt with in the synoptic accounts.

28 What a time to worry about being “unclean”! You can railroad a man to execution, but can't enter a forbidden building? Shows what happens when the rituals of an institution take over. Pilate indulges their scruples. 30 – They can't even come up with a legal charge, but (31) they had already passed sentence.

33-37 Poor Pilate hasn't got a clue. He can't get his head around a Kingdom that has nothing to do with the world. This is not actually a source genitive, because it uses a preposition, but the effect is the same. **Jesus' kingship neither derives from, nor is defended by, a power struggle**. This is totally foreign to Pilate.
38 – His question may be read as either cynical or despairing – maybe it is some of each. Other classical uses of *aletheia* – truth – include “genuine, reality (as opposed to appearance), a real event;” or, referring to people, “sincerity, frankness, candid honesty, vindicated by fulfillment.”
38-40 Despite his confusion, Pilate refuses to convict Jesus of any crime. But lacking the courage to release him, he throws it back to the crowd, who prefer Barabbas. (Compare Mt.27:16, Mk.15:7, and Lk.23:25). Mark and Luke label Barabbas as a murderer; John calls him a thief.

JOHN 19

1-5 Was the mistreatment a bid for pity? It seems strange, if Pilate was truly convinced of his innocence.
6-9 Lacking guts, Pilate tries to shift responsibility.
10-11 Jesus is the only one who understands the hollow nature of authority. His extending compassion to Pilate is outstanding. But politics wins – temporarily (12-16).
19-22 Is Pilate's writing of the label a strange sort of confession of faith?

25-27 As the eldest son, Jesus would have been responsible for his mother's care. She could have been quite destitute, after he was executed. Even at such a time, he provides for her care. Tradition assumes this disciple to have been John. There is no evidence, internal or external, except for tradition.

28-29 *tetelestai*, a perfect passive tense, implies “fulfilled, accomplished, brought to completion. To be finished or made effective.” It probably refers to the fulfillment of both Scripture and his assignment.

31-37 Now that the dirty work is done, the “authorities” turn back to Sabbath regulations. The stabbing, etc., obviously had some connotation obscured by history. Most explanations sound contrived.
38-42 Nicodemus and Joseph show up again. Neither identified publicly with the disciple group, but both seem to gain courage for the sad responsibility of faithful friendship.

JOHN 20

1-10 The detailed description of the burial cloths is good evidence that at least in this case, John is the “other disciple” of whom he writes. A grave-robber would not have left expensive linen in a pile, nor neatly folded the smaller cloth. (8) *What* did he/they “believe”, or to what/whom did he/they “become faithful”? John says that they hadn't figured out the resurrection part yet (9). They must have pretty well ignored Mary.

11-18 In this account, the messengers do not give her the news: Jesus himself does. *Hapto* conveys more the sense of “hanging on, fastening, grasping” than the more common “don't touch.” Clearly, she would have wished that he not leave. But she herself is made a messenger to the other disciples.

19-22 Jesus was not handicapped by their being locked-in by their fears. He bestows peace, and provides ample evidence that it is he. His instructions are interesting. The “sending” is a present tense – continuous. The instructions to “receive” *labete* the Holy Spirit is cast in the aorist imperative. *Lambano* is listed as “to take, grasp, seize, even carry off as a prize or booty of war!” It is used of possession by a deity or spirit. Later it refers to receiving hospitality. There are many different words that have been translated “receive”. This one is stronger than many, and often occurs with several prefixes. Is there a reason why there is no definite article this time with *pneuma hagian*?

23 – The shifts from aorist and present subjunctive in the conditional clause to perfect passive indicative in the main clause is puzzling. According to Liddell/Scott, *av* belongs to the apodosis of a conditional statement, not the protasis, which would require it to be used with *ei* (if). But no *ei* appears. Therefore, we must question whether this statement is conditional at all. Might it be a question, not of power, but of discernment? The Holy Spirit is to enable disciples to discern whether a person's failures (shortcomings) *have been* removed or retained, and convey that understanding to the individual in question? Or may it be a contraction of the preposition *ana*? This is rarely used with the genitive. Moulton says it is a substitute for *ean*, which would incorporate the *ei*. But I think the perfect passive definitely communicates the discernment aspect, in either case. Not sure how that could be coherently translated, however.

24-29 Thomas missed out on that encounter. It must have seemed to him that the others were delusional. People make a big deal about his “doubting” -- Jesus did not scold him for his hesitation. Gullible is not necessarily good, nor an indication of “faith”. Jesus supplied the evidence Thomas needed. I believe Thomas was convinced, not by the seeing, but because Jesus *knew* what he had said he needed. Jesus did “bless” those who become faithful without seeing – but he did not disparage Thomas' need.

30-31 John is very up-front about his reason for writing. It is unapologetically evangelistic. Most manuscripts use all present tenses in the purpose clauses. Nestle brackets a sigma in the first, which would, as an aorist, indicate *beginning* to become faithful. The present tenses carry more of a flavor of encouragement -- “This is all real! *Continue* in faithfulness, and in the consequent life.” A few manuscripts add *aionion* to *zoen* but very few. The “life” is *in his name* – *en onomati autou*. Linguistically, that is a puzzle; culturally, it would frequently imply depth association.

JOHN 21

2 This time when John “calls the roll” he mentions *two* “other disciples.” If convention is to be accepted, he would be one, although he is never named, but who is the other? and is this John *not* one of the “sons of Zebedee”? They are listed separately. There is only one “John” on Mark's (3:13-18), Luke's (6:12-16), or Matthew's (10:1-9) lists. John himself records no catalog of the twelve. Was there perhaps more flexibility in the group than we realize?

7 “The disciple whom Jesus loved” -- here, *egapa*; in 20:2 he used *ephilei*. 13:23 also uses *egapa*. Might the difference be less than people normally assume? (“But it makes such a good sermon!”)

15 – The conversation with Peter, though, does give the impression of a deliberate choice of words. However, please notice that *agapao* is used in Mt.5:46 of “tax collectors”-- hardly a “godly” group!

17 – Is Peter hurt by the change of language, or by the parallel of three questions to his three denials? Likewise, the shift from *boske*(feed) to *poimaine*(shepherd) and back is not as clear as people like to make it sound.

I'm intrigued at *Ioannou* being applied to Peter as a surname. Most translators have rendered it “Jonas” or “Jona”, but the lexicons do not distinguish it from “John.” Might one of the “John's” been Peter's dad? An interesting speculation. *Iona* is given as an alternate reading, but the majority text has *Ionnou*.

18-19 – The prophecy might not be completely clear, but the instructions – **follow me** – are unmistakable.

20-23 What the other guy is doing is not ours to say. Or necessarily to understand.

24-25 John declares himself to be a witness to all that he has written.

ACTS: “THE APOSTLES' ACTIVITIES”

The introduction (1-2) clearly indicates that this is a “sequel” to Luke's gospel. Like its predecessor, it is addressed to “Theophilus” (see introductory material for Luke), essentially taking up where he left off.

Luke himself does not arrive on the scene until more than halfway through – chapter 16 – when he begins to use “we” in describing the journeys. So presumably the first half is derived from sources similar to those he used before – folks who were present.

Peter must have been a contributor, since some of his sermons are quoted (unless somebody kept a file!) Others, notably Stephen's, are also quoted. (Was someone taking notes? Stephen died before Luke joined the group.)

Regardless, Luke must have spent a lot of “quality time” with various ones of the brethren. The narrative covers the time between Jesus' ascension and Paul's imprisonment in Rome, thought to be around the early 60s AD, during the persecution under Nero. The date of writing can only be conjecture: sometime around then, or even later, after the destruction of Jerusalem, has been suggested.

I have not seen a proposal of any other author. Although people who categorically deny that anything was committed to writing during the first century, also categorically deny all attributed authorship, no one has put forth an alternate suggestion. The vocabulary of Acts contains a number of words that occur elsewhere in the New Testament only in Luke's gospel narrative, which furnishes evidence that at least the two works belong to the same author.

Thus, the present notes are written under the assumption that Luke, the doctor mentioned in Paul's epistles, has, with the help of earlier apostles, drawn together an anecdotal history of the earliest days of the church, as it spread from Jerusalem throughout the Roman Empire.

ACTS 1

Luke begins with a more detailed account of Jesus' ascension than he included at the end of his gospel (24:50-53). He summarizes the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, and gives a much more detailed account of Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit. The use of *perimeno*, which indicates basically “hang around”, in v.4, is interesting. There is no prescribed prayer or course of study.

6 - Obviously, the disciples would prefer having a game-plan, and knowing how it would all come out. Wouldn't we all?! But that's none of our business. (7) It's under the Father's authority.

Jesus' words are significant in that regard. Previously when he sent them out, he gave them “power *and* authority” *dunamis* and *exousia* (Lk.9:1). This time, it is only *dunamis* – the *ability* to follow directions. Note that *esesthe* is a future indicative – NOT an imperative. It IS going to happen. Notice also that all the “you's” are plural.

9-14 – Staring up into the sky was not part of the instructions. So the whole crowd goes back to Jerusalem: the listed disciples, “the women”, including Mary, and Jesus' brothers, who must have joined the group by now. We are not told when that happened. There must have been others also, if the total was 120 by Pentecost. Not having a clue what else to do, they prayed. A better choice than their descendants often make, when faced with uncertainty!

15-26 It looks like Peter got tired of waiting. He patched together a few Bible references with the local gossip about Judas, and decided to get organized. (How thoroughly modern!) There is no hint of any leading or instructions from the Lord. *Jesus* had said to wait for the Spirit! But the rest went along with the suggestion. Probably they were getting antsy about the waiting, too. And after all, Jesus *had* talked about witnesses. Organization is what happens when people get tired of waiting for the Holy Spirit, and jump the gun on their own initiative.

It's amusing that groups who institutionalize “the lot” fail to recognize that this was Peter's idea, not Jesus', and it was done **before** the arrival of the Holy Spirit. We aren't told that it was *wrong*, but this is the last we ever hear of Matthias. Maybe not wrong, but certainly irrelevant.

ACTS 2

1- *Epi to auto*, which occurs for the first time here (again in the end of v.47), seems to have been a characterization of extraordinary unity among the brethren. It is virtually impossible to translate literally -- “upon /toward the same ---” the same *what?* Moulton says “in the same place”, which works here, but not everywhere. Liddell/Scott refers to a Homeric use denoting sameness or agreement, which would do most places. I think there is more to it than meets the eye. *Homou* is equally puzzling. It is an adjective with no obvious antecedent. I am not fully comfortable with having used “like-mindedly,

in one place”, but did not come up with a better solution.

2 – It should be noted as in 1:11, *ouranos*, which translators generally switch between “sky” and “heaven” more or less at random, is the same word. To differentiate is a presumption, not responsible translation.

3-4 – Note the movement between “each” and “all”. This experience was *both* individual and collective. *Neither* is valid in isolation.

5 – People had come from all over for the feast. As noted previously, most would have understood Greek and Latin. But the message was too important to confine to a second language. It really doesn't matter whether the miracle was in the speaking or in the hearing – I would guess probably both – due to the note in v.4 that they began to speak in other *languages* (*glossais*), but the hearers recognized even their own native *dialects* (*dialekto*) v.6. No wonder everyone was “shocked and puzzled” (11)!

But the message was clear: the greatness of God!

14 – This time, Peter quotes Scripture at the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Quite different. He's not arranging an organization any more – simply announcing what the Lord has done. Interestingly, he is said to be “among the eleven.” Has Mathias already dropped out? It is also interesting that even way back when Joel was prophesying, old and young, men and women were all included.

20 – Many of the people in the crowd were probably in Jerusalem and witnessed the eclipse that took place at the time of Jesus' death (Lk.23:45).

22-46 All that has happened is the vindication of the glorious triumph of Jesus! After the resurrection, as Jesus revealed himself to his followers, suddenly all the prophesies fell into place. Pentecost has now opened that revelation to the world. If Jesus were not alive, this could not be taking place.

37 – *Metanoesate* is an aorist imperative. They must definitively turn from their old life/ way of thinking and acting. Literally, it means “change your mind,” but life is the result of that. This choice is to be symbolized quite publicly, by submitting to baptism. This too is aorist passive: a deliberate, decisive act *Aphesis* is listed in Liddell/Scott as: release, dismissal, discharge; **a starting point in a race**, leave-of-absence, remission of a debt. All indicate *total removal of hamartia*. This is a terribly misunderstood word. It has been lumped together with *paraptoma* – deliberate transgressions – into the English term “sin”, when it is a completely different concept. I have usually chosen to represent *hamartia* with “failures”. L/S lists: to miss the proper road, to miss a target, to fail of one's purpose, to lose, to neglect, an error of judgment. *This is a critical distinction*.

The result is the promised Holy Spirit: the gift they have just seen/observed/experienced.

39 – The offer could not possibly be more universally opened! Peter had no idea how “far off” some of the folks of whom he spoke might be! He needed more instructions on this later.

40 – Interesting – it is “**this crooked generation**” from which Peter urges them to be “rescued/saved” -- he says nothing about “hell” or the “anger /wrath/punishment of God”.

42-47 The result of *Spirit-led* evangelism was the immediate formation of a sharing, studying, celebrating brotherhood! *Proskarterountes* is a present participle describing the committed group. L/S lists: “to adhere firmly, to persist obstinately, to remain in attendance, to devote oneself to an occupation”. They couldn't get enough! Of what? The apostles' teaching – listening to those who had “been there”; Sharing -- “fellowship” (see *koininia* in *Citizens of the Kingdom, chapters 7 and 12*); and the breaking of bread – mentioned twice. This can refer equally to the observance of sharing ordinary meals together, and to using the bread and cup deliberately in witness to the unity of the group with each other and with the Lord. There is no indication that a particular location or ceremony was required – *certainly* not the supervision of anyone “in charge”. Can you imagine eleven disciples needing “officiate” for more than three thousand people, gathered in who-knows-how-many homes – *daily?* (46) Prayers (*proseuchais*) were constant. Nothing programmed or formal in this word. It is more like “hanging out” with the Lord. They met both in the temple and from house to house. Daily. Their praising God overflowed into a gracious attitude toward “all the people”, enabling the Lord to add constantly to the community. If you are running an organization or corporation, *you* have to be concerned about the “adding.” In a Spirit-led community, that is the Lord's job. Ours is to *be* the community to which he can add! Here is *epi to auto* again, in a setting where it is difficult to interpret it as location. KJV says “to the church.” ASV “to them”, Weymouth “to their number”, Berkley “to the group”. Jerusalem “to the community.” I tend to go with the latter.

ACTS 3

Apparently, they continued to observe “scheduled” prayers, as well as their daily meetings. I have not seen this researched, as to whether first century Judaism had something similar to the Muslim system of scheduled formal prayers or not. At any rate, Peter and John were simply going to a prayer-session at the temple, not conducting any kind of campaign.

However, this incident of healing was nothing new. 2:43 reports “many signs and wonders” occurring at the hands of the apostles. The location just gave this one higher visibility.

It has been remarked that “The church no longer needs to say, 'I have no silver or gold,' but neither can it any longer say 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!'” I strongly suspect there is a connection, and I believe the connection is the change of focus of attention, and of status. As a power to be reckoned with, the institutional church has traded Jesus' power for the power of the world. And Jesus made very clear who the power of the world belongs to, and by whom it is distributed.

No one had to be psyched into believing that something unusual had happened. It was obvious. Those who insist on a person's “claiming” healing in the absence of evidence are as much in error as those who deny its possibility. 12 – Peter doesn't start preaching until he sees the crowd in a commotion about what they had *seen!* And he takes no credit. He minces no words about those who were complicit in Jesus' death. He cuts them some slack (17) due to their ignorance, but is very clear that a major change needs to be made (19, 26). (23) The definition of faithfulness has changed radically.

ACTS 4

The authorities interrupt. “Sit down, you're rocking the boat!” Their problem is connecting Jesus to the resurrection. Pharisees would have said they “believed” in the resurrection (Mt.22:23 f) – just not connected to Jesus. Contrast vv. 3 and 4. Peter and John are carted off to jail, but another couple thousand people come to faithfulness. Who won?

5-6 Annas and Caiaphas had a dynasty going. They fancied that *they* needed to give permission for any such goings-on. “Church hierarchies” are nothing new, either.

8-12 Peter's reply was plain: *Jesus'* commission supersedes their permission! Why is the institution *still* oblivious to that? The officers of the corporation aren't in charge any longer. **Jesus is.** And he is the *only* one.

13-22 Total frustration. “Ordinary people” are not supposed to be able to do/say such things. But what to do about the evidence? Shut them up. But Peter and John flatly refuse to shut up.

23-30 The lines are drawn with extreme clarity. Note that the prayer of the group is not for defense or revenge, but for confidence and courage to continue the work and testimony: to speak (29) and to serve(30).

32-36 The stress produced a pulling together, and even deeper sharing – NOT the sniping and blaming that occurs in a corporation. There is no indication of any compulsion here – just mutually providing for needs. 31-36 is, in a real sense, the answer to the prayer of 24-30.

31 – Note that these folks had been present at Pentecost, and/or otherwise *already* had received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The “filling” spoken of here has to be another “infusion” to meet the current crisis. There is never any indication that only a single “filling” is to be expected.

ACTS 5

There is much that we do not know about this situation, and therefore a lot of speculation has arisen. A few things should be noted: There is *no* intimation that the contribution of assets was compulsory. No form of *pas* appears. Also, *time* is somewhat ambiguous, with its definitions ranging from references to non-monetary honor or esteem, to value, the price of a sale, taxable value, cost, expense, liability, or profit. The challenge to Ananias was on the grounds of his *deception*, rather than the quantity of his contribution. The honor accorded to Barnabas (4:36-37) may have led Ananias to desire the same reputation.

One may wonder why they buried Ananias without telling his wife! 8-9 – It is clear that husband and wife are held equally responsible for the deception. Dishonesty of any kind cannot be tolerated in the new society.

A mixture of fear and respect is not surprising (11), since word would certainly get around. The multitude of healings do not seem to have been confined to believers (12-16) since 16 notes that *hapantes*(everyone) was healed. It is instructive that the “faithful ones” being added (14) specifically are said to include both men and women.

17-18 We are not told which of “the apostles” were involved this time. 19-21 – the deliverance from prison seems almost to be a slap in the face to the temple authorities. Their unexplained (to the bigwigs) release seems to have mitigated their

treatment, at least for a while. 27-32 Peter emphasizes God's over-ruling of their previous sentence. The day's events must have lent some credibility to the possibility of God's involvement. Note (32) the gift of the Holy Spirit is represented as being given "to those who *obey* him."

38-39 Gamaliel is more rational than the others, recognizing that maybe God *does* have a hand in this.

41-42 Beating was supposed to be a deterrent, but had the opposite effect.

ACTS 6

1-7 More things need attention than twelve people can keep up with. So they don't *try* to do it all. Delegating authority is sensible. The decision is made by "the multitude of the disciples," as is the choice of responsible folks. Nothing is done in closed, "executive session." From the names, it is clear that the ones chosen were from the Greek community – the ones who had raised the concern.

7 – Interesting that even priests found the new community attractive. Perhaps priests on the lower rungs of the hierarchy also found it oppressive. Is that why they are mentioned after the incident of the informal appointment of the deacons?

8 f – Stephen was chosen to help look after justice for the Greek widows. But he soon became a powerful preacher/evangelist/apologist. And got into trouble for it – NOT with the church – but with its attackers. How sad that this is so often reversed in modern times.

Stephen's activity was attested by "signs and wonders," as well as Spirit-given eloquence.

The charges, however, centered around the "holy place", and "changing customs" -- both of which, in the light of the resurrection and Pentecost, were already obsolete.

ACTS 7

Stephen's sermon re-caps Old Testament history – a history of people rejecting the messengers God had provided for them (9, 27, 39, 51).

Basically, in their rejection of Jesus' Kingdom, they are simply following the pattern of their ancestors (52). The history has been one of consistently opposing both God's message and his messengers.

54-56 Stephen is privileged to see Jesus' glory, and to declare it, before he dies.

59-60 He follows the example set by Jesus, committing himself to Jesus, and praying for mercy toward his killers. In 59, note the use of "spirit"-- *to pneuma mou*, (cf. also Lk.23:46 and parallels), *not psuche*. Neither Jesus nor his followers subscribed to the Platonic "soul" philosophy, which was as common in their culture as it is today.

ACTS 8

1-4 --Once the predators tasted blood, violence increased. That phenomenon is not rare. But the scattering turned out to be a good thing.

There are those who preach that things were getting too cozy in Jerusalem, so "God had to send" a persecution to stir them up. This is **nowhere** found in the New Testament. The conspiracy against Stephen, who was faithfully serving, was an unmitigated evil, as was Paul's (Saul's) subsequent eradication campaign. But by the power (and decentralization) of the Holy Spirit, the Lord **used** even this great evil for his good purposes. The message spread ever more widely.

5-13 – Philip – we are not told whether this was the apostle Philip or the one chosen as a deacon, or even if they were the same person – ventured into Samaria, where he was received as warmly as Jesus had been (John 4). Many were attracted by the healings and deliverances, as they had previously been "wowed" by Simon's magic. Spectacle-chasers are always fickle.

The use of the various forms of *pisteuo* in 12-13 is problematic. First is the aorist: the Samaritan folks "became faithful", or "trusted" Philip's preaching, and received baptism into the Kingdom. The very same form of the same word is then used of Simon – though it is noted that he was just attracted by the manifested powers. Was Philip unaware of his duplicity? Or just giving him the benefit of the doubt? It is likewise uncertain why the Spirit was not bestowed immediately, as seems to have been expected earlier. This time (14-17), that gift awaited the prayers of Peter and John, who came down from Jerusalem to see what was going on. Was the discernment of more experienced brethren needed? But surely Philip would have detected a problem, had Simon offered to buy the power from him. Peter, of course, was never one to mince words.

Simon had obviously seen a way to regain and increase his own powers over the villagers. Peter is not shy about **denouncing the idea that a gift of God was for sale (21). Such an idea is clear evidence that the perpetrator is**

not connected to the Kingdom. How sad, that this is no longer assumed!

Peter characterizes it as *kakias* – a moral or philosophical term. *Kakos* is the opposite of *agathos* (good); it is a very serious charge, but less so than *poneros*, which is more connected to the personification (and contagion) of evil (so in Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*). So in this instance, it is a reference to Simon's own error, from which he is urged to turn away (*metanoesian*). He is still eligible for forgiveness (which implies having it *removed* from his heart.) He must have done so, since he asks for their prayers.

25-26 reveals an *enormous* expression of trust in the Spirit! After intense instruction, the apostles return to Jerusalem, and Philip is sent on to Gaza, leaving the new congregation with only local leadership! But they have certainly had a demonstration that “you don't mess with the power of God!” Everyone must have recognized Simon's conversion and repentance as genuine.

26-40 – Philip “just happens” along the road when needed. People who insist on this as a “pattern” for “evangelism” neglect to notice that the Isaiah passage is what the Ethiopian was already puzzling over. Philip did not “choose” it -- he simply started where the man was. *Anything* can be a starting point to lead to Jesus! Notice that they weren't required to hunt up some apostles to do the baptizing, or to find some “blessed” or “sanctified” location! All that was required was an open heart and available water. A few manuscripts add that the Holy Spirit immediately fell upon him. This is not in the majority text. In any case, the man continues joyfully homeward. Tradition calls this the beginning of the Ethiopian church.

Philip (39-40) is carried off to Azotus – perhaps 20 miles north of Gaza – and continues all the way north to Caesarea. This must have been quite a walk—looks like nearly 100 miles on the map. The transportation issue is not explained – at least not in the text. The efforts of interpreters are not helpful. Some things are simply beyond our understanding.

ACTS 9

1-9 Saul was at least a person who did not go halfway, with what he believed. Notice (v.2) that he had *requested* authorization for his journey of destruction-- and received it. Jesus had to come personally to get his attention, but then he delegated the rest of the instruction to Ananias, an obscure disciple of whom this is the only mention.

10-19 It is no wonder Ananias argues with the Lord. And please note that he is not scolded for it. In spite of very specific instructions, he protests as if he's afraid the Lord had not heard who this guy was. Nevertheless, he obeys. He must have been scared spitless – yet when he goes in, he addresses Saul as “brother.” *That* is faithfulness.

18 – Saul immediately accepts baptism. Ananias is the only one available to administer it. No fuss is made about that fact. It does not seem to have mattered.

19-22 – Saul immediately becomes as eager to proclaim Jesus as he had been to oppose him. No wonder the Jews were confused. 23 – Their hero-turned-enemy had to be disposed-of. 25 – Now Saul's life is saved by the very people he had come to destroy.

26-30 – How desperately the church needs more like Barnabas. How different our life would have been, if there had been such a person to advocate with some group of brethren! With Barnabas as a sponsor, he became an active and useful part of the brotherhood. But the time was short. 31 – He was ostensibly sent home to Tarsus for his own protection. I wonder if *he* saw it that way?

32-43 – Apparently people tended to wait on Peter when healing was needed – we are not told why. Both Aeneas' and Dorcas' situations attracted people to the Lord.

43 – Peter's staying in the home of a tanner is evidence of a crack in the wall of ceremonial cleanliness, as anyone who handled dead animals would have been, if not an outcast, at least suspect.

ACTS 10

1-8 It sounds like Cornelius was being as faithful as he knew how. His prayers and his merciful behavior must have been viewed as of equal weight, as the order of mention is reversible (2 and 4). The instructions he is given are enviably specific! And he follows them immediately and without hesitation. He must have had a profound influence on his men, also, since the people he sent accepted his explanation readily.

9-20 The way was prepared for their arrival by Peter's vision. But Peter doesn't get nearly as complete an explanation! At

least, not till he has puzzled over it for a while. Even then, the Spirit merely says, “Don't worry about it. I've engineered this.”

21-23 Peter obeys, and extends hospitality to the men, inviting these presumably Gentile messengers into the house where he is a guest. Perhaps Simon the tanner is less likely to feel threatened by this than a “ceremonially clean” person would. They spend the night!

24-33 It is significant that Peter takes along a few brethren from Joppa. He was going at the Spirit's direction, but not free-lancing. He is well aware that he is breaking “the law”, but he does so under orders from the Holy Spirit. The trip must have taken two days each way.

Cornelius obviously recognizes that this is serious. He has assembled quite a crowd, all of whom are apparently expectant and receptive. (28) Peter finally “gets it” about the vision, and makes the appropriate connection.

34-43 Peter's summary is of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as evidence of Jesus' status and power. Faithfulness to Jesus results in the removal (*aphesin*) of *hamartia* (failure to live up to God's standard.) This is “good news” indeed, to people who had been sincerely trying!

44-48 Here, the Holy Spirit is given not only before baptism, but before any formal profession of faith! It's a good thing Peter had those witnesses along. They were “shocked”, but could not deny the reality of what had happened. Baptism followed. Wouldn't it have been great to be part of the fellowship of those “few days”!

ACTS 11

1-18 Peter is called on the carpet about associating with Gentiles. (Note: he is NOT the “supreme leader” that makes all the decisions, or he would not have been challenged.)

His explanation is significant: it includes: (1) his vision, and the Spirit's instructions (2) his taking care to have witnesses along (3) specifics of the encounter (4) God's activity. The situation was then clear to everyone (v.1 -- “the apostles and the brethren in Judea”), and both praise to the Lord and enlightenment to the brotherhood was the result. Note: nowhere is any arrogance or defensiveness evident. A challenge is valid, an explanation is warranted, and sanity prevails. Everyone learns.

19-21 Consequently others follow the example, with outstanding success.

22-24 Sending Barnabas to Antioch was not a re-run of the challenge; it was to check on what was happening, and to provide encouragement (23). This is a man who has proven to be wise and reliable. He has been generous (4:36), willing to take a chance on including people (9:27), and he welcomes and encourages the new folks.

25-26 Ever the “includer,” Barnabas fetches Saul to help with the work in Antioch, and they work together for a year – a helpful apprenticeship for Saul. This must have been an exemplary group. The title “Christian” was applied by observers, who obviously saw a difference in these people.

27-29 Agabus' prophecy is a simple delivery of a message from the Lord about the needs of brethren. The decision to send a “relief offering” comes out of the disciple *group*, not an edict from on high. They choose Barnabas and Saul to be entrusted with the delivery of the gift, men who have proved their integrity for the previous year among the congregation.

ACTS 12

1-2 There's no indication why Herod chose James for execution. It is noted that it is John's brother James. This cannot, then, be the James that took leadership at the Jerusalem Conference, (chapter 15), since that took place later.

3-5 Peter is jailed – probably a further political ploy. BUT the church was praying (not protesting).

6-11 The Lord took action. Peter (9) wasn't even sure what was going on – he didn't have to “claim” anything, just to follow instructions. He only realizes the miracle when he is left alone on a street corner!

12-17 The folks who were praying are just as confused. Peter instructs them to “tell James and the brethren.” Is this the other James, or is the chronology skewed? Or has Peter not yet heard of James' death?

18-19 probably indicates that the guards were executed for their negligence. This would not have been unusual. (Note the reassurance needed by the guards at Jesus' tomb -- Mt.28:14, and the distress of the Philippian jailer – Ac.16:27).

20-23 It is made abundantly clear that while Herod had political power to abuse and kill the believers, his power had limits. He was struck down without human intervention, while showing off his splendor. (Josephus has a similar account.) One

has to wonder why that happens so rarely. Political figures frequently demand adulation that belongs rightly only to God.

25 – Manuscripts differ in the prepositions used here. Some say “to Jerusalem”, others say “from Jerusalem.” Still others say “from Jerusalem to Antioch”, which appears to fit the situation best.

Barnabas, in his usual role of including people, brings Mark along. This would point toward the latter reading, since Jerusalem was Mark's home, and the scene proceeds to shift back to Antioch.

ACTS 13

1-- Note that “prophets” and “teachers” are both plural. No one is a “big cheese.”

2 – Regardless of whether this was a prayer meeting of the congregation or of the prophets and teachers, the Holy Spirit's message was perceived and acted upon by the *group*. There is no indication of how the particular destinations were perceived or chosen.

5 – Interesting that even though they were sent out by a Gentile church, they went to the synagogue first, when they arrived in Cyprus.

6-12 – The encounter with the proconsul was at *his* initiative, and he wanted to listen, not challenge.

The opposition came from Elymas. Notice that Paul did *not* “curse” him. He simply announced what the Spirit had revealed was about to happen. (11) *achri kairou* indicates that his blindness was to be temporary – long enough to make the point that the Lord was in charge. 12 Sergius Paulus was impressed with “the Lord's teaching” -- or, “the teaching about the Lord” (Genitive of content?) -- which must have been assumed to be connected to the demonstration of power.

13 – There is no reason given for Mark's departure. Paul later appears to have considered it tantamount to desertion, but Barnabas did not agree. Leaving Crete, they head for the Asian mainland (now Turkey), at Perga, and continue on to another Antioch. (There were cities named for the Greek conqueror Antiochus Epiphanes in many of the areas he overran.) Here again, (14) they found a Jewish congregation.

14-15 Apparently an invitation to visitors to speak must have been customary. The request is for “a word of encouragement”. Paul, of course, is ready.

16-25 Paul ties Jesus' coming to their own history.

26-42 Notice, he does **not** lay on his listeners the blame for the action of the rulers in Jerusalem. He focuses on the triumph of the resurrection – the fulfillment of God's ancient promise. The message is simply, the Law has failed. But God found a way to make things right. 39 “In this man” -- Jesus – the faithful (*present* active participle) are “made just”. The verb is *present* passive. **It is transformation, not sleight-of-hand.** Both the faithfulness and the transformation are described as a *process*, not an event. (Some manuscripts add “before God.”) The details in which subsequent preachers delight to wallow, are simply not there. If one is faithful to Jesus, he is *made* what he is supposed to be. It's not some theoretical “believing” -- it's *becoming*. And that is enough.

43 Some, apparently, were convinced immediately. A few manuscripts refer to “deserving ones” (*axiountes*) being baptized. At any rate, they are urged to remain faithful.

44-48 “The Jews” here must refer to the leadership, as a large group had already chosen faithfulness. They are jealous of the crowds that have come together. (46) Paul asserts that they have pronounced their *own* judgment – it is not he who condemns them. The offer of life was made to *everyone*.

46-47 They have forgotten their own commission from God, which Paul quotes from Isaiah (49:6): the very *existence* of God's people is for the purpose (*eis*) of straightening out (“saving” --*soterian*) the whole world. “Setting things right” is what we are about.

48 Word order may be significant here: “whoever believed/became faithful” or “whoever was appointed” -- which verb does *hosoi* belong with? It is right between the two, and could be read either way. Usually it has been taken with a “destiny” flavor, but the grammar does not support insistence on that.

49 The message of inclusion spread like wildfire.

50 Interesting that both men and women were enlisted to throw the apostles out. Women listed first! This is not what we have been told about the prevailing culture. Remember that we are now in Greek territory, not Jewish.

51 Paul and Barnabas matter-of-factly move on, obeying the instruction to “shake the dust off their feet.”

52 Presumably this refers to the disciples who remained in Pisidian Antioch.

ACTS 14

1-7 The same pattern prevailed in Iconium – modern Konya. Is there something about the harsh, bleak landscape that breeds extremism? Later centuries saw it become a center of Sufism (dervishes); it appears very conservatively Muslim now. We saw more distinctive clothing there than anywhere else in Turkey, in '06. People responded to Paul's preaching, or at least to the miraculous powers exhibited, but the populace and rulers were divided, and a riot was brewing. So they headed out – continuing to preach.

8-18 The opposite problem presented itself in Lystra. The healing of a crippled man was seen as a visitation of the pagan gods, and they had all they could do to prevent a pagan sacrifice.

19-20 The opposition arrived from Antioch and Iconium, and instigated a stoning, instead. No opinion is expressed as to whether Paul was just knocked out, or resurrected with the prayers of the disciples. But he was well enough to go on to Derbe the next day. These are considerable distances – a long walk.

21 More disciples in Derbe, and apparently the Jewish leaders did not follow there. No incidents reported, at least.

21-24 Checking back with all the places they had been, it is interesting who is doing the “strengthening”! The guys who had been beat up! They are not preaching a “prosperity” gospel – they warn their converts of “many hassles” connected with entering the Kingdom. 23 is a significant pattern: *plural* “elders” are appointed in *every* church – no hierarchy here, either. No conferring of power or clout. Just communal prayer and fasting, committing the new brotherhoods to the Lord.

25-28 Making their way back through Perga, they returned to report back to the folks who had sent them out. Debriefing is an important part of an assignment, cultivating integrity, and allowing the work to be critiqued and evaluated.

ACTS 15

1 – The major manuscripts do not make clear whether these troublemakers were from among the believers, or from the opposition leaders. Some manuscripts add, after “Jews”, “who had become faithful / believed, from the sect of the Pharisees.” Might they have been trying to keep a foot in both camps? Clearly, (v.2) they had not been “sent” by “the apostles and elders”, since the group at Antioch felt they needed to be informed. Who “they” are is not certain in v.2, but v.3 states that Paul and Barnabas were sent “by the church” -- the entire brotherhood. Paul and Barnabas were accompanied by others from Antioch as well.

The news of the inclusion of the Gentiles was received joyfully, all along the way, as well as in Jerusalem – except for one faction, identified the same way as the minority manuscripts characterized the perpetrators of the dispute in v.1. Perhaps they are the same people?

6 – The “apostles and elders” -- we are not told how many – are assembled as arbitrators. Peter's testimony is a reminder that it was God's initiative, not people's, that started the involvement of Gentiles.

12 -- The venue shifts to “the whole multitude”, who then listened to what had happened.

13-21 -- James (not clear which one – see 12:2) undertakes to summarize the discussion, and relate it to Scriptural precedent. His recommendation is that the Gentiles simply be admonished to abandon all pagan practices – all the things listed were integral parts of common pagan worship.

22 – The decision is made by “the apostles and elders with the *whole* church/assembly.” Two new “leaders” are introduced: Judas/Barsabbas and Silas, who are sent to represent the Jerusalem group, in addition to the letter that is drafted.

23-29 Important points are made:

Although the offending individuals came from Jerusalem, they were not sent by the apostles and elders there.

Their teaching was an unwarranted attack upon the genuineness of the conversion (the integrity) of the Gentile converts.

The Jerusalem brethren had reached a consensus of acceptance, attested by sending a couple of their own leaders.

They assume the decision to have been engineered by the Holy Spirit.

A clean break with pagan practice should be the only requirement imposed upon the Gentile believers.

Notice: they did NOT say, “You are fine just as you are.” Change IS expected. But it is a specific kind of change – not one merely requiring peripheral cultural practices. They have been given insight and grace to see that there is a difference.

30-34 The decision is received as *encouragement*, not repression. Judas and Silas are referred to as “prophets/spokesmen” and their function was also encouraging and strengthening (not scaring!) the brethren. They were also free to make their

own decisions about where to serve. (33-34).

35 – Emphasis again is on *plural* teaching and preaching functions-- “with many others.”

36-41 This second trip appears to have been Paul's idea. There is no mention of submitting it to either the brotherhood or the Holy Spirit's guidance. Might this have been a factor in the disagreement that arose? Yet the Lord turned it to usefulness, with two teams sent out. Only Paul and Silas are recorded as having been “committed to the Lord's grace” by the brethren. Is that because Luke has chosen to follow Paul rather than Barnabas? He is not mentioned again, except in a couple epistles. The rift is sad, as without Barnabas' intervention, Paul would not have been included by the apostles. Now he has chosen to give Mark a second chance.

ACTS 16

1-5 Not sure what Paul is doing here. Operating on his own initiative? Timothy is recommended by the brethren, but then Paul, who has *just* made the case for accepting Gentiles, makes this concession to the advocates of Judaizing? In spite of (4) distributing the results of the council decision? There is no mention of guidance – and I wonder if he asked?

6-10 Now suddenly the Holy Spirit reasserts himself, by *blocking* access to some of the places Paul had targeted. The details of the blocking are not outlined.

10 – Luke joins the team. This is the first of the “we” passages. Some hypothesize that Luke himself may have been the “Macedonian man” who bugged Paul so constantly that he was seeing him in his sleep! In any event, the team now heads to Greece.

13 – Lydia is labeled “a worshiper of God” -- but there is only the mention of the Sabbath to indicate that the prayer meeting may have been Jewish. Apparently there was no synagogue – that required a quorum of adult males, and this was a group of women. Gender does not appear to have been an issue. Greek custom in the first century allowed a great deal of autonomy to women. As a business woman, Lydia apparently had the means to offer generous hospitality. Purple goods were a luxury, and very expensive.

16-18 The healing of the fortune-teller is odd, and seems an act of frustration more than compassion.

19-20 The real issue is loss of profit, but the complaint to the officials is religious and political. Things haven't changed much!

22-29 Beaten and in prison, Paul and Silas are praying and singing hymns. After the earthquake, compassion kicks in. The jailer might indeed have been executed for the escape of his prisoners. Of course, danger also accrued to conversion, as had just been made obvious. Notice: the way of faithfulness had been explained to the jailer and his household (32) *before* they were baptized. He had also given “first aid” care to Paul and Silas. Afterward, it looks like a party, all in the middle of the night.

35-40 Apparently, by now the officials had realized the baselessness of the charges. (37) Paul plays the citizenship card. Roman citizens could not be treated like that, and the soldiers knew their jobs, and perhaps their lives, could hang on a complaint.

Nevertheless, when asked to leave, the apostles comply – after they have “encouraged the brethren.” Wait a minute – who needs to be encouraged?

ACTS 17

1-10 Paul followed the usual pattern in Thessalonica, starting at the synagogue, where there was at least a logical starting-place, ideologically. Apparently, local people must have at least frequented, if not joined, the synagogue, as it is “godly” or devout Greeks and prominent (*proton*) women who are mentioned as converts. Strict Jews would have allowed neither, unless the men became proselytes.

So the political uproar, which Luke attributes to jealousy, probably arose from the perception that these “outsiders” would not identify with their institutional structure. Also true to form, the charge they brought before the court was political, not religious.

10-15 The response in Berea is far more faithful -- “What does the Scripture say?” This, as always, led to faithfulness – again, both men and women are included. In first century Greece, women played much more public roles than they did farther east. They are included in all the reports of contacts in Greece, both positive and negative.

It was not far, for the Thessalonian Jews to come to stir up trouble, but quite a long trip to Athens, so Paul had a fairly long wait until Timothy and Silas could get there.

16-21 In Athens, Paul did not confine his efforts to the synagogue. Perhaps he prudently decided not to get run out of town

before the others arrived. The Agora (marketplace), right below the Parthenon and other temples of the Acropolis, was a major gathering place for discussions of all kinds.

22-33 The Areopagos, beside the market, served as a forum for philosophy and debate. Its stony surface, worn smooth by millennia of use for that purpose, overlooks the market below, and the lofty Acropolis towers on the other side. One cannot help being overwhelmed at the multiplicity of deities represented, and many now are just the bases from which statues have long since been looted for museums and trophies.

The Areopagos at that time had spawned a court/council of respected thinkers and philosophers that served a rather more intellectual than political function, although some political leadership was also present. It was not a formal court of law, however: it could be seen as a sort of “peer review”.

Paul addresses them respectfully, quotes their own philosophers, but does not hesitate to correct their perception of their “unknown god.” The people of Athens had made room for all sorts of foreign deities (18). What was one more altar? Just an “insurance policy” in case they had missed someone! Note that although Paul spoke of One superior to all, he does not attack their worship. He simply supersedes it, introducing Jesus as the one to whom all previous perceptions had looked forward. The resurrection was too much for them. Such a thing was not in their cultural universe.

But a few were convinced. Dionysius was a member of the Areopagos council, a prominent citizen. We know Damaris only by name. Women, as far as I have been able to find out, were not councilors; but she must have been around, to hear. The “others” are not named.

It appears that Luke remained in Philippi – his home? -- for the writing reverts to the third person in this chapter.

ACTS 18

2-- Priscilla and Aquila apparently were political refugees. Claudius, a relative of questionable mental capacity, had succeeded the capriciously cruel Caligula as emperor in AD 41. He was despised by the Roman senate, supported by the military. The conquest of Britain, and several notable reforms marked his reign, as well as a paranoia that may well have been justified. Although he instituted judicial reforms, some of which defended the weak, his concern for security may have combined with general Roman xenophobia to expel the Jews in AD 51. At the same time, he campaigned against other Eastern mystery religions, as well as Celtic Druidism, largely because of their proselytizing activities, which he considered a threat to the Imperial religion. Felix, later governor of Judea (23:24), was a member of his court. Nero was his adopted son and successor, after Claudius was poisoned by his fourth wife, Nero's mother.

3-4 Paul teamed up with Aquila and Priscilla in order to support himself while “holding discussions” in the synagogue. (6) His success soured relationships in Corinth, despite the conversion (8) of one of the synagogue leaders; so he moved, to preach and teach next door. (9) The Lord personally encourages and confirms his work. What a privilege!

12-17 Gallio shows himself to be a very rare bird: a political figure who refuses to be manipulated! May his tribe increase! 18 – There is another reference to this custom later (21:24), but neither has an explanation. Speculation is widespread, but the only thing that is certain is simply “what it says” -- it is symbolic of a “vow”.

18-22 Priscilla and Aquila elect to remain at Ephesus. This is the first mention – perhaps the first contact? -- there? Paul makes an appearance at the synagogue but apparently leaves the work in their hands.

22 – Caesarea was the closest seaport to Jerusalem, so it is probably the church there to which Paul “gave greetings” before returning to home base in Antioch.

23 mentions a third journey around the same region (west central Turkey), just checking in on the various congregations.

24-28 Priscilla and Aquila deal very wisely with young Apollos, whose message was deficient. They recognize and appreciate his proficiency in the Scriptures, note his enthusiasm, but carefully correct his errors. They must have gone about it very well, as they soon decided he was ok to send on. Their judgment was vindicated by his helpfulness to the brethren in Corinth/Achaia to whom they had recommended him.

Clearly, all had the welfare of the whole group as a priority. The “senior” team did not react as if the young man was a threat; and he did not arrive with a “conquering” attitude. The results are beneficial for all concerned.

It becomes clear from the next chapter that it was the part about life in/with the Holy Spirit that was missing from Apollos' understanding. If only such lack could be resolved in such a healthy and brotherly fashion today!

ACTS 19

1-6 Here is another excellent example of graciously correcting error, and of receiving correction. Why is that so much more difficult, millennia later? I suppose since the whole idea was new, there was no set-in-concrete “doctrine” to defend, and folks were of a mind to adopt a new life. Clearly, this group was identifiable as “disciples”, but something made it obvious

that the power of the Holy Spirit was missing. It was however quickly granted. In Cornelius' case, the Spirit was given with no instruction having been given; But here, the ignorance of expectation seems to have been a hindrance. This discrepancy should be adequate evidence that there is no “set formula” that must be followed.

Most likely, these were people who were converted under Apollos' ministry before Aquila and Priscilla corrected him. One is made to wonder how many others in those early times, like today, accepted only a “partial” gospel of some sort, due to faulty teaching.

8-20– Three months in the synagogue, and two years in Tyrannus' school, and word spread throughout the province. And this with no radio or tv campaign!

11 – The miraculous healings are called “unusual”. So apparently that was not standard procedure. Without the negative *ou*, the aorist participle was frequently used to refer to chance or fate, as well as “ordinary” expectations. So all of these concepts would be negated in this passage. It is presented as a deliberate action of God. 13-16 Such unusual goings-on naturally produce some phony imitations. Their falsehood is evident. 17-20 This draws a clear line between miraculous happenings that are the work of God, and deceptive “magical” practices – and the faithful lost no time in declaring their new allegiance. There is no statement that they were *required* to destroy the paraphernalia of their previous deceptive practices. It appears to have been a spontaneous expression of their loyalty to the Lord. The financial loss is tallied, but obviously did not deter their decision.

23-40 That was not universally the case, however. Demetrius and his “union” saw their trade threatened – as indeed it was – and this time the local “religion” is invoked on behalf of “business.” The white marble pathway to the theatre surged with angry craftsmen whose market-stalls lined the roadway, as the mob filled the huge theatre (seating 24,000) that is still standing. A formidable lynch mob! Interestingly, this time (31) some of the government officials took steps for Paul's protection. The town clerk, probably a pagan, from his speech, nevertheless quiets the mob and directs the plaintiffs to the courts. It should be noted that he was able to say in all honesty that Paul and his fellows had done or said nothing slanderous about their gods. Modern “evangelists” would do well to follow this example.

What an impressive thing it was, to see the single remaining column of the world-renown “Temple of Artemis of the Ephesians,” standing in a weedy field, with a stork nest on top! “She whom all the world worships”! Sadly, though, the church, said to be that of John the elder, is also in ruins. The remnant is from the 4th century AD. The only thing one hears is about the decline of the Orthodox hierarchy. No trace of the brotherhood established earlier seems to be remembered.

ACTS 20

1-6 Final visits to the churches of Macedonia and Greece. Representatives from many of those groups join the delegation. This *might* be the famine-relief trip that Paul records in II Corinthians, and mentions in Ac.24:17 in his defense before Felix, in which case folks from the donor groups are invited to certify the integrity of the campaign. Luke also rejoins the group (5,6 the “we” references resume), which reassembles in Troas (Troy?). The geography fits.

7-12 It fits for a doctor (Luke) to connect the abundance of lamps (CO and CO₂) with Eutychus' falling asleep. Getting him outside would surely have helped. Does Paul's response approximate an early understanding of CPR? This is not to deny a miraculous restoration, but to wonder if the “miracle” may have been in the proper response being inspired.

13-16 details of the journey. Paul wants to be in Jerusalem by Pentecost. He does not say why: to celebrate? Mitylene, Chios, and Samos are a series of islands off the Turkish coast, which would have been logical stops along a coastal route.

17-38 Why was the farewell to the Ephesian elders at Miletus? The ancient harbor at Ephesus was silted-in by that time, but Kusadasi would have been closer. Probably that was simply the boat's scheduled stop.

18-21 Paul reviews his exemplary history among them, which modern envoys would do well to emulate.

22-24 He has been “warned by the Holy Spirit” about the outcome of the trip, but chooses to ignore the warning. He does not speak of any leading to that conclusion, nor of any counsel of the brotherhood. One would like to ask him his reasoning. It does not seem to square with other admonitions. Was he “winging it” on his own?

28-30 Paul delivers his own warning to the elders: of treason. Some will come from outside, some from inside the group. Watchfulness is essential.

31-32 This is critical. Only the power of God can protect the gathered group. Although the infinitives are aorist, (oikodomesai, dounai), the watchfulness (*gregoreite*) is a *present* (continuous) imperative.

33-35 Paul reminds them of his example: self-support – not making a profit from his work. He paid not only his own

expenses, but those of his companions! What a difference from modern practice!
Note especially v.35 – the purpose for working, is to provide for the weak!
The farewell scene is of love and commitment.

ACTS 21

1-3 Details of the journey down the coast, sheltered by a succession of islands. More open water, heading for Phoenicia. “Syria” was the designation of the Roman province of which Palaestina and Judea were parcels, not the modern country by that name.

4-6 The counsel of brethren here is also against going to Jerusalem. Warned by the Spirit (20:22), and reinforced by the brotherhood (4), Paul nevertheless persists. Again, there is no reference to leading. Is he just tired? Stubborn?

7 Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea – continuing down the coast.

8-14 In Caesarea, the warnings are reinforced by the prophecy of Agabus. Paul had listened to him before, when he spoke of the famine. But now he is adamant. (Luke is still involved.) The wish for “the Lord's will” seems to be one of frustration, rather than a prayer.

15-25 Meeting with the elders, Paul reports on his trip. They propose a concession to the Judaizers, which Paul, uncharacteristically, accepts. No mention of any instruction either by the Spirit directly or by prophecy. This is usually touted as faithfulness on Paul's part – but I wonder.

27-36 False accusation by the Asian Jews who had been his nemesis on their own turf. But why was Paul even **in** the temple? Did he still hope no break would need to be made?

30 Is the locking of the temple doors symbolic? Or prophetic? (Compare Rev.3:8 and 21:25)

31-40 Paul is rescued by the Roman authorities, who apparently had no clue what the fuss was about. The commander is impressed by Paul's linguistic fluency. Paul plays the citizenship card again.

ACTS 22

1-2 Suiting the language to the audience, he now gives a brief bio to the crowd,

3-5 identifying with their distrust of the new message,

6-16 describing the circumstances of his conversion.

17-21 He had been instructed to leave Jerusalem because his testimony would not be accepted. Is his response in 19-20 a case of arguing with the Lord's assessment of the situation?

Paul's accounts of events immediately following his conversion are not consistent. Here, he skips over his activity in Damascus, and the advice of the apostles (9:19-30). In later epistles, he makes reference to other events not mentioned in either of these accounts.

21-22 The reference to Gentiles sets off the crowd again, confusing his protectors.

24-49 Another round of citizenship, and also pulling status, of hereditary vs. purchased citizenship.

Paul did not hesitate to take advantage of his “rights.” And again, there is no mention of his being led or directed.

30 The Roman commander is still trying to figure out what's going on. Could he possibly be so clueless about the factions in the city he was charged to keep under control? Of course, that is not rare in an official of an occupying power----.

ACTS 23 Paul before the Sanhedrin

1-5 Is Paul being sarcastic? Is Ananias' behavior the issue -- “A real high priest wouldn't act like that!”? Or has Paul been away so long, and the office so highly politicized that he really *doesn't* know who's the titular head-honcho? Either reading is possible. The grammar gives no clue.

6-10 And either would fit with his very political response. The Romans are more confused than ever.

11 Now, at length, another vision. This too can be variously interpreted: either, “You've done well, hang in there,” or “You wouldn't listen, so this is what will happen.”

12-15 I wonder how long this group starved themselves?

16 This was one gutsy kid, to go into the Roman fort.

16-22 The ambush is averted. Why did the commander believe the boy? Perhaps so much wacky stuff was going on, that it sounded plausible.

23-30 An enormous escort, for one man! Of course, Lysias manages to cast himself as the brave rescuer of a Roman citizen – just a bit of a stretch! 29 He recognizes the nonsensical nature of the charges, but (30) represents his continued custody being for Paul's own safety. Politics never changes!
31-35 Waiting for a trial on charges that everyone knows are false.

ACTS 24

1-9 Tertullus is the consummate political advocate. He even manages to get in a snide attack on Lysias, probably miffed at the inconvenience of needing to come to Caesarea, rather than simply disposing of the dissident in Jerusalem. The governor is not deceived.

10-20 Paul is very straightforward. He acknowledges that they consider him heretical, but still tries to maintain the connection with the ancestral “hope”. (17) He reminds them that the purpose of his being in Jerusalem was to bring offerings, and (19) that it was foreigners who started the trouble.

22-23 Felix is knowledgeable enough to realize the whole affair is a sham. But protocol must now be observed. 24-26 And of course there's always the possibility of a bribe.

Curious about the conversations with Felix and Drusilla. The governor's having a Jewish wife – no references as to whether that was common. (22) He knew “quite a bit” about the Way (of Jesus); but she is not called a disciple or a follower. *akribesteron* refers to precision, accuracy. The implication would be that he had devoted some study to it.

25 Why would Felix have “become frightened”? The discussions dealt with “justice, self-control, and the coming judgment” -- perhaps he judged *himself* by the criteria of which Paul spoke? If he was angling for a bribe, none of those factors would score him very high.

27 Leaving a person whom he knew to be innocent in custody for two years, would be hard to construe as “justice”. Tacitus, the historian, characterizes Felix as notorious for corruption, licentiousness and bribery. He also notes that Drusilla was the daughter of Herod Agrippa! In AD60, Felix was recalled to Rome, tried, and convicted of abuse of his office. He was succeeded by Porcius Festus (around 59-62 AD), about whom little is known. Josephus considered him a better ruler than Felix.

ACTS 25

1-5 That judgment seems sound, as Festus seems to have immediately begun to tend to neglected work. He was also smart enough not to risk sending Paul back to Jerusalem.

6-12 On returning to Caesarea, he got right down to business, and apparently quickly discerned the baselessness of the charges. 9 As a concession to the Jewish leadership, he suggests the Jerusalem idea, but not as an order. 10-11 Paul boldly reminds him that he already knows the whole thing is a sham. Exercising his right as a citizen again, Paul appeals to Rome. Nero was emperor by that time! Had Paul not heard of his reputation? Nero had just succeeded Claudius, so perhaps he had not yet hit his stride of despotism.

13-22 Festus' dilemma: remanding a prisoner who should have been released, and needing a charge. He obviously knew nothing of the religious controversy. Agrippa's opinion is solicited.

23-37 A hearing to resolve Festus' problem.

This Agrippa was Agrippa II, son of the one who reunited the Jewish kingdom around AD 40, and whose death is recorded in 12:20-23 (documented also by Josephus.) He would have been a brother to Drusilla, Felix's wife. Bernice was also the sister of Agrippa II. He was the last of the direct line of Herod the Great (followed by Archelaus, then Agrippa I and II. He had no children.

ACTS 26 Paul before Agrippa

1-8 Introductory comments. Paul respectfully recognizes the king's familiarity with Jewish culture. (6-8) The repetition of *elpis/elpizo* is intriguing. The strictness of the Pharisees was premised upon attaining the “hope” of the Messiah. Is it perhaps easier/preferable to live with hope *anticipated* than with hope *realized*? Its realization changes the whole environment. Perhaps this is what the powerful could not accept? Their power to coerce obedience was derived from the expectation that their system would bring the consummation. To have it announced that the King *had come*, and thrown open the doors of his Kingdom to all who would acknowledge him, totally wiped out the basis of their power.

9-12 Paul acknowledges this attitude as the basis for his own earlier activity.

13-18 This version differs slightly from the account he gave (22:6-16) before the crowd in Jerusalem. He leaves out Ananias' ministry, and attributes all the instructions to the apparition of Jesus. The commission is to open the eyes of **both** "the people" and "the Gentiles", turning them from darkness to light. Neither recognized the "darkness" in which they were living, or that they were operating under Satan's authority and needed to be set free. The "inheritance" which the legal experts were so diligently seeking, is for those who have been made holy by (*en*) their faithfulness to Jesus – not people meticulous about details of the law. A radical message!

19-23 What was promised to happen – HAS happened. And that is a serious problem for the people who had it all figured out.

24-29 It all sounds like nonsense to Festus, but Paul appeals to whatever may be left of Agrippa's understanding. Agrippa does not appear to be offended. In fact, he speaks to Paul's innocence.

Much has been spun out of Agrippa's reply to Paul's challenge about believing the prophets. *En oligo* is a common phrase, used as we would say "In short," or "What this amounts to ...". The verb *peitheis* is a simple present indicative. Since there was no punctuation in the original manuscripts, no one can pontificate as to whether this is a statement or a question. Paul's response, however, tends toward the idea of a question -- "Are you trying to convert me?" which, again, could be taken as genuine or sarcastic. Paul replies, in essence, "That's what my whole life is about! That is my desire for all of you." The assumption that the king was on the verge of commitment has no basis in the text.

ACTS 27

Luke is along again. It is not clear who else is in the company this time, other than Aristarchus. Julius, the centurion, must have been a considerate man, to allow such freedom of association.

1-8 A coastal route was chosen because of the weather, but after leaving Cnidus a lot of open water had to be crossed. They were on the Mediterranean side of Crete, and hence vulnerable to storms.

13-20 The danger of which Paul had warned is upon them. There are only so many things to be done, and they run out of options, and hope. Whether Paul's warning was the result of his experience in many travels, or a prophetic word, is not recorded.

21-26 This time, it *is* a prophetic message. The vocabulary indicates that he had been praying for the whole crew, not just his people: (24) "God has graciously given (*kecharistai*) you all those who are sailing with you." This is the verb also used of the gifts of the Holy Spirit! (which fact confirms that such "gifts" are intended to fill obvious *needs*, not so that people can show off.)

25 Paul admonishes the *crew* to "cheer up" because *Paul* trusts God! I wonder how they reacted.

27-38 Two weeks is a long storm!

31 This time the captain listens to Paul's warning.

33-36 Following his example, they took a meal, then threw out all the supplies. The boat is a total loss by now anyway.

37 In tallying the passengers and crew, Luke uses the word *psuche*. This should put to rest the nonsensical assumption that *psuche* refers to "souls" as some sort of disembodied entity.

42-44 Normal procedure would have been to kill all the prisoners; but it has finally become clear to Julius that Paul is the only one who has a clear head. Consequently all are safe.

ACTS 28

Melita is a tiny island south of Sicily. Certainly it had to be providential to land there, after two weeks adrift! How would people have found it, not knowing where they were?

1-6 They were kindly received. The snake episode impresses the natives, but not Paul. It is simply a fulfillment of the promise of Mark 16:18 – not a show, but simply provision for a need.

7-10 Paul continues filling the charge to supply needs, in the healing of Publius' father, when his household was caring for the stranded travelers.

11-15 In decent weather, the trip is completed in easy stages. The hospitality of brethren was welcome. People seldom know how critical this can be, just to be reassured that one is not alone!

16 Again, very gracious treatment for a prisoner.

17-22 Paul keeps trying to communicate with the Jewish leadership. His repeated references to their own history and tradition remind me of my own futile attempts to identify with Mennonites-- except that Paul had the advantage of having been born into their culture. Even their response: "No one has reported anything evil about you", sounds so familiar – and so phony! Was it as untrue for him as it was for me?

23-28 It's fruitless. You just can't get people who have deliberately distorted their own traditions to see what they are doing, and to restore their original purpose and vision. It doesn't work. The quote from Isaiah in v.27 is significant:*epachthune* is aorist passive; but *ekusan* and *ekammusan* are aorist *active*. The blindness and the failure to hear are *deliberate*. They have *chosen* not to see or hear; consequently, their hearts have been rendered untouchable. Even God can't heal that.

30-31 Paul was granted more freedom by the Romans than he was by the people who "should" have welcomed him. That is familiar also.

The ending leaves the reader hanging. "Then what?" It is assumed by some that Luke planned, or perhaps wrote, a third volume, but none has been found. Tradition takes over at this point, and there is no historical documentation that has stood the test of careful scrutiny.

ROMANS

Paul had never met the believers in Rome when he wrote them this letter (1:8-14), although he says he had wanted to visit them for some time. We know that Priscilla and Aquila had been expelled from Rome, by edict of Claudius, in AD 51, before Paul met them in Corinth. Whether they were believers at that time, we are not told.

There is no record of who introduced the Lord and the Christian message to the brethren at Rome. The speculation that the word was carried there by people returning to their homes after Pentecost is as plausible as any, since people “from every nation under heaven” (Ac.2:5) are said to have been present on that occasion, and we know that Jews had been scattered across the Mediterranean world in the centuries following the Exile.

Many people have touted this letter to be a closely reasoned theological treatise, and therefore the source of their equally complicated doctrine and dogma. I reject that assumption for several reasons:

Paul states his own goal for a relationship with these brethren as *mutual* encouragement (1:12). That does not sound like a dictated doctrinal statement.

Like his other letters, the primary concern of this one is to establish that Jew and Gentile, Greek and “barbarian”, all share both privilege and responsibility in the Kingdom. Nobody has an “inside track” -- all have fallen short of God's pattern, and all who are willing can be “set straight.”

It is not unusual for Paul to get carried away with his subject matter, and literally “murder” the grammar in doing so, but this letter is probably the most vivid example. He can go for a whole page without a primary verb, heaping together various sorts of dependent clauses and participial asides, until a responsible translator is driven to utter despair, and wishes it were possible to back good Brother Paul into a corner and say “Hey! Slow down!”

I honestly don't believe that *anyone* can say with complete certainty what he intends by some of these grammatical train-wrecks, and consequently I distrust anyone who claims to have it all sorted into a neat “systematic theology.”

A translator, of course, must make a call, from among the possible grammatical choices – but here, even more than most places, that call must be made with humility. I have frequently offered alternative translations in the text – perhaps not frequently enough.

There are, however, themes that are quite clear, and these we may use as guides to the rest:

- Faithfulness to Jesus is foundational.
- “Do-it-yourself” projects, whether Jewish or Gentile, are futile.
- New life in Christ is Resurrection life! We must *expect it to be different*.
- A change in one's life *will show*.
- A new way of life is **possible**, as well as expected, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

With the use of these lenses, and a deliberate suspension of preconceptions, much of value can be gained from these admonitions concerning Christian life and attitudes.

The letter may have been written from Corinth, where Paul met Priscilla and Aquila, who would have been a source of knowledge about the existence of a group of believers in Rome, or perhaps Cenchrea, the home of Phoebe, by whom the letter was sent. Most estimates place it in the late 50's AD – after the expulsion under Claudius, and before Paul arrived in Rome as a prisoner.

ROMANS 1

1 – The use of the genitive case here denotes “source”. “Apostle,” literally, is anyone who has been sent on an errand, of any kind. It is not categorically a title of hierarchical position. *Aphorizo* refers to designated tasks or boundaries, and also to a gracious gift (Liddell/Scott.) It, too, has nothing to do with status.

2-4 Paul immediately establishes the link between his message and Jewish history, but quickly moves on to make the point that Jesus' resurrection reveals him to be far more than “just” a descendant of David.

5-6 *All nations* are now included: and all who have chosen to belong to Jesus are thereby certified to be numbered among the “called” or “chosen”. Consequently, *all* the disciples in Rome are addressed as holy in the love of God. Note the plural – “WE received”-- in v.5!

8-15 Paul speaks of his desire for fellowship: a *mutuality* of sharing and strengthening (v.12). He has heard of their faithfulness, given thanks, and is eager to share with them.

16-17 Faithfulness is the key. This is a more accurate rendering of *pistis* than “faith”, which has come to be (mis)understood as a purely theoretical position. A proper understanding of *pistis* as a very active word would readily erase

the “faith vs. works” nonsense. **Faithfulness can only be expressed in behavior.** “*Ek pisteos*” is *not* an expression of agency (the most common interpretation), which would require a dative case, but rather of *source* (*genitive*). Faithfulness to Jesus is the source of our life. The *eis* + accusative form denotes a purpose or destination.

18-23 God's “furious anger” is not directed at ignorance, but at **deliberate opposition** to his ways. Paul speaks of those who hinder (again, an active word) God's truth *by* their injustice. Note that *dikaosune* and *adikian* are **judicial** terms, not esoteric philosophical words. The depravity and idolatry described are deliberate choices.

24-28 The listed perversions against which Paul inveighs are part of the liturgy of idol worship. Nevertheless, I cannot understand anyone looking seriously at this passage and condoning deviant behavior in any context.

It should be noted that Paul is using *arsen* and *theleias*, the animal words for “male” and “female” here, not the more usual *aner* and *gune* referring to men and women. He is describing behavior that doesn't even qualify as human! But that list, we must acknowledge, **also** includes (29-31) “evil, greed, wrongdoing, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, slander” **None** of these are to be condoned in the behavior of believers. It is sad that, instead of concentrating on removing *all* hindrances to a faithful life, so many choose only one or two items as targets by which to pass judgment on others. If only God's people were as eager to stamp out greed, or deceit, or slander, as they are to condemn deviant sexual behavior! “Selective repentance” ought not be acceptable in *any* context.

31 – The lack of understanding, loyalty, affection, and mercy are also on the list.

32 – This seems to indicate that approving of this sort of behavior is as serious as participating in it.

ROMANS 2

1-5 *Everyone* needs a changed life! And God has made that possible. It's not about judging other people. It's about *becoming* faithful and obedient. The “wrath” is for those unwilling to change.

6-11 The statement that there is no favoritism makes it clear that “the Jew first and also the Greek” is *chronological*, not preferential. This is usually overlooked.

12-16 Again, behavior is the defining factor.

17-24 Knowing – even preaching/teaching – is worthless without a life that demonstrates the message.

24 is a serious charge, and one, I fear, to which much of the church today will have to answer. By associating the name of the Lord with political issues, greed, wealth, ignoring the needs of the poor, militarism, nationalism, the “church” has given him a bad name. Unbelievers want nothing to do with such a god – and I don't blame them.

25-29 In the Jewish culture, the “test” was circumcision. and Paul does not disparage it – IF it is accompanied by obedient, godly living. Circumcision was a sign, originally, of belonging to God. But it had, for many, become an end in itself (like a flag on one's lapel!) and every bit as meaningless. Paul speaks of “circumcision of the heart”, but has just made it clear that there *will* be observable evidence.

ROMANS 3

1-8 A “heritage of faith” is not without value – IF it has the intended results. But it has no value if it does not produce faithful living.

9-18 The problem is, nobody has been living up to what they *do* know. This, however, is not an excuse to maintain the status quo, but an impetus to *all* to change.

19-20 The function of the law was to show people how far off the mark *all* of humanity falls.

21-22 Since nobody was getting the point, Jesus provided, not just more words, but a real-life demonstration, a definitive definition, of faithfulness. Frequently, in the Gospel accounts, he is criticized for disregarding some technicality of the Law – while he is in the very process of demonstrating the true *intent* of that law.

25 *Hilasterion* *may* refer to a “sacrifice” (an offering to a deity), which is the usual translation. However, it is also the designation of the “mercy-seat”, the covering of the Ark of the Covenant where God was believed to dwell. This *may* be a statement that it is in Jesus that the presence of God is revealed! Especially since the words “blood” and “life” are often interchanged.

This understanding would meld well with v.26, where we learn that justice itself is *created* out of the faithfulness of Jesus. Justice and mercy, wherever they are found, exist only because of the faithfulness of Jesus. Here we have “*ek pisteos*” again – a source genitive, as also in v.30.

27-31 The only way this is coherent at all is, again, to understand *pistis* as “faithfulness”, or “loyalty”, rather than the

esoteric concept of “faith” (characterized by someone as “insisting that you believe something that everyone knows isn't so.”) The distinction is not between activity and passive assent, but between picky details and absolute loyalty to Jesus. Paul has been stressing behavior all along, and this is no exception.

ROMANS 4

What, then, is “faithfulness”? One critic of my first edition translation protested, “But that only means “loyalty”! Actually, that would not have been a bad choice, and I have included it as an option in subsequent revisions. I'm not sure there is any place where “loyalty” would do violence to the spirit of the text. It encompasses the recognition that the object of the action is worthy of one's total commitment (which would be another valid choice), as well as a deep attachment and, if appropriate, obedience – a distinct concept, but often mentioned in conjunction with *pistis*. “Identification with” could also parallel “faithfulness to”. It is making common cause with the one to whom you decide to be/become faithful. Connected to Jesus' John 17 prayer that we may be ONE, with him and with each other? Perhaps.

1-3 Faithfulness to God, then, becomes seen as a total involvement with his plan and his purposes. Participation.
5-8 So, since God is all about justice (*dikaiousune*), so is Abraham, and so are we. And all are transformed in the process.
V.8 was paraphrased in a song our kids enjoyed in high school, which affirmed, “It doesn't matter what you've been – it matters what you'll be”!

It is also necessary to realize the root meaning of *aphiemi*. The English understanding of “forgive” as “Oh, that's ok, it doesn't matter”, is completely in error. It DOES matter, enormously. The word means “to take away, to remove.” A complete transformation of a life is called for.

9-12 Circumcision was given to Abraham as a sign of that total identification – *after* the fact. It was to be a constant reminder of his commitment. But v.12 is clear: it is the *ordering of one's life* that counts.

13 At that time, no law had yet been given.

14-25 This latter paragraph becomes a collection of vignettes by which we may understand the all-consuming nature of the faithfulness/loyalty that is required of those who would be God's people.

14-15 The Law, which came on the scene hundreds of years later, has nothing whatever to do with the inheritance promised to Abraham or his descendants. That inheritance is for those who remain steadfastly loyal to God, by his gracious provision, regardless of circumstances.

17-18 Resurrection is no more fantastic than the possibility of such elderly people becoming parents! Here we also need to re-examine the concept of “hope” (*elpis*,) which refers not to wishful thinking, but to confident expectation. Expectation was sheer folly – but *loyalty* made it possible to hang on.

A New Testament parallel situation is seen in the loyalty of Thomas, at the time of Lazarus' death. Everyone knew of the death-threats against Jesus, and tried to dissuade him from going to Judea. But not Thomas. He said to the others, “Let's go along, and all die with him.” THAT is loyalty/faithfulness: a more genuine demonstration of the true meaning of “*pistis*” could not be imagined.

19 This kind of loyalty does not stick its head in the sand and ignore the prevailing circumstances. It does not deny reality. **It takes sober stock of the situation, and makes a conscious decision to persevere.** 20 This kind of loyalty produces strength, and a by-product is giving glory to God. In refusing to desert his commitment, Abraham became “fully convinced” (*plerophoretheis*). The verb *phoreo* refers to habitual action, endurance, possession. The prefix *plero-*, indicating completeness, fullness, total satisfaction, makes the whole concept stronger. This is the result of extreme loyalty. Having *committed* to loyalty, Abraham became confident of God's ability to make good on his promise.

22-24 This is the kind of confidence that is offered to all of us, which enables us also to live in justice.

(Here's where I get messed up. I am quite sure that God CAN do what he said, but as the years go by, I wonder if/when he WILL. I *choose* to be loyal, but fall down on the hope/confidence.)

25 I'm not sure how this gets connected to Jesus' betrayal and resurrection, though. The words are *paraptoma* – transgressions, and *dikaiousune* – justice, and both are in identical prepositional phrases with *dia* and an accusative object. The construction is completely parallel. Liddell/Scott lists the possibilities as referring to (1) place (through), (2) time (during), (3) cause (by aid of, on account of), and (4) purpose (because of). There would need to be some specific reason for a translation that did not reflect the parallelism, but none of these really seem to fit, because the betrayer (Judas, and by extension, all who reject Jesus) and the Author of resurrection (God), certainly cannot be said to be the same! The verbs are both passive, with Jesus as the subject, but the prepositional phrases cannot refer to the doer of the action. That might

work for the betrayal, but certainly not for the resurrection! That effected (caused) our justice, it was not caused *by* it. We were *not* “just” at that time.

So in spite of the parallelism of the grammar, I have treated them differently, but with caution. I have not found another translator that has solved this dilemma adequately. One of many places where the counsel of brethren would be very helpful.

ROMANS 5

1 – The previous explorations of “faithfulness” and “justice” help to make sense out of the use of *ek* and the genitive here, instead of a dative of agency. Loyalty is the *source* of the “being-made-just.” As we *behave* loyally, we *become* just, and enjoy the relationship of peace that Jesus created.

2 – Never forget that only he could provide that access. It was never a “do-it-yourself” project; but we *did* have to “take a stand”. *Estekamen* is a perfect tense: it had a defined beginning, of which the effect persists. Here, confidence is connected with the glory of God as its source (genitive with no preposition).

3-4 Hassles produce endurance, which in turn produces tested character, and eventually hope / confidence. But what happens when the hassles wear you down, instead?

5 – I wonder if the key here is not, like so many other places, the use of the *plural*? “We” can endure, where “I” cannot. The Spirit is the mediator of God's love, but so is the brotherhood.

6-10 Jesus' willing death is the means of reconciliation. The emphasis is on the demonstration of the love of God, not only in the rescue, but also in the preservation of his people. *En to haimati* (v.9) and *en te zoe* (v.10) are parallel, and possibly equated, both as the means of safety. *Di' autou* in v.9 could refer either to the former *autou* or to *haimati*— there is no way to tell for certain.

11 – **Jesus enables the enjoyment of God!**

12-14 Especially v.12 : the susceptibility to death is NOT a genetic inheritance from Adam, but is “because all failed.” Not because of specific violations -- there was no law yet -- but because all preferred their own way over God's.

16-18 Jesus has set a different example – his life, too, is contagious.

This is one of those places where the sentence structure is virtually impossible to render in any coherent fashion. Please feel free to criticize it! But please offer a viable alternative!

19 *Katestathesan* and *katastathesontai* are both forms of *kathistemi*. It *may* refer to causation, as in the usual translations, but may also refer to a “starting place”, as in a race. That casts an interesting light on the concepts of “failure” and “justice” -- has Jesus changed the “starting place”? Are we no longer obliged to dig ourselves out of a hole?

21 – The only question that really matters, is, “Who's in charge?” We are now enabled to *choose* our King! *Basileuo* appears twice – but in wonderfully different contexts!

ROMANS 6

Paul continues the theme of the choice of **who will be King**. Life *will* be controlled: either by failure or by grace.

3-11 Baptism provides a graphic figure of death and resurrection. A person can only make that choice for himself: no one else can make it for anyone. And if it does not result in a transformed life, it is a sham. Slavery ends when one dies. The resurrection life is free to submit to a new and gracious King. He has put an end to the rule of death (elaborated in Heb.2:14) and enables his people to live in the power of his triumph!

12-14 We have changed masters. Physical life still exists, but we are choosing to be tools in the hands of the one whose very being defines “justice”. Those tools are no longer to be instruments of “failure”.

16-18 The plain fact is, we are *going* to obey *somebody*, or *something*. Freedom from the life that is really death, enables obedience to the giver of life. It does not leave us in a vacuum.

I cannot understand why so frequently people reject the concept of obedience. The obedience that is asked of a resurrection life, is part and parcel of that life! It's the “user's manual,” and the result is justice – the very life of God. That is the weight of *hagiasmos*: a life that is devoted (loyal!) to God in every detail. 19-22 recaps the transformation, from slavery to destruction, into the *choice* to submit instead to the graciousness of God.

23 – Why do people always place the emphasis on the first half of this statement? That totally misses the difference between an owed payment, and a gracious gift. Life in Christ is the gracious gift (*charisma*) of God. It can **only** be received *en Christo* – one of Paul's favorite phrases, “in Christ.” The preposition can only appear with a dative object.

This one encompasses nearly all the possible implications of the dative case: agency, location, association, means, and cause. Jesus Christ is the location, the cause, the very atmosphere, where “eternal life” takes place. Whatever, whenever, and wherever it is, it's all about Jesus. Thanks be to God!

ROMANS 7

1-6 This is not a treatise on marriage. It is a legal illustration of being “dead” to the Law and joined to Christ. This is represented as one of the accomplishments of Jesus' death, and our identification with it. It is a continuation of the argument of the previous chapter. Responsibility, the control of our lives, is in different hands now – those of the Spirit of Life.

7-13 Paul is for some reason reluctant to discredit the law. It was established for a good purpose, but was wrongly used. Perhaps it would have “worked” if people had been looking for guidance; but using it as a minimum acceptable standard was counter-productive. **Human nature seems to go for “minimum requirements”, rather than maximum loyalty!** That's why any attempts to establish a “list” are doomed to failure: you can't “list” everything, so the “fudge factor” goes wild. Although a “list” might contain some good, valid, useful principles, it really just reveals, not so much specific transgressions, but unholy *attitudes*.

14-21 The problem of focusing on specific items, is that it produces total frustration in the mind and heart of the untransformed person.

22-25 Jesus is the only solution because only he can change attitudes and transform “human nature”.

Paul is clear that learning the new life is not a “zapped to perfection” affair. “Choosing life” is a constant effort, despite the immediacy of the (ch.6) burial-and-resurrection figure.

But note the beginning of this chapter. This passage, Paul says, is directed to people familiar with the Law. Consequently, those whose lives are *not* consumed with the Law may miss nuances that others would not.

ROMANS 8

1-2 I have chosen to read the genitive case without a preposition in v.2 as a source genitive. It is not possessive. It could also be considered “content” or “material” without doing any violence to the text. The point is, that he is speaking of a totally different sort of “law”. This applies to both *pneumatou* and *zoës*, as well as *hamartias* and *thanatou*. Whatever is chosen for the one pair needs to be applied to the other. The sentence is contrasting two divergent understandings of “law.”

3-4 Jesus came to do what the law could not. Note, he condemned the *failure*, not the people. He *created* the justice in which those who follow him participate. Again, “walking” -- behavior – the way one lives – is the key.

5-8 The *focus of one's attention* is what makes the difference, and reveals the chosen source of one's life. Again, the genitive may be simple possessive, but may equally imply source. In either case, living by one's human nature is a choice, not a given.

9-11 The Holy Spirit is frequently spoken of as God's/Christ's “seal of ownership” on the lives of those who follow him. The presence, life, and activity of the Spirit is the source of our resurrection life. There have been long and convoluted theological arguments about whether God's justice is “imputed” or “imparted” to people. Those who love such arguments call it “righteousness” instead of “justice”, which makes it easier to argue about, because they can pretend it's all theoretical. It's NOT. The Spirit's work is intensely *practical*, changing death into life, and failure into justice. If you need a “label” for it, try “*implanted*”! I think that's better than either of the others.

12-17 The definitely not-automatic nature of this change of life is delineated more clearly. The verb in v.13, *thanatoute*, is *present active*, implying continuous action on the part of the second person plural subject. If it referred to a single incident or commitment, the form would be aorist. The Spirit's presence is an enabling for a *constant* effort. v.14, being “led” implies *going* somewhere.

Adoption (15-17) is a *process*. So is becoming a member of a family. On a human level, it may take a child a while to realize that he “really belongs” -- no less on the level of the Spirit. The Spirit's teaching pulls us into the realization that as children, we share it *all* – both suffering and glory. This is part of being truly joined to the family. Some historians have noted a provision of Roman law that required a father, at the time of a child's majority, to officially “adopt” or acknowledge him as his son, in order for responsibility and inheritance to be established. This may also factor into the understanding.

18-22 Even the physical creation has suffered from man's failure to care for it as he was instructed. This paragraph seems to hold out hope that if the children/heirs of the Lord will learn to follow instructions, even the physical world may yet be rescued.

23 As physical beings, we, too, are still under the constraints of badly-managed “nature.” One wishes a preposition had been used here: should it read “the redemption *of* our body”, or “the release *from* our body”? There is nothing in the grammar to help. Perhaps it depends upon whether that time comes before or after our physical death? No one knows, and anyone who pretends to know, needs to study his grammar.

24-30 In the meantime, the Spirit enables our “hanging on” to hope/expectation. It is *his intercession* that “works everything together” for the ultimate benefit of the called. The purpose is our conformity to the likeness of Jesus: being *made* just, and eventually glorified. This passage has been mightily abused, both in teaching that attributes every occurrence to “God’s will”, and in insistence that only a few are “called” to belong to him. There is no hint of either in the text. The “destiny” of which v.29 speaks, is to be patterned after Jesus. This is the goal toward which the Spirit is working and interceding.

26-27 – *may* be a reference to the gift of praying in the Spirit – but may not. It is certainly a valuable gift for that purpose. 31-39 Although we are a “work in progress”, the love and protection of God/Jesus/the Spirit are both our defense and our enabler, regardless of what awful stuff is between here and there. And some of the list looks pretty grim. Accusations, and even condemnation by opponents do not change the certainty of our belonging to him. But, oh, how we need to be reminded!

ROMANS 9

1-5 Paul’s lament is based on the realization that even though the Jews had so many advantages that should have enabled them to recognize Jesus, they didn’t.

6 – It certainly wasn’t the fault of God, or his word. The key is in v.8 – not physical children, but children of promise: and this must be maintained through successive generations. The genetic component is there, but useless, unless the promise is accepted.

I do not understand how the Jacob/Esau part fits in, as neither of the boys seemed to act very faithfully. But perhaps we are to see that *no one* “deserves” to be included in the promise. (16) It is all the mercy of God.

I have retained the traditional translation of v.18, but I am not sure it is correct. The problem is in the unexpressed subject of *thelei*. *Hon* is a direct object, but there is no subject, nor is there any for *eleei* or *sklerune*. It has been assumed that “God” is the subject in all four instances, but with no antecedent, any translator must admit conjecture. The immediately following argument would seem to push one toward a “destiny” interpretation. This is problematic, however, since the whole rest of the message is urging people to make a *choice*.

24-26 This treatment of the calling being extended to the Gentiles, also would appear to contradict the strict “destiny” interpretation. There are prepositions here : both phrases employ “*ex*” -- people have been called *out of* each group.

27-33 The implication is that only a few of either group will respond. 31-32 sounds again like the problem was one of focus on details instead of personal loyalty. Now we are back to personal responsibility.

Frankly, I don’t know how these fit together, and I’m not convinced anyone else does, either.

ROMANS 10

1-3 parallels 9:31-32. We are not dealing with a do-it-yourself project.

4 Dependence on Jesus is absolutely necessary.

9 The statement, *Christos kurios*, is a highly political one. This was the wording of the Roman oath of allegiance to Caesar. No wonder it is paired with trust in the resurrection. The statement constituted treason, and thereby a death sentence.

10 Loyalty is a matter of the heart -- “resulting in justice” connects it to behavior. Verbal acknowledgment is also a necessity. It’s not “either-or”. The whole package has to go together for “deliverance/safety/salvation.”

11-13 Loyalty confers the privilege to “call on” the one to whom we are loyal, for rescue. And again, it is the only criterion – there is no discrimination between Jew and Gentile.

14-15 The urgency for getting the word out. This was an early component of my own call, as it was for many others. And I do not doubt that many others were also hindered by the unwillingness of people in institutions to do the sending. I have never found the answer to this question. Lord, have mercy!

17-21 Unfortunately, many do hear but do not listen. *Hupakouo* is interesting. *Akouo*, to hear, is combined with *hupo*, under. Liddell/Scott consistently includes the “answer” concept to hearing, and thereby comes out with “obey, submit, yield to expectations” for the combined word. In v.18, it reverts to *akouo* alone. They had heard, but did not respond.

Even Paul had consistently gone first to synagogues, and ranged more widely only after being rejected there.

ROMANS 11

The question is, *who* rejected *whom*?

1-10 God is aware of faithfulness/loyalty that we do not have the power to see. Only he knows for sure whether the message will be heard or rejected.

7-10 The confusion comes upon those who refuse to hear, confirming and solidifying their choice.

11-16 The message reached the Gentiles when it did, largely as a result of Jewish opposition. Paul hopes that as they see what they missed, they will come around, causing even greater rejoicing. He clings to the hope that their refusal will not be permanent.

17-24 *Neither* choice is automatically permanent. Grafting can go both ways. And remember Jesus' story of the vine – HE is the holy rootstock. The Father – the vinedresser, -- can prune and graft as appropriate.

25-32 For the key to v.26, see 9:6. “All Israel” has to refer to all who accept the promise.

The calling is still open, to those who choose to listen.

I am uncertain about v.32. *sugkleo* – literally, “locked up” -- also means “joined together.” I think the point is basically that we are all in the same boat.

33-35 At least, God has it all figured out. Probably nobody else does (least of all, those who are sure they do!) He certainly is not beholden to anyone.

36 On the contrary, the whole creation (*ta panta*), not just people, are completely dependent upon him!

ROMANS 12

Paul now turns to exploration of the practical results of the new life that has been offered. What does it look like in shoe-leather?

1 – The incentive is not fear of judgment, as so many preach, but a realization of the compassion and mercy of God! Our behavior is to grow out of our gratitude for that mercy. It's the logical, reasonable response!

2 – The interplay of voice and tense in the verbs is significant...*Me suschematizethe* is a negative, present middle imperative. The middle voice, which English lacks, indicates that the subject both *acts* and *is affected by* the action of the verb. Hence, “Don't continue to pattern yourselves” ... since the present tense indicates continuous action.

Metamorphousthe, on the other hand, while also present imperative, is in the *passive* voice: this is not something we can do, but must receive from outside ourselves. The transformation is accomplished by the Spirit of God's “renewing of your minds”. *Parastenai*, in v.1, is totally different. It is an *aorist infinitive*. The “presentation” of ourselves to God is a single, definitive commitment. This is in the *active* voice: requiring initiative on our part.

and the result/purpose of all this, is that we may be able to *recognize* what God's will is. The assumption, clearly, is that once recognized, it will be obeyed.

3 – The enormity of the privilege of participating in this graciousness of God requires a warning not to get “uppity” about it. But neither are we to disparage either self or others.

4-5 The whole structure of society is changed by the process of transformation. Members of the Body are part of each other! The individualism of first century Greek culture – really, ever since the 6th century BC philosophers – like that of the 20-21st century western world – has been superseded by something far more beautiful: the Body of Christ.

6-8 The “gifts” (*charismata*) expressed in each person are given, not *to* that person, but *through* him to the Body, the brotherhood. The list here differs from those in Corinthians and Ephesians, in that the functions mentioned are all things critical to the formation and growth of the Body. The dative in v.3 harmonizes with this principle. It is more likely to be a dative of means or agency than an indirect object. However, I realize that is a judgment-call.

The exhortation is to exercise all of these functions with humility and good humor, without taking oneself too seriously.

(Taking each other seriously obviates the need to take oneself seriously!)

9-12 This describes the atmosphere to be cultivated – genuine love, devotion to good, affectionate honor, and eager service.

12-14 “How-to” achieve this – holding up each other's confidence and endurance by prayer; sharing needs both inside and outside the brotherhood; praying blessings upon persecutors. It's plain-down impossible to maintain alone.

15-17 Sharing sorrow and rejoicing, and a total disregard for status or position; concern for the welfare of everyone, is critical to becoming a brotherhood.

18-21 The plurals continue through v.19. the text then reverts to singular “you's”. If the relationships described up to this point are cultivated, then the instructions to individuals in 20-21 are possible, because each can count on the support of the rest.

ROMANS 13

This is a favorite quotation for various nationalistic factions; but to use it to advocate blind acceptance of *any* nation's policies is seriously to misunderstand the text. The primary point is that civil authority is not to be disregarded, but we must recognize that such authority is secondary, and subject to that of God. *Hupo*, after all, has a primary meaning of “under.” In

1-5, the instructions are in the singular. After that, it shifts back to the plural.
 2 – *Authority* is not the problem, in and of itself. *Abused* authority (that presumes its own absolutism and disregards the supremacy of God's authority) is.
 3-4 It therefore follows that the instructions here apply to authority that is properly subject to God, and used for the purpose that has just been outlined.
 5 – We are to recognize that legitimate, worldly function.
 6 – The participial phrase defines the officials who are “God's officials” -- those who give attention to the duties he has prescribed. (7) *These* deserve respect.
 8 – but do not lose sight of what is truly “owed”.
 9-10 -- These higher responsibilities must be a part of the picture, and if a person “in authority” commands the violation of these commands, it becomes clear that they are NOT in their God-assigned role. This paragraph dare not be removed from the beginning of the passage.
 11-14 This is not a digression nor an afterthought. It is, after all, “human nature” to get caught up in the chaos of nationalism and the maneuvering of the powers of the world. It's “human nature” to treat warfare like a football game. But God's people no longer live in that sort of society. “Look what time it is!” and live in the Kingdom of Light!

ROMANS 14

1-- There are limits to “inclusiveness.” The specific issues may vary from time to time and culture to culture, but this principle is sound: Welcome those whose faithfulness/loyalty is immature or incomplete – but not into discussions requiring discernment. As Vernard Eller put it, “Welcome anyone, without reservation or judgment – but don't let them rearrange the furniture and throw stuff away!”

2-4 Dietary decisions are not to be a criterion of fellowship, in either direction.

5-6 Observation of particular calendars aren't, either.

7-8 The biggest issue is, does a person make his decisions and arrange his life as a consequence of his devotion to the Lord? We learned to accept this when we had Old Order neighbors. It was an important lesson.

9-12 Worship of the Lord is crucial. It may take diverse forms.

13-18 The person who considers himself mature, is responsible not to cause harm to the conscience of anyone else.

19 There is much that is edifying, that can be pursued in peace.

15, 16, and 20-23 -- “Freedom” must always remain subservient to love.

ROMANS 15

1-7 This is a pretty succinct recipe for a healthy expression of the Body.

1-2 Strength, or capability, is not to be an excuse for domineering, but equipment for service.

3 – If anyone ever had a right to dominance, it was Jesus, but he deliberately rejected that attitude. The quote from Ps.69:9 is puzzling: it is the last (unquoted) part of the statement made regarding Jesus' cleansing of the temple. The original reference is David's complaint about abuse suffered in the interest of faithfulness. Obviously, it was re-interpreted in both contexts. Here, it is frequently taken as Jesus' substitutionary acceptance of abuse, but it is one of many places I'd like to ask Paul what he had in mind.

4 – This is a helpful word on the usefulness of Scripture in the life of the brotherhood: instruction, and coaching for endurance, resulting in continual (present tense) hope.

5-6 This endurance and encouragement can only come from God – but it must become a *corporate* experience. It melds with concern for and among one another. Jesus is the pattern, and following the pattern glorifies God.

7 – Another admonition to “welcome each other.” The standard is “the way Jesus did.” He is always the pattern. All are received, but all are expected to be *transformed* into his likeness. NO ONE is expected to *remain* “just as you are.”

8-12 Paul piles up evidence that the message of life is for all ethnicities.

13 – Hope (confidence), joy, peace, and faithfulness (loyalty) all combine to produce *overflowing* hope. This is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. That is the only way diversity can become unity.

14 – Paul hastens to add that he is not about bullying anybody or trying to take over. The group is perfectly capable of “reminding” each other of who and what they have committed themselves to be. He is just doing some “reminding” of his own. Faithfulness must always be a mutual effort.

16-19 – Paul speaks of “God’s good news” as his duty (16) and his having “fulfilled” it (19). The news, and the task, is to realize and confirm the multicultural nature of the Kingdom, and it is effected by (18) “the obedience (*hupakoe*) of the Gentiles” – again, a question of behavior. The integrity of the message is attested by observable results, in all sorts of unexpected places. (20-21) This goal requires constant new frontiers.

22-29 Paul shares his planned itinerary. It didn't quite work out that way. This was apparently written before the last trip to Jerusalem, since he is carrying the relief offering of which he spoke in Ac.24:17 and also in II Cor.9. This is probably the reason why many assume that this letter was written from Corinth, since he refers to the offering from Macedonia and Achaea – though it could just as well have been from any of the Greek churches. Cenchræa was the closest to Corinth, and he selected Phoebe, from that church, to carry the letter, presumably when he stopped there enroute, as he had done earlier, on his second trip (Ac.18:18).

29-33 – Clearly, he is going to Jerusalem with a combination of eagerness and apprehension, as he asks for prayer for protection, as well as for his service. I'm sure at this point he did not realize that his trip to Rome would be at government expense, and not enroute to Spain.

Nevertheless, his confidence that it would be accompanied with blessings was certainly vindicated.

ROMANS 16

1-2 I would like to know Phoebe. She is clearly the carrier of the letter from Cenchræa or Corinth to Rome. She is called a *diakonon* – the word from which we derive “deacon”. In traditional usage, it is translated “deacon” three times, “minister” twenty times, and “servant” seven times. This is the *only* instance outside the Gospels where “servant” was chosen by the early translators.

Paul used the word of himself, in the previous chapter (15:16). There, apparently, the powers-that-be thought it ok to call him a “minister”. Historically, Liddell/Scott lists “a messenger, attendant, or official”, and the verb form as “to render a service.” The most significant point is that Paul uses the term of *both* himself and Phoebe, which certainly absolves him of the frequent – and ridiculous – charge of misogyny. Phoebe, whatever her “label,” is to be welcomed and provided-for, as she has done for others. At this point, the word is used in its masculine form, but applied indubitably to a woman. Any responsible translator must take this into account. As is the case with most words which have taken on hierarchical overtones in modern usage, *diakonos* and *diakoneo* were more concerned with the *function* that was (or needed to be) performed by a person, than with conferring a “title” upon anyone.

3-16 The list of greetings is impressive. For never having been there, Paul knows a lot of the folks! Note that Mary, Junia, Stachys, Apella, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, and Julia are all feminine names; not to mention people's mothers and sisters. Andronicus (male) and Junia (female) are **both** mentioned as “apostles” (“ones sent out”), and relatives of Paul's.

17-20 A final warning is issued against those who foster divisions for their own profit. They appear to be identified with “Satan” who is shortly to be “smashed.” *Suntribo* is listed with an impressive amount of destruction, including “to beat into jelly, to have one's head broken, to shatter, to crush.”

21-22 More greetings include some from Tertius, Paul's scribe. No one, of course, knows if Gaius (23), the host, is the same one to whom John wrote later (III John), but both refer to hospitality.

25-27 does not appear in all manuscripts, but *if* it was added at some later date, the writer did so to reinforce the central message: It is the purpose of God “that all nations may come to him in faithful obedience.” Amen !!!

I CORINTHIANS

The Corinthian letters have caused huge amounts of controversy through the years. People can't even agree as to how many there were. Paul appears to refer to some of which we have no record. Some "scholars" (?) contend that the ones we do have are a compilation of fragments of many. This is not implausible, but by no means certain.

One thing is clear: there was a lot of trouble-shooting to be done in the Corinthian church. The city is located on a narrow isthmus, where ships had to unload their cargo and have it transported and reloaded on the other side, in order to continue a westward journey. Sometimes an entire ship was raised and rolled on logs to the other side. Commerce was such that the city, even more than Athens or Ephesus, was a poster-child for diversity: a crossroads of trade, cultures, ethnicities, and religions.

Paul had found a willing audience there, and spent about a year and a half among them (Ac.18:11). Apollos, also, had spent time there, with the blessing (after instruction) of Priscilla and Aquila, whom Paul had met in Corinth, and then taken to Ephesus (Ac.18). With all the coming and going, some lines were bound to get tangled. Paul's intent is to "rally the troops" to present a united front to those outside.

The scene is usually set during Paul's lengthy stay in Ephesus, during the late 50's AD, when he received word from some of the Corinthian brethren of dissensions and controversies that had arisen. He repeatedly makes the point that it is necessary to root out pagan practices, yet without instituting a new legalism. This is never an easy task. Faithfulness without coercion, and freedom without licentiousness, has always been a difficult balance to achieve.

Many practical issues of life together are also treated. Viewing them in the context of first century Greek culture places Paul's advice in a perspective which is too frequently ignored.

Remember that living in loyalty/faithfulness to Jesus challenges the presuppositions of *every* culture, in *every* age. "Thy Kingdom come!"

I CORINTHIANS 1

1 – Sosthenes had been in charge of the synagogue at Corinth when Paul was there for the first time (Ac.18:17), after Crispus, who is first mentioned as its leader (18:8) was converted. Apparently, he too must have come to faithfulness, before or after the uproar before Gallio, as he is now with Paul (most speculate, in Ephesus) and sending greetings back to his home congregation. Or perhaps he had carried the letter *from* Corinth to which Paul refers in 7:1, and detailed some of the problems that Paul now proceeds to address. *Tou kuriou iesou christou* at the end of v.3 could be either a second object of the preposition *apo* or modifier of *tou patros*. Either or both would be correct.

2-9 As in most of his letters, Paul begins by giving thanks, and in the process, reminding his readers of the exalted status that they share with all who have cast their lot with Jesus. They have been provided, spiritually, with all they need for faithfulness (7). They have the knowledge (*gnosis*) of what the life they have chosen is all about (5). These are both essential provisions of the grace of God – equally necessary in order to be "established" -- literally, built on a solid foundation – to remain faithful until the Lord comes. *Everything* depends upon the faithfulness of God, and a major expression of that faithfulness is their/our inclusion in the community (*koinonia*) of the Kingdom.

This is an important reminder, because it immediately becomes apparent that the ubiquitous Greek individualism, as prevalent then as in western culture today, which enabled division into groups following particular individuals, has reared its ugly head in Corinth, threatening the existence of the believing community. (10) A united front is not only essential for the reputation of the brotherhood, but for their very survival in the Kingdom.

11-17 Paul, it should be noted, refuses to accept even those who have lined up behind *him*! He is adamant that there is no place for any such division. Jesus is the *only* "Big Man". Paul points out that he did not do all the baptizing, either. Jesus' commission (Mt.28) directed ALL his followers to do that. This was probably, among other reasons, for the specific purpose of avoiding this kind of factionalism. The reference to "wisdom of speech" (17) may be a subtle reference to Apollos' more scholarly approach; but Paul does not discount its value, saying simply that's not the point of the message. Elsewhere, it is clear that Apollos made a valuable contribution.

17-25 The only thing that matters is the "word of the cross." Unlike most of his writing (and even later in this same letter) Paul does not focus here on the resurrection, although the reference to its demonstration (24) of God's power and God's wisdom certainly implies its inclusion.

19 "Wisdom" and "logic" were at the top of the "respect" hierarchy in the Greek culture, and had been for at least six centuries already.

22 Neither group, Jews nor Greeks, had any room in their tightly regulated system for God to step in and do something that did not fit their pattern of expectations. God's power supersedes both systems, as it turns the ultimate disgrace (execution) into ultimate glory!

25-29 God in Christ has literally turned every category of "honor" on its head. Worldly wisdom, power, aristocracy, strength, even existence, are of no value without his transforming power. The reason is clear – (29) so that none of these uppity-types would have any excuse to brag that they "made it" on their own.

30 – The genitive case is equally well interpreted as belonging to God (possession), or as having its *source* in him. As always, it's *all about Jesus*. Wisdom, justice, holiness (devotion to God), redemption (release from bondage) – all of these are provided in/by Jesus. He did not just *bestow* all these things. He *incorporates/incarnates* them, for our benefit.

I CORINTHIANS 2

1-5 A flamboyant presentation would have obscured and cheapened the message. I would however like to ask Paul why, in view of his devoting the entire 15th chapter to the primacy of the resurrection, here and in the previous chapter he mentions only the crucifixion. I suspect it may be to provide sharp contrast to those who glory in flamboyance, but I am not sure. The goal, though, is plain in v.5. Only the action of God deserves ultimate loyalty.

6-9 We have not been called to *oppose* or to *reform* "this age" or its riches, but to recognize that something new and different is happening, in the establishment of the Kingdom. God had the idea of sharing his glory with his people (7) all planned out, *pro ton aionion* -- literally "before the ages", or, if a common translation of *aion* is used, "before eternity"! That's a mind-boggler! Such things are not accessible to mere reason (9). But I might take issue with him on v.8. I think part of the reason why the rulers opposed Jesus may be that they *did* understand, far better than his followers, that the order that had sustained their luxury and privilege was gone. Perhaps he is giving them the benefit of any possible doubt.

10-16 Such wonders are only accessible by revelation from the Holy Spirit. This is probably the best reason why carefully polished arguments do not change anyone. 12 – yet God's people have been given that Spirit, so that we *can* see what he has provided (*charisthenta*). It is *entirely* a gracious gift. 13 Explanations can't possibly make sense to anyone who has not opened himself to that gift. 14 They make no sense whatsoever.

15 – This is the clearly discernible link that happens when we encounter a person who shares the vision and the commitment. It is the difference between blank stares and eager acceptance. It is an incredibly precious gift to "share the mind of Christ." Liddell/Scott lists for *nous* (mind): "implication of thinking, feeling, deciding; purpose, intellect or design; resolve; sense or meaning; the active principle of the universe"!

I CORINTHIANS 3

1-4 One must, nevertheless, appropriate and cultivate that gift. If he has not, then none of the beautiful new creation makes any sense, and we don't function that way. Dividing into factions over human leadership is "human" -- it is *not* a response to the leadership of the Spirit. We must note here, as elsewhere, the serious error in translating words related to *sarx* as "sinful nature." The word simply means "flesh" (as in "meat"!) and came to apply to that aspect of human nature that was not specifically controlled by a spiritual force (holy or otherwise). It referred to "humanity" as an artifact of creation. Human nature can be transformed into likeness to Christ (Rom.8:21 and others), and needs to be, if it is to function in Kingdom society. But when Jesus is spoken of as having "flesh and blood", using the same word, "*sarx*", it should be obvious that there is nothing necessarily "sinful" about it!

5-9 The proper attitude toward human leadership is outlined. Such people serve a useful – even necessary – function, but only if they keep the focus where it belongs. "Leaders" are assigned a *particular task* – not a position of status.

10-15 The foundation is Jesus – laid in each place, I suppose, by whoever first introduces him. Subsequent builders must choose not only materials, but also techniques, with care. The quality of the work will eventually become obvious – revealed by its survival – or not. (15) Screwing up is *not* a sentence of exclusion. But it will be clear what has been done.

16-17 This is a much-abused "verse" -- as usual because the *plurals* are not recognized. The "you's" are all plural here. It is the Body – the brotherhood -- that is the "temple" -- not any individual. The Holy Spirit inhabits that temple by his residence *among* us. This sharpens the warning against "messaging up" that temple. Liddell/Scott lists for *theiro* "destroy, trap, lure, entice, bribe, corrupt, seduce, ruin, spoil" -- a pretty apt description of what has happened to the institutional church across the centuries. It is in God's hands.

18-21 The “messaging up” is credited to people who are “wise in this age”, and “crafty”. These are not compliments! 22-23 Besides, we don't need them. Because everything belongs to Jesus (and by extension, to us), and is in the scope of God's possessions, as are we. Note the parallelism in v.23 -- “You all” are to “Christ” in the same relation as “Christ” is to “God” -- therefore, all are ONE!

I CORINTHIANS 4

1-5 Any who handle the Word are expected to be faithful caretakers. *Oikonomos* refers to the servant or slave who is in charge of the administration of a household. He is a manager of the daily affairs. He is NOT the boss, or the owner. He simply organizes things according to the owner's instructions.

6-9 Apparently, there are people who have viewed assignments of responsibility as positions of status, and attempted to gain some sort of clout in the group thereby. This is absolutely unacceptable. There is NO license to create a hierarchy. (8) Someone must have run away with the idea of “reigning with Christ” already this early! People still abuse this idea to seek dominion over others.

9-13 Paul contrasts this glory-seeking with the attitude that he had displayed. He has never represented identification with the cause of Jesus as a “fully paid ticket to glory”! “King's kids” DON'T “go first class” -- he describes weakness, dishonor, hunger, thirst, poverty, persecution, heavy labor. If the King was treated this way, the servants, even his deputies, should expect nothing else. 14-15 is provided so that the readers may recognize the behavior of a *true* deputy of the King. Their example must mimic that of their Lord.

16-20 Timothy, having accompanied Paul for a considerable time, is a capable witness of his attitude.

19-21 A warning to whoever is trying to “take over” the congregation is blunt. *Phusao* is a very descriptive term. It refers to being “inflated (full of hot air?), swollen (as of an infection of a wound or an injured joint), an explosion, or the playing of a wind instrument” It consistently refers to unwarranted arrogant behavior. V.20 is critical: the test of Kingdom connections is the power of God --not fancy rhetoric.

I CORINTHIANS 5 Dealing with perverted behavior

This sort of situation happens when “tolerance” or “openness” is carried to extremes. Paul has often reiterated that the Kingdom is open to all. However, those who sign on are expected to exhibit a life that conforms to Kingdom principles, **not to remain as they were before.**

1-- “not even among the Gentiles.” Corinth was probably the “Las Vegas” of its day and age, known even among the pagans as “Sin City”. You don't demonstrate the freedom of the Kingdom by out-doing the world's evil!

2-- These folks were bragging about their “tolerance”! And in the process, they were defiling the reputation of the group.

3-5 ---The unrepentant person is to be excluded from the group, as a contagious disease is quarantined. He must be made to realize the seriousness of his situation. The protection of the brotherhood is removed, hopefully to bring him to his senses. (It worked: see II Cor.2:5-7).

6-8 – The Kingdom must be a beacon of purity (8) in contrast to surrounding society.

9-13 – Paul makes very clear the difference in relationships inside and outside the brotherhood. Of course one must relate to those outside -- how else can they be invited in? They are not our responsibility to judge. **But inside, it is another story.** The committed have *voluntarily* chosen another way, and they must therefore both be subject to the evaluation of their behavior, and participate in such evaluation for others, in order that the Body may grow to its full potential. Note that *krino* in 12 and 13 has *no prefix*; it therefore denotes **evaluation, not condemnation.** Note also that those to be disciplined include **not only** individuals committing sexual sins (perversions), **but also** those exhibiting greed, idolatry, abusiveness, drunkenness, or violence. Much teaching is needed here. It's not one or the other, but **both** that must be addressed.

1-7 Now Paul turns to matters *within* the brotherhood. It is the job of others in the congregation to mediate such matters. Taking an “in-house” disagreement to be settled by people who have no knowledge of or commitment to the Lord's ways, is not only unsatisfactory, but poor publicity. In the brotherhood, justice should be able to be assumed. We belong to One who laid down his life for his people. Yet we demand “rights”! In a properly functioning Body, this should not be necessary.

8 – No way is this “brotherly”!

9-10 Here is another fairly explicit list of behavior that has no place in the Kingdom. Historically, it has been easier for the church to focus on the first half of the list. In reaction, lately we have been urged to “accept” these, still ignoring the second

half. We fail to see that **ALL of these behaviors are patently unacceptable**. v.11 is the key: *Such things are past tense!* The Lord's people have been "washed – made holy – made just" -- all aorist passives. That constitutes the definitive *removal* of such behaviors. The whole "identity" argument is meaningless, because in Jesus we are given a new identity. No, neither part of the "list" is "worse" or "not as bad" as the other. ALL behavior needs a makeover by the Holy Spirit.

12-14 The new standard of judgment is the resurrection life!

15-20 One's physical body must be treated with extreme respect and care, because it is now a part of the Body of Christ. Perhaps the problem today is that we have not really internalized the information that (19)"we are not our own" any longer.

The interplay of singular and plural in 19 and 20 leaves open the possibility that "body" may include both its physical and spiritual reference. This should be discussed in a serious, studying brotherhood.

I CORINTHIANS 7 Paul's view of marriage

Note that Paul clearly states that this is his *opinion*, not a revelation (12, 25). It also takes into consideration the surrounding culture (2), and his expectation of a soon-coming of the Lord (29, 31).

1-7 The admonition to *mutuality* (3 and 4) is a radical departure in a setting where wives were frequently viewed as property. Paul recognizes that his personal choice of single life is not for everyone.

8-11 He has no problem with people marrying. However, (10-11) once chosen, marriage is permanent, and this part he (rightly) attributes to the Lord. Jesus was unequivocal about that (Mt.5:32, Mk.10:11). Note that the responsibility is on both sides.

12-16 Where only one partner has come to faith, the believer is not to leave, in hopes of the conversion of the partner. However, the "brother or sister" is not constrained, if the unfaithful partner leaves.

17-20 The insertion of commentary on circumcision seems odd, until you realize that this also was a lifetime thing. Although it no longer has spiritual significance, it is not a hindrance either. But no such thing is required any more.

21-24 Slavery is another question. One should take advantage of a chance for freedom (21), and should not voluntarily assume a condition of bondage (23), but status (slave or free) is no longer a question of personal value. Elsewhere (Eph.6:9, and Col.4:1) he speaks to masters, but not here. Perhaps there were no higher-class people in the group?

25-40 Again Paul stresses that his view of marriage is based on "the times". Although he sees the marriage relationship as a distraction from focusing on the Lord, he does not discourage or forbid it. He extends the principle to mourning, celebration, possessions, and any "use" of the world's systems (30). *Chraomai* refers to virtually all of the experiences of earthly life. The core message is that *all* details of life be subordinated to faithfulness: (35) "for your undistracted, complete devotion to the Lord." *Euschemos* is listed as "respectability, proper treatment, decent, becoming, grace, and dignity," *euparedos* as "constantly waiting on", and *aperispastos* as "undistracted."

36-40 In summary, marriage is not to be considered a "failure" of devotion to the Lord. Paul himself chooses and recommends, but does not require, a single life. 39 – Marriage is permanent, until the death of one partner. After that, remarriage is permitted – to another believer – if the widowed one wishes.

Paul concludes by reminding them "*doko*"("It seems to me") that I have the Spirit of God." ("This is the best I can do.") Such a statement is a far cry from the autocratic legislating usually attributed to Paul. Also remember that he is responding to specific questions (v.1) which we do not have at hand.

I CORINTHIANS 8 Idol sacrifices

This was definitely a problem in the prevailing culture, and much more serious than modern "organic" or "pesticide" concerns. It would be difficult to find food in a market that had no idolatrous connection. Planting, harvest, slaughter of animals, would all have been accompanied with ritual.

3 – How central, and how often forgotten: "If anyone loves God, God understands!" The question has nothing to do with the existence or power of idols. Everything that exists is subject to God – to Jesus (6). What matters is the effect on others. There are many behaviors that, although of no particular "spiritual" significance, are damaging to someone else. These are to be studiously avoided.

This does not, however give the "offended" one the right to dictate to others. There is no coercion here, on anyone's part.

The only admonition is to loving concern.

I CORINTHIANS 9

In support of people who carry the message

1-2 Apparently, there has been some sort of challenge to Paul's qualifications. Rather than "pulling rank", he reminds them that he brought the message to them, so their very inclusion testifies to his "certification".

5-- This has engendered speculation about whether Paul was married, but in ch.7, he says he is not. The question here is what would be permissible, not what exists. However, it seems that it was not unusual for couples to serve together.

6-14 The same goes for support. A group should share in the physical needs of those who serve it (11). But (12) Paul points out that he has deliberately not exercised that "right," in order to display the utmost integrity. 15-16 Neither does he delineate these "rights" in order to receive them.

17-18 He has not created a "career", but is simply fulfilling a responsibility entrusted to him. "Rights" do not even enter the picture.

19-23 This is another much-abused passage. Paul is referring to identification with the *condition* of his hearers, not participation in their excesses and abuses! Using this statement as an excuse for indulgence in the depravity of others, or assuming that "evangelism" needs to descend to the level of entertainment available in other spheres, is a gross error. Paul considers that his own life is under "God's law" and "Christ's law", as opposed to those of other cultures. (23) His motivation is the conversion of all these categories of people – not adopting their failings.

24-27 Strict discipline of oneself is obligatory, if one is faithfully to represent the Lord. As someone said, "One must be very strict with *oneself*, while allowing his brother all sorts of latitude." I think this is a faithful admonition.

I CORINTHIANS 10

Applying historical examples

1-11 Heritage and privilege cannot assure faithfulness. (3) The Israelites all had the same experience of deliverance and provision. But those who chose idolatry, perversion, and complaining, threw that all away, and were destroyed. This is to be taken as a warning. Faithfulness vs. unfaithfulness will *always* be a choice. (12) No one is "home free".

13 The above is the context of this often abused promise. It has nothing to do with illness or misfortune, and certainly no implication that such is caused by God. The point is, there will always be a choice to be made. Sometimes that is awfully hard to see.

14-22 This is a totally different affair, from the query in ch.8 about food. This refers to participation in pagan worship. Our worship is sharing (16) in the Body (congregation) and Blood (life) of Christ. One cannot maintain dual citizenship in this Kingdom.

23 "Everything is permissible" cannot stand alone. No, one deviation does not make a person outcast. But "helpful" and "edifying" must define and govern our choices, both for ourselves and others.

25-27 Here, Paul reiterates his former position -- "don't be overly worried about it," BUT, if an issue is made, the whole scene changes.

31 is the key to faithful behavior: no matter what the decision entails, *every* choice must be motivated by the glory of God, and (32) the welfare of everyone else. There are now *three* classifications of people, no longer only "Jew and Greek." "The church of God" has superseded both!

Attention in the rest of the letter now turns to relationships in that new category: "God's church". Liddell/Scott defines *ekklesia* as "a deliberately called assembly, for a particular purpose."

I CORINTHIANS 11

1-16 Gender considerations in the home and in the church have broader implications than usually realized. In an earlier paper, I dealt with this subject in detail, and also in chapter 13 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*. I will not repeat it all here, except to say that the common hierarchical interpretation of the passage is *diametrically opposed* to the actual import of Paul's words. His concern for mutuality in the marital relationship, already advocated in chapter 7 (and also in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3), is here expanded to include the whole congregation.

Remember that this is in *contrast* to the prevailing culture, where only a privileged, elite priesthood was entrusted with the privilege to pray or to prophesy, and the primary religious function of women was temple prostitution. Paul's delegation of the responsibility to pray and to prophesy to *every* man (4) and *every* woman (5) is revolutionary in its inclusiveness.

The question of proper attire (heads covered or uncovered) is symbolic also. Elaborate headdresses were common among pagan (male) priests, and the Jewish hierarchy as well. These are forbidden. In pagan worship, likewise, women would have been lightly clothed, if at all. The woman's modestly covering her head would set her apart most definitively.

Those who turn the concept of “headship” into a prescription for hierarchy, likewise miss the whole point. The paradigm (v.3) is *the relationship of God and Christ!* And that relationship was one of the most complete *unity*, with each fixated upon enhancing the glory of the other. Refer to Jesus' final recorded prayer in John 17. He confers that same relationship upon his followers – and Paul points to *that* relationship as the standard for Christian marriage.

The simple principle of pronoun antecedents reveals that “being argumentative” is the reference of what is “not the pattern for God's church”.

17-22 This is not changing the subject, but an outgrowth of the concern for mutuality. (18) The existence of divisions denies the unity for which Jesus gave his life. They are engendered by a competitive spirit that has no place in the Kingdom (19).

20-22 – The concern here is not boorish behavior at the church potluck, but the lack of mutual concern and care. Selfishness is symptomatic of scorn for the Lord's pattern (22).

23-26 – Paul reminds them of what the Lord intended in this remembrance: tangible evidence of his life, his death, and his coming. This is treated in greater detail in chapter 12 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*.

27-29 “Discerning the Body” is the key. (See *Citizens*, chapter 7). “Unworthy” participation consists of any attitude or behavior that fails (or refuses) to acknowledge that Jesus has called us to be ONE.

30-34 Evaluating the relationships in the Body needs to be a constant effort. “Judging” (*krino*) is NOT condemning: it is *evaluating*, for discipline, in order to *preclude* condemnation (*katakrino*). There is nothing theoretical, ethereal or esoteric here. It is *behavior*, again, that is the test of faithfulness.

I CORINTHIANS 12

1-3 These are the two statements that were often the difference between life and death. “Patriotism” required a person to burn incense with the declaration, “Caesar is lord.” So applying that term to Jesus constituted treason: a capital offense. Declaring a curse upon Jesus was the only way a person could escape that sentence. Paul says rightly that only the Holy Spirit could help a person maintain the faithful choice.

But the Spirit does more than that. He also enables the faithful *life* of his people. The rest of the chapter is, again, a treatise on *mutuality*. From v.7 through v.11, the dative cases have no preposition. The common translations have assumed an indirect object: the various “gifts” being given “to” particular individuals. However, it is equally valid to understand it as a dative of means, or agency. I have chosen to use “by” instead of “to”, in order to make the point that these are gifts *to the entire brotherhood*, administered *from* the Holy Spirit, *by means of* whatever individual member he chooses. Note the purpose stated in v.7: “**for everyone's benefit.**” This is a crucial understanding. The Spirit's gifts are not diplomas or rewards or status-symbols, but simply the provision of a gracious God for the needs of his people. He makes use of whoever happens to be available.

12-26 Mutuality means that every person is not only valuable, but absolutely necessary to the proper functioning of the Body. It is not even desirable, for all to be alike. Important functions would be missing if they were. Neither can anyone exclude another because he doesn't fit into a “slot” already determined by the “organization”. *Everyone* – and everyone's contribution – is necessary. 25-26 Diversity is not division. Faithfulness must make a clear distinction. Division happens when the “parts” lack the “concern for one another” of which Paul writes. Suffering and honor are both shared.

My problem is v.18: “God set the parts, each one of them, in the body just as he wanted.” So painfully seldom have we ever been “set” into a Body! Of course, seldom have we even seen anything remotely resembling the Body described here. It would be so beautiful! Why doesn't anyone else want to try it?

27-30 Paul does not say that this is an exhaustive list of functionaries in the Body/church. it seems plausible that the “first, second, third” is simply chronological; apostles first brought the message, prophets then arose to confirm, interpret, and make it practical to the local situation. Teachers deepened the understanding in accord with the Scriptures, and workers of miracles vindicated the teaching by demonstrations of the power of God. These were never firmly defined categories, as the functions frequently got scrambled. Other gifts followed as needs arose. For further treatment of this subject, see “Leadership” -- chapter 8 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*. Note that ALL of these functions are *plural*. No single individual has an inviolable assignment.

31 The form of *zeloute* can be indicative, imperative, or subjunctive. If indicative, it would be a criticism of those who would derive status from their assignments. If imperative, it could be an admonition to continue seeking to improve one's usefulness to the Lord. If subjunctive, it would be "exhortation" -- not quite as strong as an imperative, but similar. *There is no way to tell*. There is likewise no way to tell if this sentence belongs at the end of this section or the beginning of the next.

I CORINTHIANS 13 This is NOT a digression, nor a separate unit!

It is a major tragedy the way this section has been surgically extracted and watered down to a syrupy "love-poem" for weddings and such. It is an integral part of the description of the nature and function of the brotherhood/Body/Kingdom! It is probably a summary of what Paul has been trying to get across in the previous two chapters -- the transition from an individualistic, worldly culture to the mutuality of the Kingdom.

1-3 Even supernatural powers -- or perhaps one should say *especially* supernatural powers -- are only valuable when exercised in the love out of which they were given.

4-6 The common thread here is the focus on the *other*, rather than oneself. That is the ultimate validation.

8-10 Prophecies, language, knowledge, are only needed in the interim, until all things are finally brought to Jesus' feet. They are necessary now, but temporary. Only love will remain.

11-12 An admonition to grow up!

13 -- Loyalty and confidence grow as love deepens. All mutually fertilize each other.

I CORINTHIANS 14 Practical implications

1- *Diokete* is a very strong present imperative. It's the same word used for pursuit (of game, or an enemy), and even persecution! And the present tense indicates continuous effort. Love is the preeminent priority. "Spiritual" things (there's only an adjective, no noun) are to be desired also, but *zeloute* is not as urgent a word. Desirability and earnest effort is still in view; "striving", as in athletics, is a parallel concept.

2-6 Here Paul is contrasting the value *to the group* of prophecy relative to that of tongues. V.5 makes it extremely clear that Paul is not disparaging the use of tongues; but his concern here is for its *public* exercise. V.3 provides a succinct definition of the function of prophecy in the brotherhood: it involves speaking to people on behalf of God, for their "edification" (growth in faithfulness), "admonition" (correction as needed), and encouragement. How different from the prevailing *abuse* of "prophecy" in the 20-21st century! Nothing here about scaring people! *Paramuthia* is reassurance -- just the opposite!

7-12 *In the congregation*, being understood is paramount. V.12 summarizes the argument.

13-19 Unless one is able to interpret, the gift of the use of tongues is to be used in private, between an individual and God. Obviously, Paul recognizes the value of this means of prayer, or he would not say he frequently made use of it. Properly, and privately, used, it is the gracious provision of God that enables one to pray beyond his understanding.

20-25 But in public, the message conveyed to a stranger is of the utmost importance. Of course, at Pentecost, in the presence of many foreigners, the gift of tongues did enable understanding. And there has been abundant testimony of similar things happening since, as well. But this is not the norm. Note that in vv.23 and 24, *everyone* is *participating*.

This is elaborated in 26-36, in a description of a worship assembly. v.26 is an example of address to each individual member of a group, as opposed to a conventional singular or plural. *Hekastos* -- "each one" -- has a contribution to make: a psalm (song, perhaps?), a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, or interpretation. These functions are NOT the province of a single, designated individual, or even of a few, but of *every person*! For the reasons detailed above in 13-25, tongues must be interpreted if expressed publicly. (29) Prophecy *must be evaluated*! (31) It is a privilege and a responsibility extended to all, but to be exercised in a disciplined fashion. Referring back to Paul's definition in v.3, he reminds us that ALL need to learn and to be encouraged. (30) A prophet must yield the floor to someone who receives another revelation. Presumably, that too must be subject to evaluation. (32) An uncontrolled outburst is NOT the work of the Holy Spirit. This would constitute a reversion to the pagan practices of "possession." The picture is of an orderly assembly, where all are free to share whatever the Lord has prompted them, considerately, and in turn.

33-36, at first glance, seems to contradict 11:5, where women are instructed to be covered when exercising prophetic gifts, or praying. (What's the point, if they are never to do so?) I suggest that one possible understanding, given the context of the chapter, is the prohibition of an uncontrolled outburst of tongues. This is by no means certain, however, and needs to be open to discernment. The use of *laleo*, which refers to speaking, with no reference to the content, (as opposed to *lego*)

would permit this understanding. The reference to “learning” (*mathein*) is also ambiguous, but may refer to a Socratic-type dialogue, or the assembling of one's own personal group of “disciples” – (*mathetes*) – , which would be out of place in worship. See also I Tim.2:11-12.

36-40 Paul's concern is for an orderly exercise of the Lord's spiritual gifts to the Body. Neither the use of prophecy nor of tongues is to be forbidden nor deprecated, but both are to be controlled, for the benefit of all.

I CORINTHIANS 15

The centrality of the Resurrection

1-11 A summary of the message Paul preached, with heavy emphasis on the witnesses to Jesus' resurrection. His own encounter is an important part of that testimony, as is the drastic change it produced in his life and thought.

12-19 There's no point to anything, if Jesus is not alive. And there is nothing to share – no new life for people.

20-28 But he IS alive, and imparts that life to his people. It's not over yet; Jesus still needs to finish putting down all the competing powers. It looks like that only happens at his return (23-25), when the Kingdom is handed back to the Father. Not sure of the implication here. Does the Trinity get somehow rearranged? (26) Death itself is to be finally destroyed -- “the one that had the power of death” (Heb.2:15) already is. All of the “subjecting” in 24-28 is a little muddy, but clearly, Jesus has it all under control!

29 There is no explanation or advocacy of this practice. It is not described anywhere else.

31-34 It must be kept in view, that this is not the only life with which to be concerned. But that's not an excuse for wasting it!

35-49 “Majoring in minors” and obsessively trying to figure out details that don't really matter, are folly. We will be changed. We are in the process of *being* changed. What *does* matter, is that we will be like him. We have now the “image” of humanity, with all its failings, and just as certainly, we are promised the prospect of the “image” of Jesus. That should be enough. (See discussion of *eikon* in Mt.22:20 and parallels.) V.46 clearly contradicts the notion of pre-existent beings.

50-52 “We will be changed”. This is clearly related to the changing that is supposed to be going on now.

50-58 This can only be described as an attempt to describe the indescribable. The final destruction of death, the glorious victory of Jesus. Notice the conclusion: this is NOT an incentive to sit around and wait. v.57 – God is *now in the process of giving* (present tense!) us that victory. (58) The appropriate response is persistence and enthusiasm for the Lord's work. “It will be worth it all...!” Praise God!

I CORINTHIANS 16

1-4 – Careful plans are made for the relief offering. No hint of “Just trust me!” 5-8 – Travel plans.

9 – An odd, but common, combination: an open door – a huge task – many opponents. That would make a good sermon!

10-12 – news of co-workers.

13-14 – Back to the refrain: Be faithful – grow up! -- be strong – do everything in (*ev* – the atmosphere!) love.

15-20 – The greetings to individuals focus on their faithfulness. The greeting from Aquila and Priscilla indicates that they are together with Paul in Ephesus at this time, where they went with him from Corinth.

22 – This is an odd statement: *anathema* can be a number of things: from “dedication to a god” to “being accursed. I've chosen the middle definition, mainly because “cursing” does not seem to match “love”, and such people are certainly not “devoted to God.” It would fit with the avoidance advocated with respect to the offender of chapter 5. However, I am not adamant about that choice.

II CORINTHIANS

This is the “sequel” -- or maybe several of them – to the first letter. Some scholars think that there was a visit, or perhaps one or more exchanges of letters in between, but we have no record of such.

Titus, apparently, had been an emissary between Paul and the Corinthian church. Paul had expected him at Troas (Troy?), but they did not catch up with each other until arriving in Macedonia (perhaps Philippi). At any rate, Titus brought a cautiously optimistic report. Paul mentions that the folks at Corinth had heeded some of his admonitions, but he also feels the need to defend his ministry against some pretty severe critics. There was evidently some misunderstanding about his intention to visit Corinth, as well. Folks seem to have felt slighted by his failure to appear.

The controversy sharpens our understanding of Paul's commitment to paying his own expenses, and not freeloading – and also his deep concern for absolute integrity in the administration of the relief offering for the Judean brethren.

Much has been made of the use of the term “apostle,” which is simply the transliteration of *apostolos* (the adjectival or noun form of the verb *apostello*, “to send away,”) as if it conferred some sort of status. It is true that Paul defends his use of the word; however, the same word is also used of the people sent *to* Paul by the group, and others. Translators have customarily used “messengers” when they don't think the people in question were of sufficient status, and there is no justification for that distinction. “Messenger” is a different word : *angelos* – and they would have even more trouble with that! (It's transliteration is “angel”!) I usually use “envoy”, or the participial “sent by”, unless it seems that a person's right to speak is at issue. *Apostolos* for example, is used in 8:23 of the people appointed by the congregations for the administration of the relief offering.

II CORINTHIANS 1

1 – This is an example of the use of *apostolos* where two readings are equally valid: “an apostle of Christ Jesus”, or “sent out by Christ Jesus.” The genitive case without preposition can be taken as either possessive, or source. I frankly don't get the impression that Paul is “pulling rank” in his salutation, which includes Timothy. In v.2, the genitive does follow a preposition, *apo*, and everything else is genitive, but whether *kurieu iesou christou* is a second object of the preposition (with *theou patros*) or a second possessive (with *hemon* is subject to interpretation.

3-7 – God is described with wonderful terms. He is the father of compassion – there would be none without him! -- and of encouragement. How different from the threatening tone so many ascribe to Paul! Hassles (“tribulation”) are NOT “sent by God”, but he coaches us *through* them, so that we can do the same for others! Sharing breeds confidence. (See also James 1:12-15) 8-14 – Paul is not blaming his readers for his trials, but asking them for support in prayer. He clearly represents that they are members of the same team. There is no manipulation involved. He does find it necessary to remind them of his exemplary behavior. He asks his readers for their prayers, in the endurance that is required of him under extreme pressure.

15-22 – Some folks have been offended that Paul did not show up as expected. He speaks of a really rough time in Asia; plans do tend to change, when one's life is threatened. He tries to reassure them that he's not playing games with them, promising what he can't deliver. Especially in 21-22, the message is that they are in this together, united by the gift of the Holy Spirit. 23-24, especially 24, re-emphasizes the team concept. Paul is not a boss or a tyrant.

II CORINTHIANS 2

1-4 Part of the reason for Paul's delay was to give them time to work out their own problems. This refers back to 1:24 --- he is not inclined to be domineering.

5-11 This is *probably* referring to the person dealt with in I Cor.5, although identification cannot be absolute. Apparently, someone took it that Paul felt personally offended by the infraction – (5)but he reinforces the point that it was the church, not he, that was harmed. Now that the exclusion that Paul had advocated (I Cor.5:5 and 13) has brought the offender to repentance, he is to be restored and forgiven. Not grudgingly, either, but overtly loved. (8) If this forgiveness is not manifest, they are all playing into the hands of Satan.

12 – Since Titus had not come to Troas, Paul left even a fruitful field, and headed on in their direction, to learn the response to his admonition. 14-17 – He expresses relief at the news of their acceptance.

17 is to be especially noted: Paul is not, like some others, trying to “peddle the Word of God for profit”. Folks who are concerned about “literal inspiration” manage to find it easy to ignore this. Profit is the *antithesis* of “pure motives.” *Kapeleuo* refers to “being a retail dealer” (Liddell/Scott), with a strong flavor of swindling or trickery. Several references are to tavern-keeping! Quite different from operating “in the presence of God”!

II CORINTHIANS 3

1-3 Paul's "references" are those whose lives have been touched by his ministry.

4-6 He takes no personal credit for his work among them – he has simply served as a conduit for the activity of God. The message is not his.

7-11 Although that was not its *purpose*, the *result* of the Law of Moses was the condemnation of all who did not keep it perfectly. Even so, "radiance" or "glory" accompanied Moses' own experience. But the new administration, that of the Spirit, *creates* the justice that is required, and consequently has greater glory.

12-18 Please refer to chapter 8 of *Citizens of the Kingdom* for a study of the "veil" to which Paul is referring. No longer is God hidden. We who are his, become transformed (18--by actually beholding him!) into his image! This was the original intent of creation.

Both the veil Moses used to keep the people from seeing *his* "glory" fade, and the temple veil that hid the "holy place" where God was said to dwell, have been done away with, for anyone (16) who turns to the Lord. We are freed by the Spirit of the Lord.

Notice that the transformation (*metemorphoumetha*) is passive, as in Romans 12. This is the work of the Spirit, not human effort. We can only *reflect* – (*katoptrizomenoi*) -- what a mirror does – what comes from the Lord. He is the source. The light is not ours.

II CORINTHIANS 4

However, if one is to reflect the Lord's glory, there *is* action required. There should not be a break in the thought here.

"Therefore" indicates a connection with material immediately preceding.

2 –There is no place for *anything* that is "hidden" or "shameful" . Note that these two designations are equated – something that is usually ignored. This is another of many statements that NO secrecy of *any* kind is appropriate in the Kingdom.

Neither is it ever acceptable to deceive anyone about anything, which is tantamount to distorting the Word. Only a "plain revelation of the truth" is acceptable. Secrecy has destroyed countless victims, in corporate, institutional "churches" (which are not worthy of that label).

4 – Anything that impedes the light of the glory of Jesus is likewise sourced in "the god of this age" (*aiōnos* – it certainly doesn't mean "eternity" here!)

5 diagnoses the source of all negative things: people more concerned for their own position (proclaiming themselves!) than for Jesus. *Only light* is worthy of him. And (6) only the eternal Creator is its source. The glory is God's, and can only be seen in him!

7-12 – We who propagate this word must be expendable: battered, but not destroyed. This validates and demonstrates the power of Jesus' resurrection.

11-18 – Confidence in the resurrection (14) is the only way to "hang in there." Even human nature can be transformed by that power. We're still mortal, but stubbornly "keeping on." Notice that both first and second person pronouns and/or subjects are all plural! Even the glory of God (15) is enhanced by the faithfulness and thanksgiving of the *group*.

17 – This statement is carved in marble at the ruins of the acropolis in Corinth. Our hassles are temporary – the glory of Jesus is not!

18 -- "Seeing the invisible" is also a repeated theme. See also Hebrews 11. The key is where our attention is focused: *skopeo* is far more focused than the more common *theoreo*. It is used of the task of sentries; "to consider or examine a situation," or even a scout or a spy! And here it is a present participle. This must be our *continual* focus.

II CORINTHIANS 5

1-5 The general assumption, which is probably valid, from the context, has been that the "temporary home" to which Paul refers is one's earthly body, his physical existence. However, the inclusion of *skenos* (tent) with *oikia* could also refer to a "home" in a more ordinary sense. It really doesn't matter, as his point is that, in either case, God has prepared something better.

4 – It is "mortality" itself that is to be replaced.

6-9 – Living in a manner pleasing to the Lord makes all other considerations irrelevant.

10 – Here Paul exemplifies the trusting person's attitude toward the concept of "judgment." It is to be **anticipated**, not feared. The use of *soma* (body) may be interpreted variously, as well – as either one's physical body, or as the Body which is the church. The use of *dia* with a genitive object would allow either one. I lean slightly toward the latter, since Paul has been talking about behavior in the body of believers.

11-16 In view of having been raised to resurrection life, picky disputes between brethren are totally unacceptable. No point

in arguing whether someone is crazy or sane (13). All we are, is to be directed to Kingdom building. We are “possessed” with Jesus' love! *Sunecho* also implies being joined or held together.

15 is a too-seldom mentioned reason for Jesus' death: **so that we all might live for him**, rather than for ourselves! This totally transforms the relationships of all who are touched by it.

17 – There is no verb in the first clause. Consequently, the “new creation” may describe the individual who has taken his place “in Christ”, or it may be saying that for such a person, all creation is new. I rather favor the latter option, because of what follows – the old has gone away, and something new has (perfect tense) happened.

18-19 – This is entirely the work of God. Not only has he restored people to himself, but has entrusted to us the responsibility to be agents of that same activity. *Katalasso*, interestingly, is used of a prisoner exchange, (L/S), as well as a change from enmity to friendship, or indeed any sort of an exchange (including currency.) (I checked, but it is *not* the source of our English “catalyst.”)

The passing on of the responsibility to reconciled people is repeated: it must be very important. In v.18, it is *diakonia* – an assigned task (quite different from the mystique that was later assigned to “ministry”) and in v.19 *themenos en hemin* (2nd aorist of *tithemi*), a hugely varied verb, noted in Liddell/Scott as “to put in place, to deposit in a bank, to put in a certain state or condition, to refer to the work of an artist”, and many others. Simply put, **to participate in reconciliation is also to enlist in its propagation.**

Jesus, who had never failed or violated God's standard, nevertheless accepted the position of an outcast, in order to *create* God's justice in/among his people. The use of *ginomai*– *genometha*, a present subjunctive with *hina* – a purpose clause) emphasizes again the transformation that is expected.

Far from the “sign-on-the-dotted-line” heresy that is labeled “gospel” in our day, this calls for *becoming*, not mindless assent to a list of propositions.

II CORINTHIANS 6

1-10 The integrity of the messengers reflects on that of the message. Note the interplay of abuse to be endured (4-5), attitudes to be projected (6-7), and the contradictions that result (8-10). The lives of genuine followers of Jesus will never make sense to those outside. 11-13 Again Paul urges his readers to join the team.

14 – Note that this admonition is *not*, as usually harped-on, about marriage, although it certainly applies there. Paul is referring to *any* sort of partnership. A “yoke” is referring of course to beasts of burden, but is frequently used of alliances of other kinds. The problem comes when one tries to manifest the attitudes and behaviors treated above. A person without that commitment simply can't – and usually won't – adhere to those standards. They don't “get it.”

14-16 The contrasts are absolute. Justice and lawlessness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial (or Beliar – the name of a pagan god, also used for Satan), faithfulness and unfaithfulness, God's temple and the temple of idols. None of these, ultimately, can coexist.

One must, as Paul said earlier, (I Cor.5:9 f), interact with these people, or they cannot be “reached.” But the sharing of *partnership* is impossible, and often disastrous.

The challenge (17) is clear: *aphoristhete*. L/S lists “mark off boundaries, make a distinction, separate, **become a distinct species**” (I like that one). It is an *aorist passive imperative* – a decisive step. God has to do the work, but the decision is up to us. In short, “**Don't mess with contaminants.**”

II CORINTHIANS 7

1 -- “If you want to be clean, come out of the mud!”

2-7 -- Paul makes another effort to work at their own relationship.

8 – Sometimes a degree of harsh correction is needed. Since it produced a necessary change in behavior, it did not do damage. 9-11 “Grief” that is constructive produces a changed life. It's completely different from remorse of a worldly sort, where one simply grovels in his failure. Unfortunately, the distinction is not always recognized.

12 seems a bit puzzling – one would think Paul did want to correct the wrong that was done.

At any rate, it looks like they passed the test. Notice the *context* of the admonition to “clean up and grow up.” It is in light of the provisions and promises of the previous chapter. It is simply a choice of what sort of company one wants to keep.

II CORINTHIANS 8

The relief offering (Ac.11:27-30) is an illustration of the appropriate response to inclusion in the Body of believers.

1-5 The Macedonian churches were not wealthy, but participated generously. The key is in v.5 – having given themselves

to the Lord, “overflowing” for the needs of brethren was automatic.

6-15 Corinth was much richer (v.7), being a crossroads of commerce. Ships were off-loaded there, and their cargo transported across the isthmus and reloaded (for a fee). They had offered assistance previously (v.10), but never made good on their offer. Jesus' life is the ultimate example of renouncing selfishness (9). They are not scolded for honest inability (12), but laxity.

14-15 In a true brotherhood, no one remains in need.

16-20 Again, Paul takes great care to have others involved, to certify the integrity of the effort.

21-24 Testimony to the integrity of the “trustees” of the funds is important. They have all been selected and sent (*apostoloi*) by their respective congregations, and they are to be received and respected as brethren.

II CORINTHIANS 9

More regarding the offering (belongs with chapter 8)

1-5 Paul reminds them of their earlier commitment. This present request should give no impression of coercion.

6-7 The blessing of generosity. Basically, do what you said you would, and not regretfully.

8-11 God enables his people's efforts on behalf of others. The resources he provides are to be used for “every good deed. (8). This feeds into the true definition of “justice.” (9 and 10).

11 – If any are “enriched”, it is for the *purpose* of generosity. How rarely is that realized! Only so is it *really* “for the glory of God.” See also Eph.4:28.

12-15 –Since taking care of the needs of God's people brings thanksgiving to him, it is truly “legitimate worship.” V.12 uses both *diakonia* (service, “ministry”) and *leitourgias* (the word from which the English “liturgy” is derived – (this is not reciting things from rote memory or reading a prescribed passage from a book. It is far more practical than that!) How did the concept become so distorted?

13-14 Identification with the “good news of Christ” produces generosity in sharing, which in turn spawns giving of thanks, and prayers in love and fellowship.

15 It is *all* the gift of God.

II CORINTHIANS 10

Paul is not demanding supremacy, but equal standing with all the brethren who have the same charge.

1-2 Apparently, these are the words of his critics.

3 He acknowledges being/living as an “ordinary human” (the most accurate translation of *sarx* in this context), but that is not the standard by which it is appropriate to operate.

4-6 He wants them to recognize that there is a real battle going on, for the “hearts and minds” of people. “The obedience of Christ” -- another genitive without preposition. I think the implication is that it is *Jesus'* obedience that is to be the model for ours. The more common rendering, “obedience to Christ” would require dative case. The subjugation of our minds is a *voluntary* exercise, whose purpose (*eis*) is that obedience.

7-11 – Again, Paul has an equal right to speak, with all the others. He reminds them that unlike some, he uses his authority for building, and not tearing down.

12 – Rivalry among people has no place in the Kingdom. People who compare themselves, or pit one against another,

“don't make any sense.” 13-14 – Paul did, after all, bring the message to them. That alone should earn him a hearing. 15-

16 – He is not coming to “take over,” but to go on beyond Corinth. 17-18 There is simply no room for ego trips in honest Christian work.

II CORINTHIANS 11

1-4 Paul's concern is that the message has been distorted by competing, self-styled “apostles”, and that the hearers have been deceived. (An appropriate question might be, who “sent” them?)

5-7 Paul engaged in no deceptive rhetoric (6), and demanded no status (7) and no profit.

8-9 The Macedonian brethren supported his work in Corinth.

10-13 His behavior distinguishes him from those who are seeking their own gain and glory.

14-15 It is clear which side such people represent. Deception only comes from one place.

16-21 The sarcasm is heavy. “Maybe I should have acted like a jerk, too!” I can identify with that. Junk finds a publisher, when honest scholarship cannot.

22-33 A brief bio. Regarding pedigree, work, abuse, privation, and all sorts of dangers, Paul can run circles around most folks. Paul has said this is “foolishness” -- that it has no value. It seems to be a response to people who bragged about similar things as if they were “qualifications” on a resume.

II CORINTHIANS 12

Again, remember that Paul himself does not consider talking about these things profitable or worthwhile. Even “visions and revelations”. Whether the person he mentions in 12:5 is himself or someone else has been the subject of debates. There is no way to know.

5-6 The implication is that the competing teachers have based their claims on purportedly supernatural experiences, but Paul refuses to do that. After all, the veracity of such claims cannot be examined.

7-8 This “thorn in the flesh” is likewise the subject of much speculation. Some sort of physical affliction is likely. Seems odd, when he was so often privileged to minister healing to others. The reference to a “messenger (*angelos*) of Satan” is especially puzzling, along with *edothē* (“it was given”). By whom? God? Unlikely.

9 -- Yet, it looks like God overtly refused to remove/heal the problem. Normally one would think that the power of God would be manifest in healing, as it frequently was. But here, it is in weakness that his power is said to be “complete” (*teleitai*). *Teleo* denotes completion, accomplishment, or fulfillment. This may refer back to Paul's statement in 4:7, where he is concerned that it be obvious that the power is God's and not his.

10 -- At any rate, for Paul, it transforms what would otherwise be disasters into opportunities to draw on Jesus' power.

11-13 He considers this whole discussion unworthy of brethren. Gets sarcastic again.

14-15 is yet another passage contrasting Paul's behavior with that of the impostors. **True representatives of the Lord do not make a profit from their “ministry.”** “Literalists”, where are you???

16-21 Paul's distress is evident. The charges of his opponents are so egregious. That they should even be entertained, is inconceivable. He calls for an examination of their history. The dissension seems to contradict the whole of the message of the Gospel. The people of God simply don't *act* like that. Unfortunately, all too often, they do.

II CORINTHIANS 13

Now Paul speaks of a third visit. Acts records only two – the first, a stay of eighteen months after Athens (Ac.18), and the second a conjecture that it is included in the reference to “Greece” in 20:2 on the way back to Jerusalem. It is not clear if there was another intermediate visit, which would fit with the concern about the relief offering, or if he intended another trip that was aborted by his arrest in Jerusalem.

5 – A most-needed reminder: “Test *yourselves* to see if you are being faithful. Nobody should have to come around to check. The constant evaluation and counsel of the brotherhood is a huge safety measure. It is the strength and faithfulness of the congregation that concerns Paul.

Some later manuscripts have a subscript that this was written from Philippi, which would fit the assumption that it preceded his last visit, but then there is no indication of when the second one might have been. There could be a time gap between the first visit (Ac.18:1-11) and the incident before Gallio (18:12-17), but that can only be conjecture.

GALATIANS

The Galatian churches probably included those at Derbe, Lystra, Pisidian Antioch, and perhaps Iconium (present-day Konya), although the latter may have been considered part of Cappadocia. They were the fruits of Paul's first journey to what is now Turkey. In all of these he had faced fierce opposition from the Jewish communities, and had the greatest success among the Gentiles of the area.

Galatia derived its name from the Celtic tribes ("Gauls") who had invaded during the third century BC, and were annexed by Rome under Augustus in 24 BC.

After Paul left, the opposition Jewish leaders must have made inroads upon the fledgling church, insisting that observance of their legal requirements was necessary, rather than the simple obedience to Jesus that Paul had preached. Letters were sent to the Gentile churches after the matter was discussed at the Jerusalem conference (Ac.15), but either they had not yet reached Galatia, or the opposition impeded their implementation. Paul probably wrote this before his second visit. (Ac.16).

His concern is to establish his own credentials, in order to counteract those who have challenged his message of the acceptance of Gentile believers, and to urge upon them a return to their trust in the sufficiency of faithfulness to Jesus. He makes the point that "freedom" is not a "do-your-own-thing" license, but that obedience *results from*, and does not *create*, one's standing "in Christ."

Many historians consider this to be one of the earliest New Testament documents committed to writing, dating it shortly after the Jerusalem conference of roughly 50 AD.

GALATIANS 1

1-2 Paul clearly claims Jesus Christ as the source and impetus of his ministry, but takes care to include his companions as well, this time without listing them. The "churches of Galatia", as noted in the introduction, are probably at least those at Pisidian Antioch, Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium.

3 -- "Grace and peace", a combination of the Greek *charis* and Hebrew "*Shalom*", are frequent in both salutations and benedictions in Paul's writing.

4 – Due to Paul's emphasis in other writings that God's people are not to be *isolated* from the rest of the world, but merely *insulated* from its evil, I have chosen to sort the genitives, making *ponerou* the object of the preposition and the rest a possessive modifier, rather than the other way around. Both are admissible by the grammatical structure.

6-9 Paul dives right into the problem. The Galatians have fallen for the message of manipulative teachers who distort the Word they had received. Such tactics rate stern condemnation.

10-24 – A brief bio, making the point that Paul is not following instructions or orders from any "boss" or hierarchy, but rather preaching what he received from Jesus himself, although he testifies to an acquaintance with Peter and James. This is not quite the way Luke recorded it in Acts 9. Damascus is in Syria; Luke says the Jerusalem people were afraid of him until Barnabas introduced him to "the apostles", who later sent him off for his own safety. The details are not germane to the point, however. "The one who persecuted us is now preaching the faithfulness he tried to destroy" is the main idea.

GALATIANS 2

1-9 This is probably a reference to the council at Jerusalem, to settle the question of Gentile believers. Paul has a less charitable view of the conflict than Luke, not surprisingly; but these whom he calls "false brothers" (4) are probably the very ones who had been harassing the Gentile churches. Paul staunchly defended his converts, and those in leadership confirmed his activity. 9-10 A division of responsibility made sense, and seems to have been amicable. The admonition to remember the poor fits well with the concerns Paul expressed to the Corinthians (II Cor.8 and 9).

11-14 The run-in with Peter (Cephas) is omitted in Acts, but is quite believable. Peter probably thought he was being "considerate", but the behavior was not brotherly. And he and James had both been at the Council. They should have known better. 15-16 Even Jewish believers need to depend on Jesus' enabling them to live justly. So what's the point in imposing their system of regulations on others?

17-18 This would negate the provision of Christ, and put them back in the quagmire of legal bondage.

19-20 The death and resurrection theme is one of Paul's favorites. The resurrection life is all about Jesus. People who are his still must navigate in mortal bodies, but the Life is his, enabled by *his* faithfulness. *Iesou Christou* is a **possessive**. If the more common rendition, "by faith *in* Christ" were correct, the text would need *en* with a dative case, or *eis* with an accusative object. It is our Lord's *own* faithfulness, not our own, upon which we can rely. It is his living in/among (*en*) us

that *creates* our faithfulness. The genitive in v.20 is the same: *te* refers back to *pistei*, while *tou huiou tou theou* is a possessive genitive.

21 It is the advocates of the Law, not Paul, who de-value the sacrifice of Jesus.

GALATIANS 3

1-5 The gift of the Holy Spirit is additional evidence of the irrelevance of the Law, since no observance of its precepts was involved there. Faithfulness to Jesus is the sole condition of the gift.

6-9 It is Abraham's faithfulness to God that was the condition for his blessing. Here is another of the many places where the understanding of *pistis* is critical. It is not "believe" in the sense of theoretical assent to a proposition. Abraham *demonstrated* his faith(fulness) by *following God's instructions*.

10-14 v.11 adds weight to this understanding. The preposition is *ek*, (from, or out of); the common translation "by" would, again, require a dative of agency or means. The life of a just person *grows out of* his faithfulness.

12 The Law, on the other hand, requires meticulous observance of detail.

15-18 The advent of the Law, 430 years later, could not change or nullify the covenant with Abraham. It is the promise to **Jesus**, as Abraham's descendant, (not Moses), in which we now share.

19-24 The Law was a stop-gap measure, to try to keep some semblance of order until Jesus came. Partly, its purpose seems to have been to show how badly we needed him! (21) The Law could not give life. Only God/Jesus can do that.

25 The phrase, "the advent (coming) of faithfulness" is rather intriguing. Was there no such thing until Jesus? Surely there were faithful people. But Jesus raised it to a completely different level. His faithfulness was absolute. No longer are minutely detailed instructions in the game-plan. Faithfulness/**loyalty** to Jesus is all that matters.

27-29 Baptized to belong to Christ, Jew, Greek, slave, free, male, female, are all ONE: Sons of God.

26 – It has become stylish in the 20-21st century to "de-gender" the Biblical message. Such nonsense is evidence of a complete lack of understanding of the import of the message, and the deliberate choice of words. If "children of God" was to be understood, the writers would have used *pais* or *tekna*. If "sons and daughters" was intended, *thugater* would have been added to *huios*. It would have been perfectly possible to do this, and where that was intended, that's what was written. But that is NOT the intention here: and it could not be farther from a sexist statement. (28) "Jew, Greek, slave, free, male, female – **you are all ONE** in Christ Jesus". Why then, are we (26) "**ALL GOD'S SONS**"?

Because only sons can receive an inheritance in that culture! Only sons have the responsibility to care for the family. It's a "status thing", all right – but it's status that is shared by **everyone who belongs to Christ!** In him, the "seed" (Paul made a lot over the singular noun in v.16) of Abraham, we are ALL "heirs according to the promise"!

Let every woman who has chosen the life of faithfulness to Jesus take proud delight in the designation "sons of God"! It is the ultimate promotion – the total abolition of the "glass ceiling". In Christ, we are all SONS AND HEIRS.

Don't let ignorant demagoguery ruin that!

GALATIANS 4

1-7 Paul continues to emphasize the status of sons, and to repeat that it applies to ALL (6). "Children" doesn't work. Children have no legal authority. We have been "ransomed" out of this situation by Jesus.

The concept of "adoption" is also misunderstood. It was possible to be adopted in the modern sense of the word, in the first century. But when a natural son attained majority, there was also an "acknowledgement" of the fact, and his new status, by his father. We are all sons by birth, and also *acknowledged* in Christ – as rightful heirs.

8-10 Paul urges them not to back out of their new, exalted status, to return to childhood or slavery. That warning is seriously needed in our age.

12-16 – Paul reminds them of the gracious reception he had received among them. He is much less specific than most commentators about the affliction in question.

17 Contrast the domineering attitude of the competing teachers.

18-20 Paul is really worried about their welfare.

21-31 The pedigree business gets a little garbled here. The Jews claimed Isaac's line, but Paul connects them to Hagar because of their slavery to the Law (symbolized by Mt. Sinai), and places those who have accepted the promise (life in Christ) as Isaac's offspring. In this passage, Paul comes closer than in Romans to excluding entirely those who cling to the Law, from the inheritance (cp. Rom.9-11). Fortunately, that's not ours to sort out!

GALATIANS 5

1-12 Those who place themselves under the law have forsaken the freedom provided in Christ. Caving in to the circumcision advocates obligates a person to the entirety of the law. One has to wonder, then, why Paul required that of Timothy (Ac. 16:3). Was that not the kind of accommodation for which he criticized Peter (2:11)? Have to leave that question open.

13 Freedom does not mean casting off all restraint.

14-16 Love in the brotherhood will solve most problems. Its lack is destructive in the extreme. If one is busy about the things of the Spirit, there will be neither time nor energy for harmful things.

17-18 One must choose which “nature” to live by.

19-21 This is not instituting a new law, but merely outlining the garbage that belongs to the former life.

22-23 Characteristics of life in the Spirit. The observation that “there is no law against these” is apt.

24-26 Interestingly, there are no passive voices in this admonition to faithful living. Frequently there is an interplay of active and passive – not here. The crucifixion of the human nature (aorist tense) and ordering of life (present subjunctive) are both *active*. The former is a **definitive choice**, the latter a **continuous effort**. Both are necessary.

26 There is no place for competition in the Body. Status is not to exist.

GALATIANS 6

Miscellaneous admonitions

1-- Corrections must be made, but gently, and with humility.

2 – Mutuality is “Christ’s law”.

3 – Posturing and pretension is to be recognized as phony – by definition.

4-5 – Each must clean up his own act – be responsible.

6 – Share with *real* teachers

7-8 – The harvest will depend on what’s planted and cultivated.

9-10 – Perseverance in “doing good” is a continual assignment. To all, but especially the brotherhood.

11-13 – Question the motives of anyone giving orders or dictating requirements.

14-15 – Paul’s statement of his own choice of paths is an invitation to do the same. The “new creation” is what matters.

16 – These are the *real* “chosen people”.

EPHESIANS

Ephesus was another crossroads community, with currents of culture and thought from all over the world. It is still impressive, though the harbor is long-since silted-in, and its luxury lies in ruins. Only one column of the famed “Temple of Artemis of the Ephesians” remains. It stands in a weedy field, and a stork has found a home in its nest on top of the pillar. Such is the end of “She whom Ephesus and all the world worship.” (Ac.19:27)

Paul spent two years in Ephesus, during which time his message spread to towns all over the Roman province of Asia. This may have been a “circle letter” among those cities (including Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea). It may be a compilation of fragments preserved in one or more of those places. Most likely, it would have been written before John “retired” there according to tradition, taking with him Mary, whom Jesus had entrusted to his care. As far as I have been able to find out, no documentation exists, but tradition is strong, regarding their residence in Ephesus. Patmos, where John spent some time in exile, is not far off shore, so a connection is not unlikely.

These were all primarily Gentile churches, although there was some Jewish influence, combined with early accretions of Docetism and Gnosticism, which cropped up in Colossae as well. Hierapolis and Laodicea were not far away, and may have been part of a circuit. Other Eastern religions flavored the atmosphere as well. This probably accounts for Paul's emphasis on the supremacy and total sufficiency of Jesus Christ. He insists that those who belong to Jesus have absolutely no need of any additives.

The letter is divided basically in half, between the “theological” issues and their practical results in the lives of Jesus' followers. Paul leans heavily on one of his favorite phrases, “in Christ” -- representing that as the context, and the very atmosphere, in which new life exists.

Although it is widely disputed whether or not this is the work of Paul at all, (I have not seen any convincing arguments against his authorship), those who do acknowledge it to be his set the date as sometime during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, in the early 60's AD.

EPHESIANS 1

1-- There are a number of manuscripts that lack the attribution *en epheso*, which has led some to assume this to be a later work. Marcion substituted “Laodicea” in his compilation, thinking it might be the letter the Colossian brethren were instructed to share (Col.4:15-16). The thing that matters is that it was addressed to “God's faithful people”, who are also called “holy” -- set-apart for God. They are faithful “in Christ”, as part of the Body/brotherhood. Such an address can include all of us, in every age, who acknowledge Jesus as Lord!

2-- The genitives can be interpreted as a double object of *apo* (with *patros*), or a double possessive (with *hemon*). The grammar allows them equally.

3-- Here there is no ambiguity, as there is only one genitive. The father-son relationship is in view, as the source of *all* the spiritual blessings of heaven, *in Christ*. Remember that in the manuscripts, there was no punctuation at all, and Paul could go a long way before stopping for breath! I have divided his endless sentences to make them more readable in English, but those divisions are not absolute, and quite open to question. For example, placing *en agape* with v.5 rather than v.4 simply seemed more a part of the thought; but if you'd rather leave it with v.4, feel free! Both are expressions of the love of God.

4-- We were hand-selected, before creation, to belong to God *in him* (Christ).

5 – Our “destiny” was to be acknowledged as sons of God (see notes on Gal.3:26) *through* Jesus Christ.

6 – Our part is to bring him pleasure by *causing* (*eis*) people to praise (admire) his graciousness! Our participation in this graciousness is, again, “*in* the One he (God) loved (Jesus).”

7 – This involves redemption (release from slavery) “*through* his blood” (“blood” is often equated with “life”), *eliminating* transgressions. *Aphiemi* signifies the *removal*, not ignoring, of offenses.

8 – I've chosen to connect the “wisdom and knowledge” with Jesus, rather than arrogantly with people. HIS wisdom and knowledge enabled him to supply what he knew we needed.

9-10 “God's will” has been the subject of many sermons, much debate, and many agonizing guilt-trips. It is put very simply here: **God's will is that everything and everyone in all creation be subject to Christ!** Jesus is in charge, when “God's will” is done. This is the “mystery” revealed to his people – not the esoteric observances of the eastern “mystery religions” that seduced some from faithfulness, but simple obedience to Jesus.

11-- Our “destiny” is simply to be part of what he is doing.

12 – Our “hope in Christ” culminates in recognizing that our very existence is intended to praise – and to *cause* praise to – his glory.

13 -14 – The Holy Spirit's presence is the first installment of the inheritance – *our* inheritance – given to his people when they become faithful.

15-23 Paul gets really carried away into glory in this prayer for his fellow-believers. The word of their faithfulness (under extreme duress – see Ac. 19 and 20) has reached him (probably in prison), and brought him great joy. He prays for them wisdom – revelation – enlightenment – so that they too may have confidence in the power of God, and also in his gracious intentions for them.

19 – Paul literally piles-on the “power words” – *dunamis* – the ability to do wonders, *energian* – the energy to keep working, *kratous* and *ischuos* – physical, spiritual, and even political strength.

20 All of these together were employed and demonstrated in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

21 He is supreme over every form of *arches* (political power), *exousias* (authority), *dunamis* (ability), as well as all sorts of honor and rank recognized by people. In 20-21st century street terms, “He da MAN!”

22-23 And the church is to *demonstrate* the beginnings of the revelation of his supremacy. That's at least part of the *pleroma* designation: it can't be fulfilled without his church!

EPHESIANS 2

1-3 Living according to the world's agenda is characterized, simply, as death. It involves not only deliberate transgressions (*paraptoma*) and failures (*hamartia*), but taking instructions from any spirit other than his. No one is exempt, who is not voluntarily subjected to Christ.

4-7 But when God steps in, he creates life out of death. This is why the resurrection is so central. It can only happen “together with Christ.”

7-10 Our life, then, is intended to be a “demonstration project” of the graciousness of God.

8 – This only works as people become faithful to him – which only works as enabled by his gracious gift.

9 – Our behavior can't *accomplish* this transformation --

10 – but it must *demonstrate* what *God* has accomplished – again, “IN CHRIST JESUS”. We are created for the purpose of living as he has outlined.

11-12 We Gentiles were completely out of the loop,

13 – but IN CHRIST we are part of his family. The contrast could not be more sharp. Alienated, strangers, without promise, without hope, without God – can it get any worse? BUT NOW – another of Paul's much-repeated phrases – everything is changed! Kinship, peace, being made one, walls torn down, and the oppression of the law eliminated.

14 – People of the world want to destroy enemies. Jesus has destroyed *enmity*, and made peace as he makes his people ONE.

15-16 Reconciliation to God absolutely requires the death of hostility between people. If that is not a part of the process, it is not genuine. Near or far, the only access to the peace of God is by his Spirit.

17-18 We “arrive” together, or not at all.

19-22 encompasses wonderfully mixed metaphors: citizenship, members of the family, a building, whose foundation is the apostles and prophets, and Jesus as the keystone holding the arch together. The building now has a life of its own – it “grows” (21). It is the Body, *together*, that becomes the Lord's temple. (22 – *katoikterion* is a *permanent* dwelling place, as opposed to *skenos* (a tent), or *oikia* (a home). This one is for keeps!

EPHESIANS 3

“Because of this” -- the glorious assignment just described, given to his people by God – Paul has been enrolled as an agent, as have we all.

2-4 His job is for the benefit of the Gentiles, to let them know of their inclusion.

5-6 Earlier generations did not understand (Paul gives them the benefit of the doubt, although the prophets did allude to this truth) that God's grace was so widely available. Fellow heirs, included as members of the Body, sharers in the Good News – every one is made more emphatic with the prefix *sun* – *together!*

7 – servant/agent – the word is *diakonos* which involves tending to virtually any kind of need. It is NOT *doulos* (slavery). It's a privileged assignment given by God's power and grace.

8-9 Preaching the amazing riches of Christ involves making people aware of the concomitant *oikonomia* (responsibility) – to become a living, active demonstration of God's wisdom.

10-11 The assignment is that in/through the assembled Body, even rulers and authorities in heaven, whatever and whoever they may be, may recognize the revealed purpose of God. This is supposed to be happening NOW (*nun*), not in some distant future.

11-13 We're all to be in on this action *together!* It is enabled, again, by the **faithfulness of Jesus** – this is a simple possessive. There's no justification for the common translation “by faith *in* Christ.” That, as before, would have required a

preposition with a dative case. This is genitive.

Followers of Jesus are participants in the very purpose of creation! It was never about anything but Jesus.

14-19 Paul launches into another enthusiastic prayer for his readers, re-emphasizing that *every* family, whether of heaven or earth, derives its life – its existence – its name – identification – from God.

15 – A person's name is much more crucial to his identity in many cultures than we realize. In fact, there are places where one's name is not revealed to just anyone, lest his being or perceived “power” be threatened or misused, but only to people who have proved themselves extraordinarily trustworthy. To be “named” as related to God is the ultimate honor – the most coveted “connection.”

That lends added import to the next statement, (16) that the glory of God is the measure of the strength available through the Holy Spirit's entrance (*eis*) into his people.

17-- *Katoikesai* is an aorist infinitive, signifying the decisive taking up of permanent residence by Jesus Christ in the hearts of his people “through faithfulness”. There is no possessive expressed, but since Christ is the subject of the clause, it makes sense to assume that it is, again, *his* faithfulness upon which that relationship depends. The common translation “by faith” is usually assumed to place that responsibility upon the follower, rather than the Lord. I consider this to be in error. The further statement confirms this understanding, since neither of the elements of the mixed metaphors, (roots and foundation) is a do-it-yourself project, either. Both, however, are necessary for either the growth of a plant or the strength of a building.

18 – It is the strength of the *group* (this is plural) that is in view: strength to accept and rightly to use the incredible gifts of God. (19) The present infinitive *gnonai* refers to the knowledge of experience, not intellect, since the love of Christ so vastly exceeds any human knowledge. The completeness (*pleroma*) of God is the destiny of his people! (See discussion in 1:23) Liddell/Scott lists “full and perfect nature, full specifications, filling up, completing, fulfillment.” It's mind-boggling that God should apply such a concept to people!

20-21 But he can – because he graciously chose to work among us (*en hemin*) in order that his glory be seen eternally *in* the church and *in* Christ Jesus!

It would seem arrogant and presumptuous for mere people to aspire to such heights. And indeed it would be rightly judged so – except for Jesus' gracious prayer. Go back to John 17, and soak these two passages together. Paul is describing the gracious answer to that prayer. Contemplating such graciousness, it's no wonder Paul – and anyone else – runs out of language with which to express it.

EPHESIANS 4

Now the letter changes to the practical implications of the realization of the graciousness just described.

The instructions must be seen in the light of the “therefore.” It is because of the incredible graciousness of the Lord's calling and provision that we are admonished to live in a manner worthy of such honor.

2-- I chose “no status-tripping” instead of the much-misunderstood “humility” on purpose: see the treatment of *tapeinos* in chapter 5 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*. There is none of the “proud groveling” so frequently preached, in this word. It is a recognition of *level* standing for all. This recognition *produces* gentleness and generosity within a brotherhood.

3-- Unity of the Spirit and peace are not automatic. They require constant maintenance. *Spoudantes*, a present participle, indicates constant, strenuous effort.

4-7 contains reminders of the basis for unity. Whatever else may be diverse, these should be common experience and commitment: one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one loyalty, one baptism. one God.

7-8 There is diversity of gifts, because there is much diversity of needs. The gifts of God are his gracious provision for those needs. But the *context*, is one Body, etc.

9-10 Jesus is the giver, and his ascension is the enablement.

11 – In this list, the gifts are the people themselves, with specific assignments. Notice that they are ALL PLURAL, and (12) their single purpose is *enabling all the rest to serve*. It is God's people (“the saints” -- all of us) that are to do the work of service or “ministry” (*diakonia*), *for the purpose of (eis)* building up the Body!

13-16 – The goal for the *Body* is unity, loyalty, closer acquaintance with Jesus, mature adulthood modeled after his. 14 – This will make it unnecessary to keep building fences to exclude the deceitfulness of outsiders, because (15) interacting truthfully in love will root out deception before it has a chance to grow. *Aletheuontes* is a present participle – there needs to be *constant* truthful interaction. Many translators have watered this down by saying “speaking the truth”, but “speaking” is not in the text. We have been misled by the notion that “truth” is something you *say*. It's not. Truth is something you *DO* – the way you behave. (see also I Jn.1:6) This is the only way to “grow up.”

16 provides a beautiful picture of the functioning Body – Jesus as the head, and *every available ligament (aphe)* working together properly, growing and building itself up in his love -- “joined together” (harmonized) and “knit together” (no stitch can be dropped without ruining the whole thing).

17-19 There is no place for the former way of life.
 20-23 If one's mind has been renewed / recreated, former things are *deliberately* laid aside, and replaced by following Jesus. New "clothing" consists of justice and truth.
 25-32 This is not intended as an exhaustive list, or a "new law." Paul is merely providing a few examples of things that will change, if "God's design" (*ktisthenta* - creation) is to be followed.
 25 – Truth is essential, if all are truly part of one another. Unity is destroyed by falsehood.
 26 – Anger is a fact of life – but you don't need to let it *control* your life. Note that **anger itself is not criticized**. It is harboring grudges that is described as "making room" for the devil.
 28 – Theft is an expression of self-centeredness. Providing for people in need is its direct opposite. Note that the purpose of work is not wealth, but provision for the needy. See also II Cor.9:11, and I Thes.4:11.
 29 – Conversation is to be for the edification of the hearers and participants.
 30— It is interesting that the admonition is not to cause grief – the same word that is applied to the death of a loved one – to the Holy Spirit. It is in him that we are marked with the "seal" of God's ownership, looking forward to the "day of redemption", and it is his job to teach and protect us.. *Apolutroseos* is the word applied to the release of captive or enslaved people, and also to the Jubilee ordered under the old Law (and never recorded to have been observed). Wonders of release from captivity to emptiness have already happened, but there is more ahead!
 31 – No kind of nastiness has any business among brethren.
 32 – Jesus' attitudes and behavior are to be the model for what goes on among his people.

EPHESIANS 5

1-2 This is a continuation of the theme of Christ as a model of behavior: it is to be characterized by love and self-giving.
 3 – All of these were characteristics of idol-worship, and as such, have no place in a new life. "Perversion" (*porneia*) here is the word from which the English "pornography" derives. It referred to all sorts of sexual deviations. "Uncleanness" was more generalized.
 4 – Other similar behavior is likewise inappropriate, and to be replaced with thankfulness. (See the discussion in Romans 1)
 5-7 – Anyone who condones this kind of behavior is deceiving the brotherhood. They are not to be heeded. Remember, these are not all "sexual sins" -- greediness is on the same list!
 8-14 – Anything that needs to be hidden probably ought not to be done at all. Leaving the darkness behind in favor of light would solve most questions. V.10 is good advice – another present (continuous action) participle – the admonition to diligence in "finding out" what pleases the Lord. This is repeated in v.17.
 There is no incentive *at all* to return to the former way of life. Concentrate on the new!
 18-20 Celebration in the Spirit is so much better! How I miss the singing of praises, in a few groups that no longer exist – It was indeed above and beyond any other pleasure!

21-33 Family relationships are affected too. Refer also to I Cor.7 and 11. People who make a hierarchical hobby-horse out of this skip over the *mutuality* of v.21, and don't start reading till v.22 – a major error.
 The model for the marital relationship is that of Christ and the church; protection and sacrifice deserves a loving response. This only gets messed up when it is fragmented, with major parts left out. Especially the *hina* (purpose) in v.33 – the wife's respect for her husband is **contingent** on the context of Christ-like love.

EPHESIANS 6

1-4 Mutuality continues. Parents must create an atmosphere for their children's obedience, as a husband must create one for his wife's response.
 5-9 This is *not* an endorsement of slavery. Taken together, there is mutuality here as well. The focus is on the Lord, and on attitudes on both sides. Slavery would not last long if this was observed.
 10-17 Recognize where the real battle is – not with people, but with spiritual powers.
 13 – This is an earlier version of the proverb,
 "All you can do, is all you can do. And when you've done all you can do,
 that's all you can do!"
 The Lord will take over what we can't.
 There follows a roll-call of our defenses: truth, justice, peace, faithfulness, deliverance. God's message is our only "offensive" weapon.
 18-20 Paul is acutely aware of the need/value of prayer. It simply needs to be going on all the time. And of course, it can - "in the Spirit."

21 Tychicus, the carrier of the letter, was from Asia (Ac.20:24) , so was probably known to the churches around Ephesus. He is also mentioned in Colossians, and it may be this trip to which Paul refers in II Timothy 4:12. He may have even come from Ephesus.

There are no individual greetings here, which is seen as evidence that this may have been a more general letter than the others. Paul simply takes his leave with a brief benediction.

PHILIPPIANS

Philippi, the location of Paul's first foray into Europe, carries the name of its founder, Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. It was, like Ephesus, a crossroads of Europe-Asia trade. By the first century, it had been annexed by Rome, and declared a colony of the empire, which conferred considerable status, including Roman citizenship, upon its residents.

Some scholars speculate that it was also the home of Luke, the writer of the gospel that bears his name, and Acts, and part-time companion of Paul. Some of them identify him with the “man from Macedonia” who persuaded Paul to come there (Ac.16:9).

Paul experienced a mixed reception at his first visit – gracious hospitality from Lydia, a business woman, and later, beating and imprisonment, from which his Roman citizenship was instrumental in his apologetic, courteous release the next day. He visited several times thereafter, and apparently had a continuing warm relationship with the Philippian church. This letter is, among other things, a “thank-you note” for help sent to him while in prison, and earlier in his journeys as well. According to II Cor.8, the folks there were rather poor, but extremely generous, both toward Paul, and in the matter of the relief offering for the famine in Judea.

There is some discussion about which of Paul's imprisonments marks the time of this letter – It could have been sent from Rome, Caesarea, or Ephesus. All had contingents of the Roman Praetorian Guard, which he mentions in 1:13. If it was written from Ephesus, the date would have been in the early 50's; if in Caesarea, the later 50's, and if in Rome, after 60 AD.

Unique among Paul's letters, this one was not written to address problems, but to give thanks, and to encourage the recipients to continue and increase in faithfulness.

PHILIPPIANS 1

1-2 – The order of the greeting is delightful – “*all* the faithful” are listed first, and then those with specific responsibilities of oversight or service.

3-8 – People who have responded to one's efforts are a huge joy and encouragement to a person whose history has been so mixed. Paul considers them partners in his own work and devotion. 5 and 7 both use forms from the root word, *koinonia* – the all-encompassing sharing of people deeply committed to the Lord. The statement in v.6 of a work begun by God, to be completed at the “Day of Christ Jesus” is not a criticism, but an encouragement.

9-11 continues in this vein. Paul prays for their growth in discernment (10) “so you can discern what makes a difference” -- a challenge in all attempts at faithfulness, but especially cross-cultural ones. Some elements of culture are no more than that – others threaten faithfulness. It is necessary to discern. And Paul trusts God to enable them to do that for themselves. 12-18 Paul reports positive results from his being in prison: the word is still getting out, whether motivated by solidarity or competition. Apparently in neither case is the integrity of the message compromised, and therefore he is not bothered by merely personal competition. This, too, requires discernment.

19-26 He is counting on their prayers for his *own* faithfulness. Clearly, his concept of “deliverance” (*soterian*) (19) has no connection with release from prison or avoiding execution.

21-24 He is unlikely to *have* a choice, but that does not seem to be a problem.

24-26 Since he feels needed, Paul is confident of returning to them. He did return (Ac.20:1) after the uproar in Ephesus; but we have no record of a return from either Caesarea or Rome. This could push one toward the earlier date for the letter.

27-30 Again, there is no criticism here – no “clean up your act.” The imperative is present: “Keep on” acting like worthy Kingdom citizens.

Since the Philippians had been granted Roman citizenship, they understood probably better than most what citizenship entailed. Paul reminds them of the even more important citizenship in which they have been enrolled.

27 is a summarized replay (or perhaps predecessor) of the unity theme in Eph.4:5-6. Here, Paul lists only “one spirit, a single identity (*psuche*), and working as a team (*sunathlountes* – referring to athletics)”.

28 – Depending where it comes from, opposition can be a good thing – evidence that one is on the right side. But that too requires discernment.

29-30 Suffering on behalf of Christ may be viewed as a gift from God. This, however, needs to be held in tension with Peter's later warning (I Pet.2:20 and 3:13-17) to be sure that the suffering is the result of doing *good*, and not deserved for some less noble reason.

PHILIPPIANS 2

1-4 – Encouragement, comfort, sharing of the Spirit, sympathy, and compassion are all marks of the unity produced by unequivocal commitment to the Lord. (3) There is no place for rivalry or status. These are completely contradictory to the very being of the Body. (4) Concern for *each other's* welfare is paramount.

5-8 Jesus' life and death are a prime example of those principles. If anyone ever deserved a position of status, it was Jesus – yet he never flaunted his equality (*isa*) with God. With a statement like that, how can anyone degrade him to a lesser position? *Only he* had the right to put himself at a lower level.

I'm fascinated with the use of *harpagmon* in the privilege which Jesus denied himself. The word denotes “seizing” in a destructive sense, and is the derivation of the word “harpies”, the mythological creatures that violently destroyed both people and provisions, in ancient traditions. The flavor here is the destruction *we* would have faced, had he chosen to demand his rights! But he didn't.

9-10 *dio* – therefore – that's why God exalted him above everyone and everything – because Jesus wouldn't do it himself!

10-11 – How, then, can anyone say that Jesus is not to be worshiped? GOD has ordered that he should! Not only by people, but by all of creation!

12-13 “Keep on working” -- another present imperative. This is to be the continual occupation of God's people. And it is a *mutual* effort, because *God's* work is also continuous (present tense.) Without his intervention, neither the incentive nor the ability would exist.

The goal of all this is God's *pleasure* (13), not any kind of a threat. It is not a sentence imposed, which might justify grumbling or complaining, but a *privilege* granted.

15 – If there was no difference between God's people and the rest of the world, how would any light be visible? It is the *contrast* that is intended to attract! Mimicking the world's “entertainment” to supposedly attract people to the “gospel” is a sham. The medium *is* the message.

16 – What is it to “hang on” to the Word of Life? *Epecho* is an odd word. Some of the meanings listed are “holding on” in flavor, but about as many imply “extending an offer.” Perhaps both are appropriate.

17-18 These folks need to take up the torch, as Paul sees his own life and efforts winding down. It will be a source of joy and comfort to be assured that the work will continue when he is gone. (How I long for a similar reassurance!)

19-24 Timothy's credentials are impeccable. The two men have worked together for years. At this point, Paul is still hoping for release. Timothy's faithfulness is contrasted with the others, who have demonstrated more concern for their own affairs.

25-29 Epaphroditus also has a glowing recommendation. He brought a gift to Paul from Philippi, and then contracted some near-fatal illness (not a rarity in a Roman prison). He is to be commended and honored for his selfless service.

Some have suggested that these greetings indicate the end of one letter and relegate the last two chapters to another. This is possible, but I don't see that it matters.

PHILIPPIANS 3

1-3 Paul seems to fear (probably with good reason) that the people who tried to impose Jewish law on Gentile believers either had or would try to infiltrate in Philippi as they had in other places.

4-6 Paul can reject their claims as others could not, because he was formerly an “insider's insider.”

7-8 He has deliberately rejected his hard-earned status, for the higher good of belonging to Christ.

9-11 He still has goals far ahead: closer acquaintance and greater conformity with the Lord. Again in v.9, the genitive should be interpreted as possessive for *christou*– It is *Jesus'* faithfulness upon which Paul relies. V.10 *gnonai* is the knowledge of experience, not of intellect. Here, the genitive *anastaseos* – resurrection – indicates the *source* of the power (*dunamin*), as does the parallel construction of *koinonian* (object of *gnonai*) and *pathematon*. The transformation of which he speaks is effected by identification with Jesus' death and resurrection – a favorite theme of Paul's (see Romans 6:1-11).

12-16 The goal will always be before us. *No one* has already “arrived.” The point – what matters -- is the journey. The past is – well, *past*.

15 provides an interesting slant on “maturity”. The world seems to think that is the achievement of a goal. Paul sees it as the continual pursuit of a *higher* goal. The word is *telioi*, which many (wrongly) render as “perfect” -- a really poor choice. No reference to ethics or morality is implied. Completeness is indicated, as well as “fully constituted, final, authoritative, full-grown, trained and qualified, absolute, or accomplished.” “Perfect” only appears in conjunction with an evaluation

comparing a product to the original specifications. The evolution of the word in English has distorted our understanding of what Paul is saying.

17-19 appears to be a warning against those who would impose legal restrictions as a “higher” form of devotion. Paul warns that to do so is to deny the gift of Christ and the accomplishment of Jesus.

20-21 These folks, with their Roman citizenship, valued it highly. Paul also took advantage of his. But he reminds them that the citizenship that really matters is in “heaven” (literally, “the skies”) -- i.e., the Kingdom of God. And only as loyal citizens can we be transformed into the likeness of the King.

PHILIPPIANS 4

1 – specific instructions to dearly loved brethren: “Hang in there!”

2-3 – The job of a “fellow-worker” -- whether that's Paul's intention, or Sysygos is his name, is unclear – is to make/keep peace in the Body. These women are not put-down. Their work is commended. But they need help getting along with each other.

4-7 Rejoicing, fairness, trust, prayer, thanksgiving – these are the marks of a faithful brotherhood. They produce peace – and also protection!

8-9 The *focus of one's attention* is critical. If the focus is on these positive things, and the example set by elder believers is practiced, all is well.

11-13 – Another saying that is grossly abused as a “verse”. The context is essential to the message. Paul is in a filthy jail! He is fed only when someone sends him food. This is NOT a “prosperity gospel.” It's called *endurance*, by the power of God.

14-18 Gratitude for their faithful sharing is enhanced because it may have been essential to survival. The Philippian folks had also supported Paul's work in other places.

19 It is this *generosity* that prompts Paul's statement of God's provision. It is not used as a lever to beg!

22 This final greeting makes a case for a Roman origin of the letter, since it refers to “Caesar's household.” So take your pick. It does not change the message.

COLOSSIANS

Colossae was a small town farther along the trade route, east of Ephesus. As such, it was also subject to the influence of the varied cultures, cults, and philosophies that had their origin in the eastern deserts and beyond.

Paul, by his own testimony, had not visited Colossae in person (2:1). He credits Epaphras (1:7) with the founding of the church, and perhaps those in Laodicea and Hierapolis as well (4:13). Onesimus (see the letter to Philemon) is from Colossae, and is one of the carriers of the letter.

Most likely, Epaphras had been exposed to the Christian message during the two years that Paul spent in Ephesus, which, although around 100 miles away, was the major center of trade. He then carried it to his home area. It is reasonable to assume that Paul and Epaphras were acquainted, since the latter traveled to Rome, where Paul was under house arrest, both to report on the formation of a faithful brotherhood in Colossae, and to seek counsel in dealing with Eastern influences.

These were varied, but shared a similar danger: assuming that simple loyalty to Christ needed to be supplemented with esoteric philosophies, ascetic practices, and spiritual intermediaries between a holy God and (presumed to be) evil, material creation. Paul does not dispute any details of these teachings, but simply makes the point that whatever may – or may not – exist, is subject to Christ, because he is the creator and sustainer and ruler of *everything* that exists.

There has been some dispute over the authorship of this letter, based largely on claims that identify the threatening ideologies with second-century Gnosticism. There are indeed parallels; however such cults were many and varied throughout the East, and no positive identification has been put forth.

Most serious students (who are not trying to discredit Scripture as a whole) accept Paul's authorship, and place the time of writing toward the end of his life, in Rome. A few have proposed Caesarea as a more likely location, but not convincingly. The link to Philemon and Onesimus pushes the likelihood toward Rome, since that was an easy place for runaway slaves to “get lost”, even though Caesarea was much closer geographically. Travel to and from Rome was not at all uncommon, and not difficult, if one was mindful of seasons for safe sea voyage. Consequently, I am inclined to accept Paul as the author (the topics and attitudes are characteristic of his), and the late 60's AD as the likely time of writing from Rome.

COLOSSIANS 1

1 – Even as a prisoner, Paul can characterize himself as “sent out” by Jesus, “because of God's will.”

2 – He has received word of the faithfulness of the Colossian brethren, and greets them as such.

3-8 -- Epaphras has reported on their love, which is evidence of the genuine quality of their grasp of the truth of the Word of graciousness. This is not instruction, but thanksgiving for their faithfulness.

9-10 These are all present tenses: prayer that they will continue and grow in the life they have chosen. The “certain knowledge” (*epignosis*) – the prefix is an intensifier – of God's will /wisdom/spiritual understanding is expected to *result* in a life worthy of and pleasing to the Lord. As elsewhere, this is NOT an intellectual exercise, but a guide for life. Its fruit (harvest) is *both* exemplary behavior and close, personal acquaintance with God. These are inseparable.

11 – Endurance and generosity are empowered by the glory of God!

12 – Paul is confident that these brethren he has never met, have been “qualified” by the Father to share in the inheritance of his people.

13-14 This figure is what happened in the Exile – in reverse. The faithful are literally transported into the jurisdiction of another Kingdom. This is the import of “redemption.” History abounds with records of an entire nation being carried off into slavery by its conquerors. Here, Jesus has “carried off” the *captives*, **into** freedom.

15-20 Christ is represented as the agent of creation, and therefore superior to all that exists. The “firstborn” received the lion's share of an inheritance, and was consequently responsible for the welfare of all the rest of the household. Paul re-phrases this utter transcendence several times: “*Everything*” has both its source (*dia*) and its purpose (*eis*) in him. He is not only the firstborn with respect to the physical creation, but also with respect to the church, with the same rights and responsibilities. No one, human or superhuman, approaches anywhere near his pre-eminence. V.15 proclaims him the firstborn of creation, and v.18 the firstborn from the dead, i.e., the *new* creation.

19 – *Pleroma*, used four times in Ephesians and twice here, is one of Paul's favorite terms. You can't *get* any more complete than that! Literally *all that God is* has its permanent residence (*katoikesai*) in Christ. (20) This is the only way that definitive peace and reconciliation could happen. Heaven and earth both feel the effects.

21-23 On a practical level, this enables the new creation in the lives of people. Paul piles on the adjectives here, also – holy, blameless, irreproachable – but cautions that this status is *conditional* upon loyalty to Jesus! “Don't let anyone talk you out of it!”

I don't know where the modern heresy of “unconditional” came from, but it is not a New Testament idea.

24-25 Paul sees his own sufferings as a participation in those of Jesus. There has been a lot of wild speculation about this. Delusions on Paul's part? Heresy? (One professor at Wooster told me that.) Or simply an outgrowth of participation in the Body of Christ? I go with the latter choice, especially with his addendum “to fulfill / complete (*plerosai*) God's word.”

26-27 If we experience the benefits of the life of the Lord, should we not also expect to share its cost? Might not the sharing of the hassles be a factor in our progress toward maturity? (28)

29 It has to be a cooperative effort between the Lord and his servant: “working for all we're worth” (*agonizomenos*) would be an exercise in futility, were it not enabled by his energy and power.

COLOSSIANS 2

1-3 Paul is concerned for these brethren he has not met. Only by solidifying their conviction by being “knit together” in love, which alone produces “complete conviction and (*genuine*) insight, can anyone be a real participant in “God's mystery” -- as opposed to the solitary self-aggrandizement of the “mystery religions” whose benefits were reserved for an initiated few.

3 – There IS no “wisdom and knowledge” apart from Jesus!

4 – Any other “systematic theology”-- and these guys were masters of that art – diminishes the real thing. The truth is neither established nor defended by argument.

5 – The Colossians have not yet succumbed to deception. The *order* here is critical: (6) continue *living* in him (behavior), (7) reinforce the roots and foundation with loyalty and thankfulness, (8) watch out for anything that does not adhere to Christ as the *absolute* standard. Philosophy, empty speculation, traditions, culture – ALL must be held to his standard.

9-10 *Pleroma* was also a term much used by advocates of the “mysteries”. Syncretism was the name of the game – if one didn't add all available philosophies, one might miss out! Paul insists that all the *pleroma* one needs – in fact, all that *exists* – is found in Christ. He's in charge – of everybody and everything.

11-12 Connecting the concepts of baptism and circumcision indicates that some of the challengers must have been Jewish, also. If one is living in the resurrection, there is no need for additional rites. (13)It's the faithfulness of God that enables resurrection.

13-15 The completeness of Jesus' triumph, and its extension to his followers, is, again, all the *pleroma* anybody needs! Having been made alive includes removal of offenses; elimination of accusations, by nailing those charges to the cross; and overtly and publicly triumphing over all other powers. Everyone was familiar with the spectacle of triumphal processions in the empire. JESUS HAS WON THE WAR! The powers that held folks down are shamed and shackled.

16-19 Jesus has not called for a new legalism, either liturgical or philosophical. Again, everything must be measured against him! Only so can there be healthy growth.

20-23 Asceticism, too, is just another form of self-aggrandizement. It has no connection with resurrection life. (20) refers back to the symbolism of death in baptism (v.12). The complexity of requirements and observances might create the illusion that it is devised by some sort of “wisdom” -- but it has no value for transforming life.

COLOSSIANS 3

1-4 This does not mean, however, that behavior is irrelevant: merely that it *reflects*, rather than *effects* a new life.

“Seeking” and “paying attention” are both present active tenses, denoting continuous effort.

5-9 *Nekrosate*, on the other hand, is aorist imperative. A definitive act is called for. As noted before, all these features are common in idol worship, but are also harmful in themselves, as all are evidence of a self-centered life. (7) That they were a part of people's past, is a given. That was the culture from which they came. But that is *past* – a new life has different standards. (9) “Stripped off” is also aorist, as is “put on” in v.10. These should not have to be done repeatedly! But the “renewal” is present passive – continuous – and Jesus is the “image”/ pattern for the renewal.

11-- Traditional barriers no longer exist, “in Christ.”

12-17 The new standard is patterned after Jesus' life. The focus is entirely outside oneself. Aware of his graciousness to us, we are to extend it to others.

14 – If these are elements of clothing, as the vocabulary implies, then love is the outer garment, protecting what's inside

from external cold, heat, etc., and enabling its usefulness.

15 – *Brabeueto* is what referees do at a sporting event, or what judges do at a trial. This is the role of the peace of Jesus.

16 – Note that the brotherhood is admonished to teach *one another*, as his word dwells among them. No one person dictates to the rest. Singing and thankfulness are central.

17 – Nothing should be done that cannot be done in the name (as the agent) of Jesus.

18-22 As in Ephesians 5 and I Cor.7 and 11, mutuality is to prevail in family relationships. This is a more abbreviated version.

23-25 Some people lump this section together with the admonition to slaves, but I believe it rather refers back *at least* to the family section, and perhaps to the whole chapter. All are to make the work and affairs of daily life an act of worship and service to the Lord. Paul, after all, frequently calls himself a “slave” (*doulos*) of Jesus.

4:1, however, does address “masters”. If slaves are offered “justice and equality,” slavery quickly disappears.

COLOSSIANS 4

2-4 Paul asks to be included in their prayers – again, for faithfulness, not release.

5-6 Behavior toward outsiders is important. Note, it is so that one knows how to *answer*, not persuade, much less attack!

7-9 Tychicus also carried the letter to Ephesus, and may have taken this at the same time, or this may have been another trip.

Onesimus is along this time, (See Philemon). The two are entrusted to give a report on Paul's condition.

10-14 Greetings from friends in Rome – presumably, not all were prisoners, as Aristarchus was.

15-16 We have no record of the letter to Laodicea, unless it is part of what we know as Ephesians.

The church meeting at the home of Nympha indicates that she, like Lydia, must have had the means to accommodate the group.

17 – Archippus is mentioned only here and in the letter to Philemon. He could have been the son of Philemon and Apphia. (Phm.1-2)

THESSALONIANS

Like many of the cities Paul visited, where he established churches, Thessalonica was on a crossroad. Two Roman roads, one to the east, and one to the north, intersected there. In 146 BC it became the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. Paul stopped there on his second journey, accompanied by Silas and Timothy (Ac.17), after leaving Philippi.

There was a substantially influential Jewish community there, where the missionaries at first had a fair reception; but it appears from the Acts account (17:4) that a goodly percentage of the converts were Gentile. The jealous Jewish leaders had enough political clout to get them run out of town. These opponents even pursued them to nearby Berea, and from the tone of this letter, they also continued to hassle those in Thessalonica who had committed to the Christian message.

Many scholars assume this to be the first of Paul's letters, written while he was in Corinth, where he stayed for a year and a half after a detour through Athens. Others suggest that it was written from Athens, which appears in a few manuscripts. In either case, the date would have been around AD 51 or 52, since that is when Gallio was in charge of Corinth – dated from the Acts account. There are hints that Timothy may have been shuttling among the emerging congregations at that time (3:1 and 3:6). The second letter may well have followed shortly after the first, in order to clarify some things treated in the first, that may have been misunderstood or misinterpreted.

There has been little archaeological work in Thessalonica, as the modern city of Saloniki occupies much of the same site.

Both letters wish the recipients blessings “from God the Father *and* the Lord Jesus Christ.” There are no genitive cases here to confuse the issue, as there are elsewhere.

I THESSALONIANS 1

1 – Paul, Silas (Silvanus is the Latin spelling) and Timothy are together at the time of writing, which leans toward the earliest dates.

2-- Paul's thanksgiving for the congregations that grew from his work is constant, as are his prayers for their welfare.

3 – The group at Thessalonica is eagerly “putting shoe leather” under their professions of faithfulness. The genitives here are interpreted as indicators of *source*: faithfulness produces work (not the reverse!), love incites labor, and Jesus himself inspires confident anticipation.

4-6 – Their behavior in response to Paul's example bears testimony to God's love for them, and the power of the Holy Spirit manifest among them.

7-10 – Their reputation for exemplary faithfulness has preceded Paul's contacts in other places. His comment (9) that they turned to God from idols would support the assumption that most of the converts were Gentile.

10 – The return of Jesus is often much more a prominent emphasis among people who are suffering persecution. The “turned to God” is aorist (decisive, punctiliar action), whereas the service of God and waiting for Jesus are present tenses (continuous.) Likewise, the resurrection is aorist, and the rescuing is present. Many people try to see that as also an aorist (“saved”) -- but it's not. It is an ongoing process, as we are built into his Kingdom.

I THESSALONIANS 2

1-5 – Paul reminds them of his own behavior among them, and the context: he had arrived right after being jailed in Philippi. His (and their) willingness to continue in the face of abuse bears testimony to the compelling truth of the message.

(4) If one is trying to “star” with people, he does not court abuse.

5-7 Neither was there any deception on the part of the missionaries. The team asked for no support, and no status. Flattery, greed, and admiration had no part in their presentation.

8-11 They earned their own keep, as they urged their converts to faithful living. They exhibited the utmost integrity in order not to defile the message. (11 and 12) They encouraged the converts by *demonstrating* faithful, responsible behavior.

13 – The point must have been made, as the message was received as from God.

14-16 This was not the first time Paul had gotten crosswise of the Jewish hierarchy. This is deeper than just “misery loves company” -- it is encouragement that the Judean brethren have survived the same treatment, and so can they. The hierarchy in Judea was even more brutal.

Curious about the end of v.16 – there were several crack-downs on the Jews during the first century. This is too early to be referring to the destruction of 70AD, or of Masada, but something cruel must have happened. It could have been connected with the edict under which Priscilla and Aquila were expelled from Rome (see discussion in Ac.18).

17-20 Having left the area under duress, Paul's eagerness to return to strengthen them is quite understandable.

I THESSALONIANS 3

1-2 – Consequently, Timothy was sent back from Athens to check things out. He had not been the focus of the opposition. It was apparently his favorable report that inspired this letter.

3-5 – Paul had not brought them a “prosperity gospel”. He had warned them of persecution. Of course, they had also seen what happened when the team was in their area, and were probably aware that the opponents had followed them to Berea, nearby (Ac.17:10-14). But Paul wanted to be sure that they had not been pounded into submission.

6-10 -- He is effusive in his relief that they have remained faithful. He is eager to return, which he did. Ac.19:21 is not clear, whether he went on a side-trip from Ephesus, or only sent Timothy and Erastus (19:22), or went to Thessalonica after leaving there (20:1) – or maybe both. There would have been a couple years in between, in any case.

11-13 – Mutual love in the brotherhood, again, is the key to strength in faithfulness, and also to *becoming* “blameless in holiness / dedication.” *Eis* at the beginning of v.13 indicates a purpose and/or result clause: one cannot overemphasize the necessity of mutuality, in preparation for the goal of the Lord's coming.

I THESSALONIANS 4

1-2 -- “Keep on keeping on!”

3-8 – A review of basic instructions in faithful living: 3-- The key is ultimate devotion to God and his ways.

3-4 – *Porneias* refers to all sorts of sexual deviations, in and out of idol worship.

4-5 – It is necessary to *learn* new ways of life. *Epithumias* refers to *all kinds* of intense desires.

6 – *Pragmata* refers to business affairs. Faithfulness needs to govern these as well.

In all of these, there will be no violation if one's entire focus is on the Lord. *He* is the “bringer of justice” -- the only one who can transform life.

7-8 – God's calling is to absolute commitment to him and his ways. This is implemented by the Holy Spirit, who is not to be disregarded. His transformation involves *all* of life.

9-12 Paul commends their mutual love – which has been, and must continue to be, “taught by God.” He encourages the growth and spreading of that love. A major part of that, is peaceful, diligent work. Again, as in Eph.4:28, II Cor.9:11, and elsewhere, the *purpose* of work is to support those in need! Here, it looks like that applies both to those inside and outside the brotherhood! Self-support, also, is directed, according to Paul's example described in 2:9.

13-18 – Due to some misunderstanding, encouragement was needed regarding those who have died. They won't miss out on Jesus' coming. Both the living and the (temporarily) dead will all meet him together. No complicated chart or map is necessary. “We will always be with the Lord!” That's enough. Note v.18 – this is to be a tool for *encouragement!* How sad, that it has so often been used as a threat! Note also that this is a word to the *faithful*, not to the outsider.

I THESSALONIANS 5

1-3 Speculation about the timing of the return is unfruitful.

4-5 Sons of the Light need have no fear of the night! Sons of the Day do *nothing* in secret – nothing that needs to be hidden. Apparently, even this early, some folks were abusing this glorious theme.

6-11 Paul asserts that all we need to do is act out the deliverance we have been given, in faithfulness, love, and expectant anticipation. The word is to encourage and build each other up.

12-13 is another much misunderstood admonition. This does NOT apply to A PERSON who “runs” a church. The people (plural) to be recognized are the workers (plural) among the brotherhood. Not a single one of these is referred to in the singular.

14 – *Humas*-- “you ALL” are to be correcting, consoling, and caring for the rest, and with a generous attitude.

Makrothumeite refers to patient, helpful instruction.

15 -- Retaliation is forbidden, and replaced with *agathon*, goodness.

16 – *Chairete* – Celebrate! (present tense!) “Keep on continuously celebrating!”

17 – Constant prayer – *adialeipos*-- “without quitting!”

18 -- “This” refers to the closest word -- “Give thanks”. It is *thankfulness* that is God's will, NOT “anything and everything that happens”.

19 -- “Don't put out the fire” -- or allow it to go out.

20 – As Paul told the Corinthians (14:29), prophecies are to be *evaluated*, and not disregarded.

21 – *Everything* is to be carefully evaluated. Hold on to what passes the test.

22 -- “Every form” of evil is to be avoided. (23) That is necessary in order to enable God to make and keep us as we should be. It is NOT necessary to dabble in evil to “know one's enemy.”

24 – It is the Lord's faithfulness, again, upon which we can safely depend.

II THESSALONIANS 1

1-2 Paul, Silas, and Timothy are still (or again) together at the time of this writing. God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are cited together as both the atmosphere and context in which the church exists (*en*), and the source (*apo*) of the blessings of grace and peace.

3-4 Paul has received glowing reports of their faithfulness and mutual love, in the face of the persecution inflicted on them. He in turn has spread the “good gossip” to the other churches.

5-9 Their endurance is to be viewed as evidence of God's approval, and their worthiness of the Kingdom. Notice that the message of retribution is presented as encouragement to those who suffer. It is NOT directed to the offenders. The “destruction” (*olethron*) is described simply as removal from the presence of the Lord and his glory – (10) the glory that will be realized and admired among his faithful people. The grammar is rather scrambled, but the message – that their faithfulness in receiving Paul's testimony is their entrance into that glory – is clear.

11 – Consequently, his prayer is both congratulatory of their good intentions, and desirous that God will miraculously enable them to fulfill those intentions. In such a hostile environment, faithfulness requires the power of God!

12 – The goal is not only sharing, but actually contributing to the glory and graciousness of “our God and Lord, Jesus Christ.” There is only *one* definite article and *one* possessive pronoun, so the titles must be taken together: testimony to the deity of Jesus himself.

II THESSALONIANS 2

It is not unusual for persecuted people to focus on eschatology. And such a focus, since we have so little solid information, is highly susceptible to people who claim to have “inside knowledge.” Apparently, (2) someone was fraudulently representing his “revised version” as having come from Paul. (That has been going on for a long time!)

3-12 By this time – actually, ever since Augustus – Roman emperors were demanding to be worshiped as gods, so Paul could have been referring to any of them. (Their longevity record was not enviable.) The person of whom Paul speaks in v.9, however, seems to exhibit some supernatural powers as well: the major message here is that not everything supernatural, or seemingly miraculous, is necessarily evidence of connection with God. (10) Notice *who* is deluded: people who overtly refused to welcome the truth that was offered to them.

11-12 They have made their choice, so God allows them to wallow in their deception and the injustice that accompanies their choice.

13-14 Paul hastens to assure his readers that he is not talking about them. You don't fall into this category accidentally. It results from deliberate choice. And the brethren have been “set apart” by the Holy Spirit to participate, not in destruction and deception, but in faithfulness to the truth, and in Jesus' own glory!

15-17 However, it is necessary to hang on to the things that they accepted. Safety depends entirely upon the grace, love, encouragement, and confidence that are all the gift of Jesus.

II THESSALONIANS 3

1 – Paul stresses his own need for prayer.

2-3 -- “Not everyone is faithful” -- but “the Lord is faithful.” Whether one faces “harmful and evil people” or “the evil one himself”, the faithfulness **of** Jesus is the remedy and the defense.

4-5 – Paul is confident in their commitment and faithfulness, and the Lord's supply for them.

6 – People who choose to violate the principles that were established, are to be avoided, not followed.

7-10 – Paul and his companions set the example, by self-support and circumspect behavior. Freeloading is not acceptable.

10-13 The specifics seem addressed to particular abuses: (10) people who refused to support themselves, especially (11) those who considered their “status” to obviate the need to work. This is not to be tolerated. However, (13) generosity is not to be neglected.

14-15 Dealing with people who refuse to listen is outlined. Exclusion from the fellowship is simply a recognition that a person has withdrawn *himself* from faithfulness. And it is to be a constant concern that such a person be restored.

16 – The Lord of Peace is the only one that can engineer this.

17 – Paul takes pains to give them an example of authenticity, against which to evaluate anything purported to have come from him, in order to guard against forgeries.

TIMOTHY

Timothy comes on the scene at the beginning of Paul's second journey (Ac.16), as Paul and Silas set out to visit and encourage the converts made during Paul's earlier trip with Barnabas. His mother and grandmother (II Tim.1:5) were known to Paul as faithful members of the community, and young Timothy came highly recommended by the churches in his neighborhood.

In spite of having just secured the rights of Gentile believers at the Jerusalem Conference (Ac.15), Paul decided that Timothy should submit to circumcision, which seems contradictory to his adamant stand to the contrary in the case of Titus (Gal.2:3).

Timothy comes and goes throughout the rest of the Acts narrative, sometimes as a traveling companion (apprentice?), and sometimes as a messenger from Paul to a particular group. I do not find any justification for the assumption on the part of many commentators that Timothy was installed in some hierarchical position in any of these places. (These folks are probably from groups that assume a hierarchical pattern of administration and oversight.) The missionaries had appointed *elders* (literally, "old people") in each congregation (note the *plural*), to oversee the local affairs. These are NOT elected officials of varied age and experience! Paul, as founder of the group, checked in on them via several different messengers, some of whom are named and some not.

A number of functionaries are designated "overseers" (*episkopoi*) or "deacons" (*diakonoi*) in these letters. It should be noted that *all* are *always* mentioned in the *plural*, as are the "elders" (*presbuteros*). It should also be noted that it is the choice of *translators*, not that of the writer, to read "gune" as "wives" rather than "women"; and to read "presbuteras" as "older women" rather than "female elders", and "diakonos" as "servant" when applied to Phoebe and "minister" when applied to a male. It is also a translator's bias that uses *episkope* (the feminine form) to refer to an "office", and *episkopos* (the masculine form of the same word) to refer to a person. **An honest translator would recognize that in each case, the same word takes both masculine and feminine forms**, despite the later development of hierarchical patterns as the church became an institution instead of a brotherhood.

The error is in interpreting the hierarchy of later centuries into the writings of the first, whereas the text clearly focuses on *functions* that needed to be exercised in the emerging brotherhoods, and were performed by different people at different times, rather than positions of status conferred for a lifetime. This latter concept has absolutely no basis in the New Testament writings.

The instructions given to Timothy are for the purpose of setting an orderly pattern for assigning the functions appropriate for meeting the needs of the congregations to whom he was sent as Paul's messenger – no more and no less.

Although there is no direct evidence in the text, it is generally assumed that the first letter was written from Philippi or Thessalonica after Paul left Ephesus, and in the second, he himself makes references to his imprisonment in Rome, so it would have had to have been much later. Timothy, from the references to Troas and Asia, was probably either in Ephesus or Troy at the time.

I TIMOTHY 1

1-2 Whether or not Timothy was Paul's convert, he has spoken of him before as having worked together "as a son with his father." This pays tribute to both his faithfulness and his understanding of the message, as well as the affection between them.

3 – The Acts account is not clear at what point Timothy had been left in Ephesus, but the present burden is to counteract the attempted takeover by Judaizing advocates.

4-7 – Paul discredits the emphasis on genealogies, a favorite hobby of the Judaizing contingent, as well as people who have been led astray into legalistic details without knowing what they are doing (7).

(5) Sincere faithfulness is demonstrated by love, with pure motives. That is what matters.

8-11 – The law was given to restrain evil, not to regulate faithfulness.

12-17 – Paul does not make light of his own former bondage to the Law, nor of its destructive results. But he delights in the privilege to serve the Lord, which he views as a demonstration of the graciousness of Jesus: the message being, if he could turn Paul the persecutor into an advocate, he is equal to any challenge. V.17 is clearly a reference to Jesus in the completeness of his oneness with God. They are indistinguishable in Paul's experience. Graciousness, faithfulness, and love, mercy, generosity – all are founded in Christ, the King of the Ages (*aionia* again) -- "eternity?" Liddell/Scott includes "a perpetually-held title."

18 – Paul speaks of a prophecy concerning Timothy twice in this letter (see also 4:14), but is not specific about its content. It seems to concern the service to which he was called.

20 – Hymenaeus is mentioned only here and in the second letter (2:17). There are several Alexanders – the one in Ephesus

may have been the coppersmith mentioned in II Tim 4:14, or the one who substituted for Paul in the arena (Ac.19:33). In any event, these two had by this time set themselves as opponents, and needed the discipline of exclusion.

I TIMOTHY 2

1 – Some regard this as a liturgy for public worship – the text does not say that. *Poieisthai* is a present passive infinitive. Prayer for these needs to be a continuous effort on the part of the faithful.
2 – Rulers are to be prayed-for, in order that the church may live in peace,
3-4 – but also in order that more folks may be led to God's offer of deliverance.
5-7 – There is only one (real) God, and *only* Jesus is between him and humanity. It is to make this connection available that Paul is giving his life. (6) “The witness to his own time” is obscure.
8 – Prayer, not arguing, is the calling of the faithful.

9-15 This is a favorite passage of people who want to bad-mouth Paul on the subject of women.

9-10 Replacing flamboyant attire with modesty and “good sense”, as well as “good deeds”, is somehow interpreted as oppression. I cannot see why that would be the case for anyone committed to faithfulness.

11-12 In v.11, I have rendered *hesuchia* as “orderliness” rather than “silence” (as most translators), because it is the *same word* as in v.2, describing the peaceful life desired by believers. This creates (or reveals) a different perspective.

Remember, this is first-century Greek culture, where women had increasing political power. The word *authenthein* which I have rendered “dominate”, is used (L/S) of a political coup! This is the only NT use of the word, which usually indicated violence! Coups are clearly not Kingdom methods! “Teaching” may have also implied the Socratic method of the collecting of personal disciples, who then engaged in a discipline of stylized questions and answers. See also notes on I Cor.14:33-36.

The grammar would also allow this as a pattern of family relationships. V.15 would harmonize with that. The change from singular to plural verb forms could lean toward a marital interpretation. One cannot reasonably assign it exclusively either way.

I TIMOTHY 3

1-7 – Characteristics of an overseer – basically, a person who has demonstrated, in his family and community life, exemplary behavior. (6) The stipulation “not a new convert” could be problematic – weren't they *all* new converts? But it makes sense that they should have been around long enough to be responsibly evaluated. (4-5) “Look how his kids turned out!” Sad that this is so seldom observed. (7) The opinion of outsiders counts, because that's how the group will be judged by the public.

8-13 – Deacons need to be able to stand up to financial scrutiny (8). They are, after all, distributing the resources of the group. (9) Their faithfulness must be beyond question, (10) having been carefully tested first. As noted in the introduction, *gunaikas* is translated “women” or “wives” with equal accuracy. Both genders served in this way – (see Phoebe in Rom.16:1). The household is critical here, also.

(13) Interesting comment that serving increases one's confidence and faithfulness. It does.

14-15 – The whole “household of God” is to behave in this way. This is additional evidence that *everyone* needs to be qualified for service.

16 – Some researchers think that this is a fragment of a hymn or creed. I think the former is more likely, because the formality of creeds came much later. It is, however, a succinct summary of information about the person of Jesus.

Remember that *angelos* means only “messenger” -- they may be either human or supernatural – or both! Notice also the use of *sarx*. This refers to Jesus' *humanity* – has absolutely nothing to do with the “sinful nature” used by some translators!

I TIMOTHY 4

1-5 All the “weird stuff” advocated by people who would make “doctrines” out of unnecessary details should not be surprising. Paul says (1) the Spirit warned about it, and so did Jesus. 4-5 refer most specifically to foods, but can be expanded to all created things. That, however, is not saying that “anything goes.” The test is the Word of God and prayer.

6-10 Personal advice to Timothy as Paul's representative. (7) Don't get distracted with the wack-o's.

(8) There's a difference between discipline (here) and asceticism (3). The message of faithfulness is primary – then all else falls into place. *Gumnaze* is present imperative. *Continuous* effort is required. (10) Paul is asking of Timothy only what he

demands of himself. The motivation is their “hope in God.”

11-16 These same instructions are to be passed along.

12 – The myth that Timothy was a “bishop” or some such thing should be put to rest by this. Paul notes his youth, and urges him to set an example anyway. He has *just* said, however, that even the temporary oversight he approves should be by mature people. 13 This does not exclude Timothy from teaching, or (14) exercising any gift the Spirit chooses to offer through him.

The “laying-on of the elders' hands” may have been at his baptism, at some commissioning to service, or some other occasion. It was a frequent practice.

16 – Safety – for both oneself and others – lies in close attention to faithfulness.

I TIMOTHY 5

Attitudes toward other members of the brotherhood

1 – Age and experience should be respected, even if correction is needed.

2 – All are to be honored as family.

3 -- “Honor” (*tima*), in addition to respect, may include monetary payment or support (L/S).

4-8 – This should be the responsibility of the family, if there is one. A person is obligated to care for his own household. The congregation should be called upon only in cases of necessity. This apparently was the expectation even among pagans of the culture.

9-15 Faithful widows without family, however, are to be cared for, and to be deputized to care for the needy. An atmosphere of persecution would have kept both categories well-supplied! It sounds like something similar to an order (12), in which they made a commitment to devote the rest of their lives to this service. We have no details of this arrangement. But it is a commitment that should be discouraged for young women, who might be better-off with a family (14).

13,15 – The idea is not to enable idleness, but to provide for necessity.

16 – Women, too, are charged with the care of the widows of the family, so that the church can care for those who have none.

17-22 There is an option of elders being asked to devote full time to the work of teaching. Note that these are *elders (old people)*, not career-builders! These should also receive support. These instructions need to be held in tension with Paul's frequent statements about supporting his own work.

19-20 Elders should be protected from frivolous criticism, but publicly called to account if several witnesses document some sort of abuse.

21 –Evaluation must be even-handed, and without bias.

22 – Many problems in churches would be avoided if people were given a period of apprenticeship or trial before being assigned to a major responsibility. Those who precipitately assign leadership are liable for the failings of those so appointed.

23 – personal health advice.

24-25 – Reassurance that people's behavior will eventually be obvious, even if it is not immediately evident.

I TIMOTHY 6

1-2 This needs to be held in tension with the master-slave discourses in Eph.6:5-9 and Col.3:23-4:1. Rather than attacking the system, Paul tried to redeem it. That doesn't always work. But here, he is dealing with relations *inside* the church.

3-5 Revising the teaching is not acceptable. That comes only from people who have “turned away from the truth.” “Profit” is implicated again here.

6-10 Basic needs are enough. Interesting juxtaposition of “destruction” and “waste” as the result of a pursuit of wealth. Such pursuit places one's faithfulness in danger, and brings much grief.

11-12 There *are* things worth “pursuing:” the attributes of faithful living.

13-16 Live in anticipation of Jesus' coming!

17-19 There is even legitimate use of wealth: doing good, sharing bountifully. This is real life.

15-16 may be quoting a hymn of praise.

II TIMOTHY 1

1-- This time, Paul characterizes his assignment as being conformed (“according to”) the promise of life in Christ Jesus.

What a contrast, with the threats espoused by so many!

3 – Paul has not “changed gods”. He simply recognizes that the object of his ancestors' worship is now revealed in Jesus.

4-5 The faithfulness of Timothy's family is appreciated.

6 – This may refer to the initial gift of the Holy Spirit, which frequently in the Acts account was associated with the laying-on-of-hands by an elder or apostle after baptism, or some subsequent endowment. In the first letter, Paul referred to “the elders” (4:14) having done this, and connects it to a prophecy. It appears to have been a frequent gesture, for a variety of purposes. In any case, “stirring up” a gift may often be necessary, especially in discouraging situations.

7, 8, 13 – Apparently Paul's hassles are getting Timothy down; perhaps somewhat frighteningly. Paul is trying to be encouraging, rehearsing again the power of Jesus. (9) They can depend on *his* power, not their own efforts.

10 – **HE DESTROYED DEATH!!!** (See also Heb.2:9,14,15). This is the message of hope for persecuted believers – not a constant re-run of “sinfulness”! This is an aorist participle. It only had to be done once! This is the entire content of Paul's message: light, life, immortality.

12 – Yes, it caused him suffering, but not shame. Trust in / loyalty to Jesus separates those concepts.

13-14 – Paul's example, and the Holy Spirit's power, will enable the young man to hang on.

15-18 – Report about mutual friends and associates: faithful and otherwise. Onesiphorus, Phygelos, and Hermogenes are mentioned only once in the letters: the former for his faithfulness, the other two for desertion. One never knows how he will be remembered, or for how long an event may be passed down!

II TIMOTHY 2

1-2 Make sure the torch gets passed! And to faithful people. **Every faithful person needs to be training his replacement.**

3-7 The calling to service has to be the absolute primary focus of life. (Paul doesn't say how to proceed when that calling is forbidden by “God's people”!) Although I guess that's what he suffered from the Jewish authorities. But not the “real” church. Where is “real”?

8-10 The resurrection is still central. God's word is not imprisoned. Sometimes today, I'm afraid it is.

11-13 is placed in the Nestle text in poetic form. Perhaps a song of encouragement? These are all *conditional* statements. Interestingly, though, they do not end in condemnation, but on reliance on the faithfulness of Jesus. Denial (*arneomai*) is distinct from *apisteo* (being unfaithful). The former, I believe, is more deliberate, and the latter a condition of weakness.

14-15 Consistency in the message is critical, but arguments about words are destructive. The addition of v.15, though, “correctly handling” the Word, notes that precision is not irrelevant. Perhaps Paul is saying not to belabor words among those who refuse to hear. That would fit with 16-18, where error must be corrected. Error spread faster than truth in the first century as well!

19 – An interesting combination: The Lord will sort out ownership issues; our job is to live in his ways.

20-22 – Seek to be usable: clean and available.

23-25 – Dealing with error: ignore nonsense, but correct wrong, in a way that leaves the door open to restoration.

26 Remember the source of all deception.

II TIMOTHY 3

1-4 This looks frighteningly contemporary. Probably always has been. Corroborates the thesis in *Citizens* chapter 3 that self-centeredness is the “original sin.”

5 – the 20-21st century church? The hollow ceremonies in so many congregations we have visited seem exactly this way. But where are those who humbly and honestly seek his power?

6-7 – This sounds so much like “Women's Bible Studies” - that have no more connection to the real Bible or to actual study than a collection of fairy tales. Re-running the “sin thing” like a cheap novel, never resulting in commitment to Resurrection Life.

8 -- There is speculation that Jannes and Jambres may have been magicians at the court of Egypt, among those who duplicated some of the plagues to convince the Pharaoh to disregard Moses. These names are not in the LXX accounts, but appear in a tract of the Babylonian Talmud.

9 – Parallel to opponents of faithfulness in every age.

10-13 Paul takes his persecutions as part of the package. He reminds Timothy that time and again, he has seen the Lord rescue him/them. The world is not going to improve, unless its people change their focus.

14-17 prescribes a classic treatment of the tools for maintaining faithfulness in the presence of evil society:
--one's initial commitment, carefully maintained
-- being taught the Scriptures from childhood
-- the use of Scripture as it is intended: for teaching, reproving, correction (“setting straight), and education (discipline) in justice.

“Maturity” is here defined as being fitted or equipped for every good deed/effort.

V.16 presents a translation problem, in that there is no verb present. Where does the “is” belong? Traditionally, it has been placed after *graphe*, but could also belong after *theopneustos*, since *graphe* can refer to *any* writing. The situation is further complicated in that both *theopheustos* and *ophelimos* have masculine endings, but appear with both masculine and feminine articles; there is however, no masculine noun for them to modify. This is the reason for multiple choices in the text.

II TIMOTHY 4

1-2 The expectation of Jesus' return is the motivation for constant effort to get his message out. Timothy is urged to team up with the assignment of the Holy Spirit, to coach the team for a victorious season – an excellent figure for *parakaleo*.

3-4 This is certainly contemporary, when no value is placed on serious Biblical scholarship. People and “leaders” alike prefer “made-up stories” to the truth. It requires less effort, and gets a much more enthusiastic reception!

5 – Paul is counting on Timothy to take up the torch. Wrong treatment is a given.

6-8 -- Paul is sensing that his time is short. But he has no regrets. Having “maintained” faithfulness, he expects to share the Lord's commendation with all who are eagerly anticipating his coming.

Personal greetings:

Apparently, (11) Paul and Mark have reconciled.

14 – This may or may not be the Alexander referred to in 1:20. Paul leaves retribution to the Lord, but warns Timothy to beware.

16-17 The Lord did not desert Paul when everyone else did. He escaped the death sentence this time, but does not appear to expect release.

TITUS

Although Titus is not mentioned in the Acts account, he was a companion and frequent messenger of Paul's since the early days of his ministry. He first appears as a member of the group dispatched to the Jerusalem Conference by the disciples at Antioch. Paul notes to the Galatians that Titus was accepted by that body as a genuine member, without requiring the Jewish initiation of circumcision, despite his Gentile background. Later, in Paul's second letter to Corinth, he is mentioned multiple times as the courier of the former epistle, and a member of the team carrying and administering the relief offering from the Greek and Asian churches to Judea.

In this letter, Paul addresses him in Crete. There were people from Crete in Jerusalem at the first Pentecost, and these may have carried the message home from there. Crete was, however, a convenient port for much of Mediterranean shipping (see Ac.27), so there was ample opportunity for them to have entertained Christian travelers. Paul speaks of having “left him” in Crete to help set things in order, so presumably they were there together at some point. Paul does not have a very high opinion of the local inhabitants. (1:12).

Commentators trying to justify a hierarchical arrangement are fond of viewing this as a “rank” assignment, but there is no evidence of that. Titus clearly was with Paul for a while in Rome (II Tim.4:10), and was deputed to Dalmatia from there. Most likely, he had become a skilled troubleshooter and peacemaker, whose abilities were needed in different places. There are no firm clues to the date of this letter.

TITUS 1

1-2 Paul sees his own purpose as enabling the faithfulness and understanding of the believers, that they may live in anticipation of Jesus' coming, and the fulfillment of God's promised life.

4-5 He considers that Titus shares this assignment.

Notice (5) that Titus is not told to “run” the church, but to “establish elders” (plural) in every city. *Kathistemi* indicates “setting in order,” or “organizing.” Local leadership must be taught to function properly, but it is they who will be responsible.

6-9 The elders must be people of the highest moral character, as they will both represent the church, and be expected to teach others. Again, their domestic relations are of the highest importance, including the faithfulness of their children. (See also I Tim.3). Along with exemplary behavior (7 and 8), they must be able to handle the Word faithfully, both to teach and to refute opponents. The negatives are indicative of the excesses of the culture: pugnacious attitudes, drunkenness, and greed. Hospitality, justice and self-control would indeed attract attention in this atmosphere!

10-14 As in other places, Jewish and other opponents of the message have made inroads, and made a profit from their deception. Paul doesn't mince words. This must be opposed – strongly. In both v.7 and v.11, the subject of “profit” is highlighted. This has no place with faithfulness!

12 He considers the reputation of Cretans to indicate particular susceptibility to deception.

13 The concern is faithfulness, not domineering.

15-16 People from this sort of a background are vulnerable to both legalism (as a reaction against the prevailing moral laxity) *and* its “anything goes” alternative. “Clean” must be redefined, and must start with commitment. Then one must “practice what is preached.”

(16) “Knowing God” is authenticated by one's behavior.

TITUS 2

1 – Don't focus on the culture's evil, but on “wholesome” (healthy) teaching. The word is the one from which English “hygiene” is derived. Here, Paul turns to the behavior to be expected of *all* the brotherhood. Note how it parallels that prescribed for elders.

Additionally, see the treatment of “elders,” “older men,” and “older women” in the introduction to Timothy.

2-5 – Older folks, of either gender, are to lead exemplary lives that will give the Word of God a good name among outsiders, and will educate the younger people.

6-8 – Titus is apparently among the young men, and is admonished to set an example. The assumption is that there will be

attacks and criticism: just make sure it is not valid.

9-10 See the references to slavery in Eph.5, Col.4, I Cor.7, and I Tim.6. There apparently were no slave owners in this group. We do not know whether they were too poor, or whether they had released those in bondage to them. The point is, in the entire chapter, that people be attracted to the message by the behavior of its adherents. (5, 8, 10).

11-15 is a summary. The motivation, as frequently, is waiting for Jesus, and living sensibly (*sophronos*) and justly (*dikaios*).

14 – Note what Jesus “ransomed” people *from*: lawlessness. Nothing is said about any penalty for “doing no-no’s”. The goal is to make us *capable* of doing good!

15 – This is to be the continual theme of discussion and teaching.

TITUS 3

1 – *Hypotasso* has been used through the ages as a club – to abuse people of every degree. It is true that “make subject” is one of its meanings. But it also refers to “being in an orderly arrangement”, or to be “sheltered by” a person or institution.

The rest of v.1 specifies what sort of “obedience” is to be offered to “rulers and authorities:” -- “being ready for any good work.” All the apostles demonstrated that one is not intended to obey when commanded to do wrong.

2 – Neither are we to pick fights, to court persecution. We need each other's counsel to sort this out.

3 – All of us were once ignorant and deceived.

4-7 – I've broken up this rambling sentence to make it more readable, I hope without violating its message. Only the mercy of God created our new life. We were powerless. But the gift of the Holy Spirit enables an entirely different life.

8 -- People who have chosen to *become faithful*, still need to practice (present participle) continually, to learn appropriate behavior.

9-11 – Arguments are useless: *Demonstration* is the only useful tactic. Genealogies and legalistic disputes have no value to faithful life. Again, those refusing to be taught are self-condemned, and must be excluded.

12-15 Nicopolis is in Macedonia, northern Greece, on the seashore – consequently a good place to spend the winter, while sailing is dangerous. Paul plans to send a replacement, to help, so that Titus can join him. Presumably, (13) these others were in Crete also. This indicates that Paul was not yet in prison at the time of this writing. Tychicus was from Ephesus, so he may have been there.

PHILEMON

1-3 It is assumed that Philemon was a member of the Colossian church. This is the only reference to him. Apphia may – or may not – have been his wife. Archippus, who is greeted in the Colossian letter, may – or may not – have been a son or another member of their household, or house-church.

4-7 Paul pours the thanksgiving on pretty thick here: He is always appreciative of faithfulness, but this seems a bit excessive.

8-14 It doesn't take long to get to the point. The occasion for the letter was the return of Onesimus, the carrier of both this and the Colossian letter. It is sent from prison in Rome, where Paul says he met and brought Onesimus to faith. The conjecture – and that's all we can do – is that Onesimus was a run-away slave from Philemon's household. It sounds plausible. Rome was an easy place for such fugitives to “get lost”, but it was a long way from Colossae – I have not heard the distance factor addressed, except by a few who are trying to establish Ephesus as the imprisonment from which all this is written.

11-14 – Onesimus comes with a glowing recommendation. Paul would have liked to keep him around, but felt that sending him back was the correct thing to do. 16 raises a question as to whether Onesimus and Philemon were also related. Might an indebted sibling have been reduced to slavery? I have not seen that statement explored.

18 --Paul even offers to repay any debt that might have been involved, while at the same time reminding Philemon of his own debt to Paul. Might Paul have been the one who brought him to faith? He urges Philemon to receive Onesimus as a brother, even as he would Paul himself. This should definitively destroy any notion that Paul “approved” of slavery.

22 – At this point, Paul expected release. This could be an indication against the letter's having been written from Rome.

23 -- Epaphras, however, seems to have been imprisoned also. He had come to Rome from Colossae with support for Paul. The others mentioned are also known to have been in Rome.

HEBREWS

The letter to the Hebrews, due to its lack of internal attribution, has spawned a plethora of theories as to its authorship and its recipients. The final greetings mention Italy, and Timothy's having been “released”, although we have no other record of his captivity. Who else had been in Rome? Many people at various times: Aquila, Priscilla, Luke, Epaphras, Phoebe, Aristarchus, Mark, Tychicus, Artemas, Eubulus, Poudes, Linus, Claudia, and Titus have all been suggested, among others.

We do know that the writer was familiar with Jewish history and ceremony, but also that he/she was firmly convinced that Jesus is superior to everyone and everything that had gone before. A fairly late date is suggested by the tone of attempting to encourage believers who were being worn down by persecution, and by the realization that the Lord's return would not be as soon as many had expected. Frequently they are urged to encourage and strengthen one another. It has been suggested that the recipients could have been a second-generation church.

Likewise, there has been some challenge to the assumption that the recipients were of Jewish background. Surely they were aware of that background, but it could just as easily have been written to folks who had been influenced by the contingent that wanted to force Jewish ceremonies upon Gentile converts.

Regardless of the specific original people involved, however, the letter is a valuable reminder of the unique and exalted position occupied by the Lord Jesus Christ, and a frequently needed word of encouragement to folks who grow weary in their efforts to be his faithful followers.

I would be remiss if I did not include in this brief introduction the light-hearted, somewhat tongue-in-cheek suggestion of our dear (late) brother, teacher, and sometime-mentor, Howard Charles, of Goshen Biblical Seminary. He teasingly favored Phoebe as a possible author, for a handful of reasons – a few serious, and others less so:

1. Paul had sent Phoebe, already a respected worker in her home congregation, to carry his letter to Rome, from whence it appears this one was written. (Rom.16:1)
2. Cenchrae, her home congregation, took its Jewish heritage quite seriously, since it was there that Paul had ceremoniously had his head shaved because of a “vow”. (Ac.8:18)
3. “And besides”, Howard added with his characteristic twinkle, “It *had* to be one of the ladies!” And when pushed on that, he replied, “Who else could have written thirteen chapters, and then closed by saying (13:22) 'I've just written to you *briefly*'?”

Somebody always shot back, “*Paul* could!”, which he had to concede was also possible.

But, serious or not, that banter was an important lesson in recognizing that the New Testament writers were real, human brothers and/or sisters, not some sort of plaster “saints” on pedestals. Their *message* is of the utmost importance – as is ours! -- and it far transcends the various messengers used by our mutual Lord.

The traditional title probably grows out of the frequent references to the Old Testament, and the early assumption of Pauline authorship. The literary style is quite different from his, however.

The closest thing we have to a clue to the letter's date, is the observation that it is quoted in the late first century “Letter of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians” (dated about 96 AD), so it would have to be before that.

Far more important than establishing the date or authorship, however, is the triumphant message of Jesus' transcendence of all that has gone before, and the certainty of his provision for his people. The repeated admonitions to encourage and uphold one another in this certainty are relevant for every age and culture.

HEBREWS 1

1 -- “In the prophets” is usually assumed to refer to the Old Testament prophets, but it may include others – even those of other traditions! Before you write that off as heresy, recognize that the *point* is in the following statement – (2) – that Jesus is far beyond any of these. Remember also that Paul referred the people of Athens to their own philosophers and poets (Ac.17:22 f), and spoke elsewhere (Rom.1 and 2) of God's attempts to make himself known to mankind beyond the reach of the Jewish Law.

2-4 – Jesus, though, is the “last word.” He is the heir of everything; the agent of creation; the reflection of all that God is; the one that holds everything together! He straightened out the mess that humanity had made, and then *sat down!* You sit down when the work is finished. Note that “other messengers” are *not* discredited: they have simply been superseded. 5-13 contains a host of snippets of Old Testament references. They are *now* applied to Jesus, although they were used in various seemingly unrelated ways in their original contexts. Some are from the coronation psalms used for ancient Hebrew kings; some are psalms addressed to God. They are not sorted or separated. After all, from the beginning of the nation, God *himself* intended to be their King. It was the *people* who changed the rules, and demanded a human ruler.

14 – Messengers, of whatever provenance, have a single function, if sent by God: to take care of the heirs of his program of deliverance.

It is necessary to remember here again, the use of the word, *angelos*. Much confusion (and fiction!) has been generated by the choice of early translators to use the transliteration, “angel” in places where they considered the messenger to be a supernatural being, and “messenger” in contexts where it is clear (?) that a human is in view. *These are not two different words or ideas!* The focus of the word, as is the case with many Greek words, is on the *function* being performed – *not* upon the nature or status of the performer. There are Biblical “messengers” that are clearly supernatural – and others that are clearly mortal. There are also events in which the identity of the messenger is not clear. *Angelia* is a message, a report, an announcement, a command, an order, a proclamation. An *angelos* is the individual, of whatever character, who delivers it. No more and no less.

HEBREWS 2

1-4 Apparently the recipients of this letter took the message of the Law quite seriously. The point is made that the new message was delivered by the Lord himself, and therefore merited far closer attention. The witness is abundant; the Lord himself, those who personally heard him, and the powerful manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

5-9 The statements of Psalm 8 are directly applied to Jesus. His “briefly inferior” status had a single purpose: **the definitive defeat of death!** -- and was followed by his return to his rightful “glory and honor.” See also I Tim.:10.

10-13 The total identification of Jesus with those he came to rescue was essential to the task. Never forget that it is he “because of whom” (*di' hon*) (the accusative object denotes purpose) and “through whom” (*di' hou*) (the genitive object denotes cause or source) everything exists. Even so, he was “made mature through sufferings”. This is the ultimate identification, and results in Jesus' followers being acknowledged as his brothers and his children (*paidia*).

14 – The reiteration of the genuineness of Jesus' humanity may be to counteract an early appearance of Docetism – the teaching that Jesus only “seemed” (*dokeo*) human, but could not have been, because all the material creation was assumed to be evil. The argument here is that he *had* to be identified with people to this extent, in order to *destroy* death on their/our behalf. This is an aorist subjunctive: a purpose clause. By his own triumph over death, Jesus definitively destroyed the devil, who up until then, had held its power.

15 – No longer need Jesus' people live in fear of death.

17-18 -- He could only remedy the situation by “being made like his brothers *in every respect.*”

I don't think the implications here receive anywhere near enough attention. The fact – and the effect – of the Incarnation of Jesus is grossly neglected in favor of retributionary theories of the crucifixion. Jesus **willingly shared our human existence** in order to **break the power of death**, and remove our fear of it. Fear of death has always been a favorite weapon of persecutors. They are frustrated in the extreme, when they encounter people with such confidence in the Resurrection that death has no power to terrify them. These folks had been threatened with extreme persecution. They desperately needed that confidence.

18 – The reference, then, to “temptation”, is far more serious than some “no-no” or forbidden fruit. It refers to *Jesus'* temptation: to choose the easy way to power offered by Satan, rather than the planned route. Persecuted followers were

also being enticed to trade *survival* for unfaithfulness.

17 – Yes, the priestly role was still needed: People's failures (*hamartiq*), **not** *paraptoma*) still needed to be reconciled. But it is significant that this provision is bracketed by assertions of Jesus' power to cope with situations of persecution.

HEBREWS 3

1-6 The writer does not depreciate the faithfulness of Moses, but asserts that the faithfulness of Jesus is greater, and deserving of greater glory. A faithful servant is good, but the faithful Son is greater. And it is he to whom we belong.

7-11 The followers of Moses refused to listen. Despite multiple incidents of deliverance, they chose to “wander off.”

12-14 People who become careless about faithfulness don't *start out* “taking a stand against God.” They merely fall victim to the “deceitfulness of failure.” You “blow it” at some point, and then justify the failure, rather than correcting it.

Eventually, that gets easier.

13 – Constant “coaching” is insurance against this syndrome. Mutual effort is constantly needed. Sharing in Christ only comes by “hanging on” to our original commitment – a terribly difficult thing to do alone.

15-19 The example of Exodus is invoked again. *Everyone* had experienced the deliverance from Egypt. It was those who refused obedience that fell in the desert. Note the parallelism in 18 and 19: *apeithesasin* – they disobeyed, and *apistian* – the result – was unfaithfulness. Both employ the negative prefix, (*α-*) with a positive word. Changing the idea from behavior to some sort of intellectual “unbelief” is unwarranted. Both phrases are talking about *activity*.

HEBREWS 4

1-7 The parallel is clearly drawn: equal opportunity, equal responsibility.

2 – Hearing does no good without a positive response.

The writer shifts back and forth between “unfaithfulness” and “disobedience”, treating them as synonyms.

8-11 The interplay of “effort” and “rest” is interesting. These must always be held in tension. In v.8, there is no way to be certain whether *Iesus* refers to Jesus or Joshua. Traditionally, translators have used it as a historical reference, but there is no way to be sure.

12 – God is spoken of in vv.4 and 10 as “resting”. But in 12, his *Word* is “energetic”! *Logos* can also refer either to Jesus (as in Jn.1) or to the message in general.

In either case, *discernment* is the intent. Life and breath, joints and marrow, are thought of as indivisible. The belabored differentiation of “soul” for *psuche* and “spirit” for *pneumatos* with no definite article, is unwarranted. The intent is physical illustrations of **difficult discernment**, as the Word evaluates what is in one's heart. 12-13 The committed follower values and welcomes this evaluation. It is not a threat. It is for our benefit and safety!

14-16 Since Jesus is the one who does the sorting, we come with confidence in his sympathy. This would tend toward the personal interpretation of *logos* in v. 12. He has faced it all, but never failed the test – so he can provide whatever we need to remain faithful.

The whole thing is his gracious provision!

HEBREWS 5

Jesus as High Priest

It has already been explained how Jesus' humanity was necessary to his assuming this role (2:17), so he could fully understand our condition; (3:1) to set the ultimate example of faithfulness; and (4:14-15) his position in heaven and his understanding of our weaknesses, together with his experience of the temptation to cut corners (2:18 and 4:15). This theme will continue through chapter 9.

1-4 The “qualifications” are compassion and calling. His job is to mediate between God and people. But the high priest according to the Law must also make offerings for his own failings.

5-6 One does not simply choose to occupy this position.

7-10 In Jesus' case, *God* declared him to be the high priest – after he had fulfilled the assignment of his humanity. It is amazing that even the Son of God had to “learn” obedience. (But of course, as God, he would have had no one *to* obey!) (9) He procured deliverance *after* having been “matured” by the things that he suffered (*teleiotheis* is passive.) The deliverance is for “all who *obey* him”.

11-14 People inhibit their own understanding by constantly re-running “basic principles”. Sadly, I think they don't even correctly identify what *are* the “basic principles.” (13) The “message of justice” totally escapes those who refuse to grow

up! (14) The “practice” and “conditioning” referred to here are terms of athletic training. It requires constant attention to develop the needed discernment to become what we are intended to be. Getting hung up on peripheral matters doesn't help.

HEBREWS 6

1-3 The elements of the “foundation” should already be in place. Then people need to grow further in faithfulness. “A changed life” is defined as changed *behavior*: leaving old ways to become faithful to God. (2) “Baptisms” -- yes, the word is plural. Probably it refers to the one at which one is welcomed into the faithful community, and the (sometimes later) baptism with the Holy Spirit. Teaching, laying-on of hands, resurrection, and judgment, are listed as foundational. *Aionion* may be taken as a modifier of *krimatos*, or as its subject.

4-8 The late John C. Wenger, of Goshen Biblical Seminary, pointed out that the participial clause in v.6 has no introductory particle, and therefore is only a modifier of the subject, which occurs in v.4, “those who...”, not a final sentence of exclusion. It is a present participle, and the phrasing I have chosen owes its debt to his insight, which I believe fits with the grace of the Lord Jesus. The paragraph speaks a warning to anyone who deliberately turns his back upon his commitment to the Lord, with vv.7 and 8 explaining that the fruit borne is crucial. However, 9-12 would not be included, were there no hope for the restoration of people who had fallen away. The writer seeks to renew and refresh their faithfulness, lest they suffer the fate of the unproductive land. The shaky ones are urged to persist in faithfulness “until the end.” (11) By their/our “eagerness for complete confidence of hope”, it is less likely that they/we will “get worn out” and give up. Use as an example those who have endured in the past.

13-15 Abraham had to wait many years for the promise made to him (Jn.8:56), and did not see it fully in his long lifetime.

16-20 The reference to an oath seems strange, since Jesus himself forbade its use (Mt.5:34), but God can play by his own rules. The point is encouraging discouraged people to depend on the promise of God, as the secure anchor of our life. Jesus' triumph is our security.

HEBREWS 7

1-3 As King of Justice and of Peace, Melchizedek is a symbolic representation of Jesus.

4-10 This appears to be rather convoluted reasoning, making the point that since Melchizedek was honored by Abraham, he – and therefore Jesus, whom he in some way foreshadowed – was of higher status than the Levitical priesthood.

11-15 It logically follows that the legal system on which the Levitical priesthood is based, was also inferior and in need of revision. The quotation in v.17 comes from Psalm 110, also the source quoted in 1:13 and attributed to Jesus.

16 – Jesus' “credential” is his indestructible life!

18-19 All that went before was demonstrated to be inadequate, and therefore “set aside” (*athetesis*). This word indicates “abrogation or annulment.” The law was incapable of transforming anyone. It requires a “better hope” to bring people *near* to God. Law pushed them away.

22-25 Jesus is the “sponsor” (*enguos*) of a better covenant. Only he can serve permanently, because only he definitively defeated death itself.

26-28 Jesus knew – and provided – exactly what we needed. He has no faults or problems of his own to deal with, and yet makes himself responsible for ours. No law can do that. Only the Incarnate God.

HEBREWS 8

1-6 The writer is charitable toward those who went before. Moses was granted a vision of the heavenly pattern – the intention of God – and did his best to communicate and follow it. But all that failing people can do is a poor imitation of the real thing. Some see in this echoes of Plato's “shadows” or “forms”, but I think it more likely that Plato himself may have been granted a flash of insight. He did after all write in the 6th century BC, and Moses functioned in the 13th. In either case, Jesus is superior, being himself the one who *cast* the “shadow”! He is the reality.

7-13 Even in the days before Jesus' physical coming, prophets had seen the failings of the former covenant, and been informed by God that a better one was on the way. Moses himself (Ex.9:4-6) relayed the message that **the former**

covenant was conditional upon the people's choice to obey. Jeremiah (31) detailed the sad history, as did others, and included God's promise of a remedy. Even that early, (shortly before the exile), the failure of the hierarchical system was recognized, and God revealed his intention to speak to and through *all* of his people. For a more detailed examination of this subject, please see the discussion in chapter 4 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*.

13 – The conclusion is quite simple: the old way did not work as intended, and so it has been superseded.

HEBREWS 9

1-10 It is not due to ignorance of the Jewish legal system that the writer declares it inadequate. The Holy Spirit uses all this imagery, to show that the true purpose of God for his people had not yet been achieved (8). (10) The “human regulations” were an attempt to establish and keep some semblance of order until Jesus came to “straighten out” everything (*diorthoseos*). This is the word used to refer to the correction, editing, or revision of a law or a literary work, or the setting of a broken bone!

11-14 This approach to the understanding of Jesus' supremacy uses the paradigm of the old ways – but only to point out his superiority to them. It is only possible because of who he is. All the former representations pale before his completeness. He delivers his people not only from ceremonial uncleanness, but from futility itself! He enables true worship of God.

15-22 The same word (*diatheke*) refers both to a “covenant” and a “will.” V.17 provides a cultural explanation of one perspective on the need for Jesus' death. “Modern theology” either discounts that part altogether, or turns it into a convoluted form of capital punishment (blamed on God!) The association of “covenant” and “will”, lines up with neither position. The whole “blood thing” is **not punitive**, but evidence of the death without which a will has no force. (There are many other things associated with it as well – see Chapter 12 of *Citizens*.) It is the Law that distorted this into a death sentence (22). Most people who quote the latter part of that “verse”, ignore the beginning of the sentence, “*According to the Law...*”

23-28 **Jesus' superiority** is the recurring theme. (24) He is *permanently* before God on our behalf. *Eiselthen* is an aorist tense. He does not need to “keep on entering” -- He did it *once*, and stayed there.

V. 27, also, is not a threat. It is reassurance of the **permanent validity of the accomplishment of Jesus!** *Anenengkein* (v.28) is the aorist infinitive form of *anaireo* – to carry, to lead, to restore, to recover, to consider, to take responsibility. It is hard to find any punitive flavor in that. His return is depicted as making the deliverance complete.

HEBREWS 10

1-4 It is bondage to the Law that keeps folks dwelling on the failures [“sins”] of its people, because the sacrifices of the law can't remove them or remedy them. (It is also an effective way for “superiors” to seize and retain control over people!)

5-7 Jesus recognized that the real need was to *do* the will of God, not focus on people's failure to do so.

V.7 – *Ho theos* is in the *nominative* case, *not* vocative. **This statement is not addressed to God.** It is identifying Jesus with/as God! HE is the subject of *heko*. The common translation that assumes a vocative is totally in error.

8-10 Jesus has thus redefined the “will of God”. It is no longer a set of precepts and regulations. It is the set-apart, obedient life of his people!

11- 18 The key is v.14. Jesus has definitively set things straight, for all time and beyond, for those who are his. Score-keeping (17) has been made obsolete. If failures have been *taken away*, there is no longer a sacrifice required. The proper understanding of *aphiemi* is essential here, as elsewhere.

19-25 The context of what follows is our freedom of access to God, secured by Jesus. (20) refers to the splitting of the temple veil, at the time of Jesus' death (*Citizens*, chapter 8). (21) Jesus is the only priest we need. His serving this function provides for us (22) complete confidence. We have no further need to obsess about “evil” or “uncleanness”. (23) It is *his* faithfulness on which we now depend – we just need to hang on to that. (24-25) *Our* responsibility is to keep encouraging each other in love, toward faithfulness. **This requires mutuality!** It is a responsibility to *each other*, not the task of only a few.

26-30 We are warned against deliberately turning away: that is serious. It is cited as evidence of why we need each other! Note that the warning is to people *inside* the fellowship, not outsiders.

32-39 In the beginning, these folks had exhibited great endurance, under great stress. They are urged not to quit now. Endurance (*hupomones*) – bearing up under pressure – is the key. There are basically two kinds of situations requiring

“patience,” and two different words/concepts are used. This is the patience required when under abuse, persecution, or other suffering, when there is (or seems to be) no escape. It is best rendered “endurance.” *Makrothumia* is the kindness and generosity extended to a person who is weaker or less mature. The older word was “longsuffering,” but that has reversed its connotation in modern English. I usually use something like “generous-mindedness” there. It is the attitude required of the more mature person in any situation. In this section, the weary are called to endurance, and to helping each other hang on. They “have done” or “have been doing” God’s will. They are not being scolded. But “keeping on” is necessary to get in on the fulfillment of the promise. (37) Jesus *is* coming. That is an event greatly to be anticipated. “It won’t be long” is an encouragement, not a threat.

This quotation, (38) taken as a “verse”, has also been mightily abused, like its counterpart in Rom.1:17. The original comes from Habbakuk 2:4, and is contrasting the *behavior* of the faithful vs. the arrogance of the unfaithful. Much of the misunderstanding can be corrected by properly understanding *pistis* as **loyalty or faithfulness**, rather than some mental or pseudo-spiritual gymnastics labeled “faith.” It refers to one’s *manner of life*, and is here contrasted with “turning back” -- a concept reinforced in v.39, expressing confidence that the readers will continue in their faithfulness.

HEBREWS 11

Doubtless ours is not the first culture to have problems with the term *pistis*. So the writer here goes to great lengths to provide not only a descriptive definition, but abundant illustrations. Most of the illustrations begin with *pistei* a dative case, with no preposition. These may be understood as denoting the manner, means, or agency of whatever is discussed in the immediately following narrative. First, the definitions:

1 – *hupostasis* – literally, “standing under”. It is the basis or foundation of our expectation, and at the same time, the *elenkos* – the legal evidence – of the reality of the yet-unseen promise. Evidence must be something *observable*, therefore, it has to fall in the category of *behavior*: Faithfulness / loyalty enables understanding (3). It is people’s loyalty and obedience to God that is in view, in each case.

Loyalty is equated with being “pleasing to God.” It mirrors God’s own faithfulness to his people. It sounds like he and Enoch simply “hung out” together. Noah *demonstrated* loyalty by following instructions, as did Abraham. Much of the time, neither of them had any clue what was going on, and even on occasion, messed-up royally, but remained faithful/loyal to the one who had called them.

13-16 A short digression explains that what set these folks apart was not some esoteric knowledge, but simply seeking, often with little concrete expectation, for a goal the Lord had set for them. There is no record that any of them seriously entertained the option of going back.

17-30 There follows a roll-call of people who *acted* on the instructions they had received. Perhaps it is deliberate that the frequent failings of these folks are ignored. The thing that appears to have mattered, is their *efforts to follow*. Even Rahab, with neither moral nor theological understanding, nor appropriate pedigree, is included because she *followed instructions*.

It was not all glorious. 33-34 indicates that some did experience notable triumphs. But for others (35-37), the outcome was less than one might wish. The litany of suffering is intense. Physical, psychological, all kinds of abuse were theirs. But it is “the world” (*ho kosmos*) that is judged unworthy – not its victims.

39 “All of these” -- triumphant or not, apparently – are “accredited” (*Martureo* refers to testimony given in court!) “through their faithfulness.” **Their standing has nothing to do with the apparent results.**

40 None of these, in their earthly lifetime, had the privilege to see the total fulfillment of the promise. God is much more far-sighted than we. Things could only be made fully complete at the hands of Jesus. And the wonder is, that it also included us!

HEBREWS 12

Toigaroun is very seldom used in the New Testament, although it was fairly common in the classical writers. Its reference is more precise, and stronger, than a simple “therefore”, which appears everywhere! It could be rendered “for this very reason,” or “this is why”. It refers back to the essay in the previous chapter, as an incentive for what follows.

1-3 Jesus is the culminating example of faithfulness. Every obstacle to following him must be laid aside. Our falling short deserves no further focus – only Jesus deserves attention. *His* endurance is the example – a much greater contrast to what *he* deserved, than anything we will ever face. Those who opposed and abused him were the very people who should have welcomed and served him. This is offered as an antidote to our own despairing exhaustion.

4-11 This requires discernment. At what point should we view opposition or oppression as discipline from the Lord, as

opposed to the attack of the enemy? *Paideas* is *education*. If what we are learning is to emulate Jesus' response, even the abuse of evil or deceived people may be part of the lesson. I do not believe that God *causes* such things, any more than he *caused* people to reject his Son. But it was *used* for the eventual benefit of the world.

12-13 Injuries can be healed or aggravated depending on the use and care of the affected part.

14 – Peace toward *everyone*, not just the brotherhood, and dedication to God, are essential to “seeing” the Lord. (15) Bitterness can even cause people to miss God's grace.

16-17 Esau's selfish concern for the present, was his downfall.

18-21 The “approach to God”, under the old system, was a fearsome thing, even for Moses.

22-24 Now, it is unmitigated joy! The place where we belong – home at last! It is in the context of this joy that God is referred to as the “judge of all” (23). It says only *panion*, which could be either things or people. In the genitive plural, masculine, feminine, and neuter forms are alike. But the word “judge” (*krite*, without prefix), has no negative implication. Things or people, all will be judged justly and fairly! What a glorious prospect! Just people are finally made complete, according to the new Covenant.

25-29 In that joyful scene, it is necessary to remember that we still need to pay attention! We still need to follow instructions. When all else is shaken to pieces, the Kingdom to which we are called, to which we belong, stands firmly. The only thing left to do is to give thanks, and to offer worship.

29 does not seem to fit the joyous occasion. We need more light on this connection.

HEBREWS 13

At first glance, these seem to be rather random admonitions. However, all are helpful to maintaining faithfulness. And part of the point, is that this must be a mutual effort.

1 – Primary, always, is continuous love in the brotherhood.

2 – Strangers MAY carry a message from God – or not.

3-- Maintain close identification with those abused or imprisoned as a result of their faithfulness.

4 – Faithfulness is essential in marriage.

5 – Contentment with one's means requires effort.

6 -- This is possible, by relying on the Lord's constant care.

7 – *Hegoumenon* refers to Roman governing officials. This is a *separate category* from “those who spoke God's word.” Imitate those whose conduct shows faithfulness.

8 – This seems out of place, but perhaps a reminder is needed that only Jesus *won't* change. A contrast to the functionaries just mentioned.

9-11 – Dietary laws must have been very pervasive. They are of no benefit to faithfulness. However, they were a powerful tool of inclusion/exclusion.

12-13 – Remember that Jesus was not “acceptable” to the “insiders”. He too was excluded by them.

14 – Like him, we seek the city yet to come.

15 -- “Acceptable praise” is *defined* as acknowledging God in Jesus!

16 – Doing good and sharing characterizes his people.

17 – *Hegoumenois* again. These are *secular* rulers. **There are no “rulers” in the church except Jesus**

(Mt.23:8). Therefore, clearly, *psuchon* should in this instance be rendered “lives.” The secular rulers will be called to account.

18-19 – The writer hopes to be restored to the readers, so is probably writing to “the folks at home.”

20-21 – It's ALL about Jesus. He's the only way we can endure, and is himself the goal.

JAMES

As is frequently the case, there is disagreement among scholars about the authorship of this letter. Tradition attributed it to a brother (half-brother) of Jesus (Gal.1:19), who came to faith only after the resurrection. Other candidates include one of the two “James” among the original twelve disciples: the son of Zebedee and brother of John, who was killed early on, by order of Herod (Ac.12:1), or the son of Alphaeus. There is also discussion as to which of these took leadership of the church at Jerusalem, and chaired the Jerusalem Conference described in Acts 15.

Any of these would have been intimately familiar with the practicality of Jesus' teaching. It is common to see overtones of the Sermon on the Mount in this epistle.

Much has also been made of the supposed “conflict” between the “justification by faith” trumpeted by the reformers and attributed to Paul, and James' insistence that “faith without works is dead.” If one properly understands the word *pistis* as “faithfulness” or “loyalty”, most of that so-called “conflict” disappears.

Whoever he is, James writes to scattered believers, most likely of Jewish background, who have probably been dispersed by persecution, unless *diaspora* is taken to mean the scattering of the Jewish nation in earlier centuries. The people of the Diaspora had become acculturated to their surroundings, to varying degrees, and neglected some earlier customs. This concern would have bothered the James of the Jerusalem meeting (and to whom Paul refers in Gal.2:12), a sometime champion of the Judaizing movement. But his focus now is on Christian life in the face of persecution.

JAMES 1

1-- James identifies himself as a “slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” -- which would probably play down the brother idea – although the reference in Jude 1 is a curiosity. The letter is addressed to the Dispersion -- the specification of the “twelve tribes” says nothing of whether they were believers or not – which is strange.

2-4 -- “Testing” usually refers to persecution, but on occasion also to the temptation to cut corners for political advantage (see Hebrews 4:15, accounts of the temptation of Jesus, and I Peter 1:6-7).

5-8 – There is a huge difference between asking “in faith” as currently (mis)understood, and “in faithfulness.” V.6 warns of the need for an attitude of *loyalty*-- if the needed wisdom is granted, the asker is obliged to *act* on it. Honesty is paramount, and leaves no room for dissembling. The juxtaposition of *sophia* and *diakrino* raises another interesting possibility. *Sophia* was the concern of the self-important philosopher-types, whose favorite sport was *diakrasis* – high-flown philosophical speculation and argument. Might James be warning against “asking for wisdom” in order to enhance one's argumentative skills, as opposed to the true wisdom (defined later in chapter 3:13-17) that results in just and exemplary behavior?

9-11 – The leveling of perceived status is central to faithfulness.

12-15 – NO “testing” -- whether by persecution or temptation – comes from God. Apparently that error got an early start. It comes from one's *human* nature, which has not been fully transformed yet. Note that James does not “blame the devil”, either. See also II Cor.1:3-7.

16-18 – *IF* anything is good, it comes from God. 17 again emphasizes *total* honesty – nothing “shady.” (18) *Truth* is the source of the new creation.

19-21 –An approachable and reasonable attitude is required for peace in a brotherhood.

22-25 – Knowledge of the Word is totally useless if not accompanied by obedience to it. This parallels, does not contradict, Paul's emphasis on behavior.

26-27 – Faithfulness extends to one's speech, and one's concern for people in need, if it is genuine.

JAMES 2

1-8 – Social discrimination is antithetical to Christian brotherhood. “Love of the neighbor” must extend across *all* cultural barriers, or it must be recognized as phony.

8-9 – The reference to the “law” is *not* different in these two statements. James had probably heard Jesus set this statement in the context of summarizing “all the law and the prophets” (Mt.22:40).

10-13 – The “law of freedom” is another animal altogether, and focuses on mercy to one's fellows (13). 14-17 – The evidence of genuine faithfulness is *doing* something about the needs of others.

18-19 -- “Believing”-- (It does use the same word, which indicates that even so early, the word *pisteuo* was occasionally misunderstood. The foregoing statement, however, clarifies what James considers that it is *supposed* to mean) – is even in the province of demons, if it is strictly intellectual or theoretical.

20-26 – Both Abraham and Rahab *acted* on what they “believed”, in obedience to God.

The figure of body and breath (remember, “breath” and “spirit” represent the same word) is significant. Perversely, people

posit an either/or situation, which is unrealistic and impossible. The description in v.22 is a good summary: “Faithfulness was working **together with** his action, and the faithfulness was made complete by the action.”

JAMES 3

1 – Presuming to teach others places one at risk.

2-8 – James must have suffered from the poison of people's talk. He understands the damage that can result. There is no “harmless” gossip.

9-12 -- “Blessings and curses” ought indeed be impossible from the same source – but sadly, they are not. 13-15 – Wisdom, if not demonstrated in gentleness and good behavior, is demonic. James minces no words here. Jealousy, strife, dissension, bragging, lying – none of these have *anything* in common with the truth. How can supposed “church leaders” ignore this so completely?

17-18 – What a contrast, is the description of true, godly wisdom! Innocence, peacefulness, reasonableness, obedience, mercy, impartiality – would go a long way toward repairing not only the church, but the world as well. Unfortunately, their lack is perceived only by victims, almost never by perpetrators. 18 – Genuine peacemakers are concerned with *justice* – the concepts cannot be separated.

JAMES 4

1-3 – See chapter 3 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*. Self-centeredness is truly the “original sin”. All of these self-focused behaviors are symptoms of that basic problem. v.4 takes that idea to its logical conclusion. The *direction* of *affection* must be deliberately chosen.

5-10 This is an elaboration of Jesus' warning about trying to “serve two masters” (Mt.6:24). God's grace enables those who choose his direction. But it requires effort (7). The imperatives in v.7-10 are all aorist – a decisive point is assumed in each case. I had previously assumed them to be present, implying a need for continuous attention, but that is not the case. The aorist imperatives are saying, in effect, “Make up your mind about this once and for all,” and then proceed to back up your decision with action.

11 – These, on the other hand, are all present tenses, while v.12 goes back to the aorist. We are admonished not to “keep on” judging or putting down one another. That is not our assignment.

13-16 – Boasting about plans for the future has no place in a life of trust. Everything must be subject to revision at the Lord's behest. It could not be more clear. Bragging is evil, referring back to the earlier part of the chapter, because of its self-centered focus.

17 – We are held responsible for what we *know* – to do good. It is probably the source of the goal :

“to do all the good we can – to all the people we can – on every occasion we can – in every way we can.”

Amen!

JAMES 5

1-6 This is a definitive refutation of the false teaching of the so-called “prosperity gospel.”

Tarnish on metals and insect damage to clothing both occur from lack of use.

4 – That the wealth was obtained by oppression compounds the offense.

5 – Self-centeredness, again, equates with irresponsibility. Both the acquisition and use of resources must be subject to scrutiny.

7-8 – Here the word for “patience” is *makrothumeo*, which seems strange in a way. However, no oppression is in view, to require *hupomoneo*. Both appear later in the passage (11).

9 – Complaining against one another, paired with waiting for a harvest? Perhaps issues of immaturity are in view here.

10 – Follow the example of faithful people.

12 – Taking an oath is flatly forbidden, as it was by Jesus (Mt.5:34), but absolute integrity is required at all times.

A quick listing of how to deal with various situations:

13 – unjust suffering – with prayer; rejoicing – singing praise; 14 – weakness or sickness – calling for prayer by the elders;

15-16 – failures and weaknesses – confess *to each other*, for prayer. This is not a ceremony, but mutual support.

17-18 – Elijah is cited as an example of answered prayer. Note that he is specifically described as an ordinary man “natured like us”.

19-20 – Mutual responsibility is the only way to keep faithful. This, again, is addressed to the brothers, not to officials.

PETER

Peter learned a lot of things the hard way. From the time when his brother Andrew introduced him to Jesus (Jn.1:40), he had been on a roller-coaster ride. The initial nicknaming by Jesus was more of a prophecy than a description of reality. Impulsive, but intensely loyal, he was inclined to “talk first and think later”, as in the Transfiguration scene (Mk.9:5-7). Having grabbed on to the revelation of Jesus' true identity at Caesarea Philippi (Mt.16:15-20), and been commended for it, he immediately demonstrated that he didn't really understand (21-23), and Jesus didn't mince words there, either. Perhaps it required his denial of association with Jesus, recorded in all four accounts, to jolt him out of his self-confident attitude. His transformation at Pentecost (Ac.2), is a classic example, both of the difference made by the power of the Spirit, turning a frightened partisan into a bold advocate of the way of Jesus, and shortly thereafter a person concerned for his own “glory” into one who refers all credit to Jesus (Ac.3:12-18). Even the gift of the Holy Spirit did not produce the “instant perfection” touted by some: witness the compromising situation Paul describes in Gal. 2:11-14. But he did learn.

It is generally assumed that these letters were written near the end of Peter's life (at least by those who admit the possibility of Peter's authorship), possibly even from his final imprisonment in Rome. Although there are those who insist that at least the second letter, and perhaps both, were written after the time of Peter's execution, the arguments are mainly from the style and content of the writing, ignoring the fact that in every age of persecution, there is a focus on the Lord's return. I see no reason to assume other authorship. The letters reflect a life of persistent faithfulness, despite occasional screw-ups, and should be read with the context of Peter's long experience in mind. He represents himself as a “fellow-elder” (5:1), having learned well Jesus' prohibition of pulling rank. He writes to the scattered *parepidemois* which, due to the context of persecution, I have rendered “refugees” rather than simply “immigrants”, in the churches of Asia (now Turkey).

I PETER 1

1-2 The recipients of the letter are scattered, persecuted believers. Peter stresses the fact of their having been chosen by God *for the purpose of* (*eis*) both obedience and cleansing. The order is interesting. But Peter knows very well that even the committed need an occasional clean-up. He speaks of God's *prognosis* (fore-knowledge) – *not* manipulation. Note that the transliteration, “prognosis”, is now a medical term for an “educated guess” at the outcome of an illness.

3-4 – Peter connects the “new birth” with Jesus' resurrection, and the inheritance he has graciously made available: one that cannot be destroyed, as the earthly possessions of the refugees have been.

5 – Peter doesn't say *whose* faithfulness is in view here – probably it is mutually theirs/ours and God's. It is this faithfulness that enables the realization of the protective power of God.

6-7 – This is also the grounds for celebration, despite the present distress (*peirasmos* again). This is a two-pronged word. (See Word Study #11.) It is our *response* to these hassles that provides evidence (*dokimon*) of one's faithfulness. They don't *create* or produce it – they *reveal* it. Compare James 1:2-4 and 12-14. The word consistently refers more to “testing” than to the more common assumption of “attempted seduction”, which L/S presents as only a minor variant.

8-9 These readers are people who were not personally acquainted with Jesus when he was in Palestine – yet the verbs are all *present* tenses. They refer to the love, the faithfulness, and the celebration that must continually characterize the beleaguered brotherhoods. Notice also that they are all *plurals*. This is *only* possible in the context of a committed group. The outcome (9) is also a situation of mutuality.

10-12 Peter reminds them of their position of privilege. Through the ages, the prophets had tried in vain to figure this out. The import of it all has now been revealed through the Holy Spirit. “Messengers” (*angeloi*) in v.12 may refer back to the ancient prophets mentioned earlier in the paragraph; or the reference may be more generally to all who have gone before.

It is in the context of this extraordinary privilege that the following instructions are offered. Much of the rest of the letter is devoted to describing the way of life that should result, in *response* to the enormity of that privilege.

13 – The perfect combination: get one's mind ready for work (“gird up the loins” refers to the practice of gathering up a flowing robe and securing it in order to enable physical exertion), and setting one's hope/confidence entirely upon grace. Either one alone is an exercise in futility.

14 – The reference to being “obedient children” refers back to the birth mentioned in v.3. A *changed life* is expected to result. Children are to pattern themselves after their Father (15-17). And they *will*.

18-21 The ancient animal sacrifices served only to picture the final gift of the life of Christ. None of it made any sense until the resurrection, which *enabled* human identification with God. It is only through Jesus that people are able to become faithful to God (*di' autou*).

22 – In the same way, it is “obedience to the truth (Jesus)” that eventually results in the purification of our lives. This is a perfect tense: a situation that began in the past, but continues in the present. And love can *only* grow among a brotherhood in that context. *Philadelphian* is noted as the goal (it is the object of *eis*, but the imperative *agapesate* is aorist. The level of “love” needs to be elevated – by deliberate effort.

23-25 A reminder that this is a *new* life we are learning. The old ways no longer serve. And the only reliable guide for the new, is the Word of God.

I PETER 2

“*Therefore*” -- Again, the instructions involve the appropriate *response* to what God has done. Peter is not talking about *qualifications* to be met, but about the *results* of having been given a new life.

1 – It is necessary to “shovel out the garbage” in order to make room for the new life.

2-4 – This new life must be nourished from the source of its gift. (2) It is necessary to “grow up” into the deliverance (“salvation”) that has been provided. Sort of like a parent choosing clothing that the kids need to “grow into”. (3) A taste of the quality of that new life creates an insatiable appetite! (4) Even Jesus' value was discounted by his world – we ought not expect a better reception!

5-8 The figure of a building is frequent in reference to the church – but it is *not* talking about real estate! His people themselves are the stones with which it is built. (5) *Oikodomeisthe* is a present passive imperative. The building project is an ongoing affair – and we are *not* the builders! The Lord is! We are only the building *materials*! All the hype about people or groups “building churches” is *directly contrary to the Biblical mandate*. We are to *be built* – a very different situation. At the same time, we are to become (*eis* again) the “spiritual priesthood” of that building. How, then, can anyone still advocate a human hierarchy? All the “you’s” are *plural*. They refer to *all* the faithful!

6-7 Jesus is the keystone that holds up the arch. *Akrogoniaion* has been (mis)translated “cornerstone” because of the use of *gonia* (corner, or knee), without regard to the prefix *akro--* (“high”), which denotes the “top” (reference the hilltop setting of an “acropolis”). Therefore, the “head of the corner” *has* to refer to the keystone of an arch, without which the whole thing collapses. Those who called themselves “builders”, baffled by its irregular shape, hadn't a clue what to do with it. The Master Builder does not delegate his authority! (8) The “disobedient” here may even refer to these unauthorized “builders of churches” who claim ability and authority that belongs only to Jesus' Holy Spirit! ***Taking over the job of building is disobedience!!!*** And consequently, they *proskoptousin* (literally, “fell over”) the true Word! Another offering in Liddell/Scott is “take offense at.” They reject the Word that forbids their self-aggrandizement.

9-12 BUT – transitions to the true calling of every faithful person or group. “*Humeis de*” -- *But you all --!* Refer to the address of the letter: not to officials, but to refugees! It is they who are designated “a chosen generation” (by birth), “a royal priesthood” (by assignment), “a holy nation” (the Kingdom of Jesus), all for a single purpose: emphatic, because both *eis* and *hopos* are used together – to spread the message of how excellent Jesus is!

Although he has called us “*out of darkness into his incredible light*”, so many self-styled “builders of the church” talk much more about the darkness than the light! This is just another piece of evidence of their abandonment of the Truth!

We who were not “a people” at all – just isolated individuals – have been re-created into the people of God – citizens of his Kingdom! There's no mercy where we came from, but among his people it is experienced. We should not even need the warning not to become acculturated again to the world. We have “been there, done that,” and experienced its futility. That's not who we *are*. **There has to be an observable difference**, in order to attract the detractors to the glory of God!

13-16 The transfer of primary citizenship is not a license to ignore legitimate worldly authority. Exemplary behavior is essential to faithful witness. “Freedom” is for the doing of what is *right*. The choice of verbs in v.17 is significant. “Honor” is to be the attitude toward *everyone* (*pantas*) – and toward the king! “Love” (*agapate*) is toward the brotherhood (very interestingly, the accusative object is of the feminine form). “Respect” (*phobeisthe*) is toward God. The form of *timao* changes – the first (toward everyone) is aorist imperative, and the second (toward the king) is present imperative. That probably has implications, but I'm not sure what they are. *Phobeomai* is problematic. It is commonly used of great fright, but also of awed respect. The noun form indicates reverence more often than the verb. There is no linguistic or grammatical way to tell which is intended. However, having devoted the rest of his letter to the graciousness and provision of God, I cannot imagine that Peter is telling folks to be terrified of him. More likely, in the context, is the contrast: the king is to be honored like everyone else (not scorned because of our new status and freedom); God alone merits reverence and respect. However, I recognize that is a judgment call.

18 – Household servants (*oiketai*) are NOT slaves (*douloi*). What sort of servitude is intended would have been clear to the recipients of the letter, but is pure speculation from this distance. It does not appear to be voluntary, however, since he speaks of “unjust suffering” (19). Peter's caution is **to make sure that no suffering is justified because of bad behavior** (20).

21-24 Peter reminds us that the ultimate unfair suffering was what Jesus endured, and he is to be our example, as well as our liberator. This section is rendered in verse form in the Nestle text, reflecting someone's judgment that it may have been a hymn or a "confession". A large number of parallels are noted, in both the gospels and the writings of Paul, but whether it is simply a compilation of evidence concerning the attitudes of Jesus toward his own suffering and its results, or something more formal, is a matter of conjecture.

25 constitutes a return to the theme of a transformed life.

I PETER 3

1-7 Family relationships. Like Paul, Peter is careful to advocate mutuality between husbands and wives. 2-3 External decoration is totally beside the point, and is not to be relied upon. The conclusion of v.7 is critical: to recognize that both are "heirs together of the gracious gift of life," and that failure to live in this recognition is injurious to one's prayers. The "your" is plural.

The assumption seems to be that these wives were converted first, and so responsible to aid the conversion of their husbands. This is likely a big factor in the tenor of the instructions.

8-12 is addressed to "all of you". Compassion, sympathy, and love are to be in the context of *tapeinophrones* – very badly translated "humility" as if it were a groveling sort of attitude, but more accurately rendered as a leveling, or sense of equality (see *Citizens of the Kingdom*, chapter 5.)

10 – more warning against deceit of any kind. Only when this is abandoned can one truly work for peace. (13) Peter admits that this can backfire, even though it shouldn't. (14) Don't let unjust suffering cause you to become intimidated.

15-16 This is another piece usually quoted completely out of context. The believer's response to unjust treatment is expected to prompt a demand for an explanation. The response must also be in character. Notice that this is bracketed by references to persecution resulting from one's obedience. It has *absolutely nothing* to do with a planned verbal attack on a non-believer.

17 – Note that this does *not* characterize suffering as *caused* by "God's will". Suffering will happen. God's will is that any suffering be the result of doing good, not evil. 18 – It was the wrongs of others that caused Jesus' suffering – his innocence is attested by his resurrection.

19-20 has generated a lot of speculation, but I don't think anyone knows what really happened.

20-22 identifies baptism with the resurrection, and Jesus' eventual triumph. Paul has used this figure also, in Romans 6 and elsewhere. The connection with the flood seems rather remote. In any case, Peter takes pains to note that it is not the physical action of baptism/water that accomplishes anything, but rather the obedience involved, and the identification with Jesus, in whose glory we are expected to share.

I PETER 4

1-5 Jesus' experience is presented as evidence that unjust suffering is not an excuse to quit, or to abandon the life to which he has called us. Once a person has faced the world's rejection, it matters less. Those who disparage good behavior will be called to account – eventually.

6 probably refers back to 3:19-20.

7-11 Love and hospitality should be enhanced by the expectation of the Lord's return. "Be sensible" is an interesting part of that. Extremism of any kind is unworthy of those who have that confident hope. No occurrence on the world scene is going to usher in the "end" -- that is in the hands of our King! In this context, it is well to remember (10-11) that spiritual gifts are given for the purpose of *serving one another* – they are God's gracious provision for the needs of his people. When something is needed, God has taken upon himself the responsibility to provide it – naturally if possible, supernaturally if necessary. In either case, the purpose is that God, through Jesus, will receive glory. This should enable us to live in quiet confidence.

12-19 Back to the persecution theme. If indeed Peter is writing while under sentence in Rome, it is no wonder he keeps coming back to this subject. All abuse is to be understood as "sharing in the sufferings of Christ". Again, he repeats, "Just make sure you don't deserve it." (12) "Don't be shocked!", or, as my friend Mary Jane used to say, "It's ONLY Biblical!" (13) Perhaps the more one is identified with Jesus, the more he will appreciate the contrast, at his coming. The reference to "judgment" in v.17 is not specifically defined. The word has no prefix, so it does not automatically imply condemnation. It may refer to the same discipline in the Body of which Paul often speaks. But if it extends also to those who have rejected the gospel (18), it must be more than that. Whatever it is, it has already begun.

19 is another place where the lack of punctuation in the manuscripts causes uncertainty in translation. "According to the will of God", grammatically, could go equally well with "suffering" or with "entrust themselves to the Creator." The former understanding would imply causation of the "suffering". The latter relates the will of God to the faithful person's *response*.

I choose the latter option, because of other statements in Scripture, such as James 1:13 and elsewhere. However, I recognize that this is a judgment-call, and therefore open to challenge.

I PETER 5

1 – Peter represents himself as one of the group – a “fellow-elder”, a witness, and a participant. He claims no “points” above anyone else, although he is a first-hand witness. He encourages the other elders as one of their number, to “gently lead God's flock” (2), and forbids both force and profit. They are to lead by example, not by giving orders (3). ***Nobody on earth is the “Chief Shepherd”!*** (4). Although younger members are to be subject to the elders (5), ALL are to reject any and all pretensions to status. How sadly, and with what tragic destruction to the Body, has this principle been neglected!! Both here and in v.6, forms of *tapeinoo* appear. Please refer to the discussion at 3:8-12, and in chapter 5 of *Citizens of the Kingdom*. ***The only “lifting up” is to be done by God's hand, at his initiative!***

This may be one of the most encouraging statements in all of Scripture (7) -- “You all **matter** to him!”

A truly audacious thought!

8-9 We must do our part, in watchfulness and obedience, confident that God will do his. Stubbornness in this case is not a bad thing! It may even be God-given! So is eventual vindication (10).

12-13 Silas/Sylvanus probably acted as Peter's scribe. Some interpret Ac.4:13 as evidence that Peter may have even been illiterate. I do not think that is a necessary conclusion, but it is possible. In any case, he likely needed help, given the abysmal conditions of Roman prisons.

The greeting from Mark is evidence that the men were close. Some think that Peter may have been the primary source of Mark's gospel.

“Babylon” was used to refer, at different times, to both Rome and Jerusalem, as well as, occasionally, the original city of that name. Most people choose Rome in this context.

II PETER 1

1-2 This letter is more general in its address than Peter's first one. Here, he refers to himself as a *doulos*– slave – as well as *apostolos* – one sent out. Maybe he was feeling more that way, by this time! Since there is only one *hemon* the implication is that it refers to all the rest of the phrase, speaking of “our God and deliverer, Jesus Christ.” *Kouriou* (Lord) is added in some manuscripts. V.2 is more ambiguous in its structure. Some manuscripts add *soterios* and *Christos* here as well as in v.1.

Peter's theme here is the exceeding value of the life God has given to his people. 3-4 continues in that vein. *Everything* needful has been supplied, and still more is promised – the privilege to share in God's own nature. Significantly, the participle is present: “while you *keep on fleeing*” the corruption of your surroundings. The promise is **conditional** upon sustained effort and faithfulness. This provides the basis for the following admonition (5). Only by acquiring and increasing these characteristics (6-7) is it possible to avoid falling into the trap of laziness in faithfulness (8). In continually working at the effort, there is safety. The *order* of the characteristics to be sought is significant. “Moral excellence” (*aretē*) follows immediately after “faithfulness.” This should put to rest any suggestion that the two concepts are not related! Only after that is established does he turn to “knowledge” (*gnosis*). No one is saying that any of these are inferior or unnecessary – but the priority is critical to the good name of the faith!

The rest of the items on the list are represented as *included in (en)* “knowledge.” It is not unlike those little sets of dolls that fit one inside the other. Self-control, endurance (the “patience” of the underdog), and godliness are usually not thought-of in that context. Indeed, those who profess “knowledge” often project an arrogance that leaves no room for those attributes. It is therefore necessary that they be considered *integral to* “knowledge” if it is to function as intended. Likewise, there is no true “godliness” that does not include brotherliness and love!

9-11 re-runs that reasoning. Rejecting these principles is evidence of willful blindness. But (10) “if you *keep on concentrating* on this, you will not trip up.” It is the only way to be part of the Kingdom.

12-15 Peter is well aware that his time is short, and he wants to be sure that this essential element of his message is remembered. He does not question the loyalty of his readers, he just wants to leave them a tangible record. 16-18 He notes that he is not following somebody else's wacky ideas, but reviewing his own personal observations and experience.

19 – Prophecy, when genuine, is even more reliable than personal experience! 20-21 As such, it is not subject to private interpretation, but must be handled reverently and with respect. This is in harmony with Paul's instructions (I Cor.14) regarding the careful evaluation of prophecy.

II PETER 2

1-3 False prophets can be readily recognized by their behavior. This should be obvious. All the faithful need to avoid bringing disrepute on the “Way of Truth.” False prophets, on the other hand, will take advantage of the faithful, with deliberate deception. Beware of any who refuse to consider correction!

4-9 A historical review. God has never had a problem in sorting out the unfaithful messengers, or reinforcing the faithful.

10-11 – God’s people do not need to waste their energy trying to judge or control such people. Again, *behavior* is the key to knowing to whom to listen.

12 These types will eventually ruin themselves (but sometimes it takes a long time!)

13-16 The pretense of these impostors extends to taking advantage of the hospitality incumbent upon the faithful. Their licentious behavior is contagious. Corruption and adultery are rampant.

17-22 This is “free from the law” carried to the extreme. These false teachers encourage others to continue in their same depraved behavior, which compounds the condemnation.

20-22 The danger of returning to the world’s ways after having become acquainted with the “way of justice” is real. It is a solemn thing to realize that they would have been better off, had they never heard.

These warnings would not exist, if the notion that a single (often coerced) commitment can never be revoked, were valid. Might not the advocacy of such an idea place people in exactly the position of the false prophets that Peter is describing? Commitment to faithful obedience must be continually cultivated and increased.

II PETER 3

1-7 These particular false prophets seem to have bolstered their case by making derogatory reference to the promise of the Lord’s return that has not yet come to pass. Notice that here, too, the *way of life* (3) of these prophets should have been a clue to their falsehood.

8-9 Peter reminds us that time is not “of the essence of this contract”! Delay is evidence of graciousness on God’s part.

V.9 should put to rest the unfounded assumption that it is “God’s will” that some be “lost”. “He doesn’t plan for *anyone* to be destroyed”!

10-12 Remember that the things the world values so highly will not last. Manuscripts vary in the word used at the end of v.10. The Nestle text uses *eurethesatai* -- future passive of “to be found out”. Others have *katakaesetai*– also future passive, “to be completely consumed by fire”; *aphanisthesontai* – future passive, “cause to disappear”; *ruesatai* -- future passive, “to be rescued” (!), among others. Perhaps the message is that we will NOT know in advance what is going to happen!

12-13 The lives of people will reveal where their trust lies. “New heavens and a new earth” will be a *permanent* residence (*katoike*) for justice. No more transient *sknazo*.

14 All this is to be viewed as an incentive to faithful behavior. NOT as a threat.

16 This is amusing. Even Peter found Paul hard to figure out at times. Nevertheless, he refers to him as “our dear brother.” He also refers to Paul’s writings along with “the rest of the Scriptures”. *Graphe* may refer to *any* “writings”, but is also used of writings that have a sacred status. There is no modifier, so one cannot be adamant about the reference. However, the warning about these writings being distorted by deceptive teachers would point one in the direction of an assumption of authority.

Perhaps more important is the warning regarding those who are “untaught” (*amatheis*) wrongly handling the teachings. If anyone presumes to teach, **it should be incumbent upon him/her to put forth the effort to learn rightly to handle the text.** This has far too often been neglected!

17-18 The antidote to deception is to keep on growing in faithfulness, focused on the glory of Jesus! One must guard against the excesses of the undisciplined, but increasing acquaintance with Jesus is the greater need. Devotion to his glory is the ultimate safety.

JOHN'S LETTERS

For treatment of the question of authorship, see the introduction to the gospel that bears John's name. The letters are similarly dated. There is some controversy over the latter two, by people who make a big deal over titles and positions, since he there refers to himself as “the elder” as opposed to “the apostle” -- However, that holds little water, since Peter did the same thing. There is no real reason to believe the author to have been other than the same “John” who wrote the gospel account.

According to tradition, John, at some time after the resurrection, made his home in Ephesus, and took along with him Jesus' mother, Mary, whom Jesus had committed to his care. There remain sites in Ephesus connected to each, by local tradition.

John is not mentioned frequently in Acts. A “John” appears with Peter in the incident of healing at the temple (Ac.3 and 4), and again in chapter 8, when the same pair went to check up on Philip's converts in Samaria. After that, he pretty well drops out of sight in Luke's accounts. We know that many of the early group were scattered after Stephen's martyrdom, and also later by several subsequent periods of persecution.

Ephesus would have been a reasonable home base for him, given the seven-church circle to which he addressed his account of the Revelation given to him while in exile. No viable theories have been advanced as to where he was when these letters were written, or the location of the recipients. They certainly could have been written from Ephesus to people in one of the circuit churches, or even from his exile on Patmos in an attempt to keep up with the folks at home.

The love of an old man for the Lord and his people is supremely evident. That is its own authentication.

I JOHN 1

1-4 John is writing about someone/something he knows extremely well. He speaks of having seen – heard – touched. This is *real*. At the same time, it is transcendent. He (Jesus) has existed from the beginning. He was *revealed* – not just encountered. John's sharing of this experience is in order to include his readers in the incredible community of people joined to the Father and the Son. This purpose is reminiscent of his statement of the purpose he declared for the writing of the gospel account (Jn. 20:31), and serves as additional evidence that they were the product of the same writer.

5-6 “Partnership” (*koinonia*) with Jesus is a relationship that requires the absolute absence of anything connected to darkness. We can only share in his Light. Life must reflect that light – it is not any sort of verbal assent to propositions. The end of v.6 emphasizes that “truth” is something you *do* (*poioumen*), not what you *say*. John is quite blunt about this: if one's life does not reflect the Light/Truth of Jesus, he is lying.

7-9 Nevertheless, we are all a work in progress, learning to “walk”/live in the Light. If we stay there, we can experience the needed cleansing, and the *removal* (*aphe*) of failures, creating a life of justice. (10) This is quite straightforward: we all have a ways to go to become what he intends.

However, it is a far cry from the “dirty-rotten-sinner” syndrome, or the “such a worm as I” crowd. The verbs are a whole string of present tenses. The message is entirely *process* oriented, a lot like a child learning to walk. The consistent use of *hamartia/hamartano* as opposed to *paraptoma* make it clear that he is **referring to failure to meet a standard or goal, not deliberate transgression..** The latter concept does not appear at all. John is writing to help the children of the Kingdom learn to walk!

I JOHN 2

1-2 The theme continues here. The goal is to learn to walk, and no longer to fall. We have a patient teacher, who understands and provides the remedy for our failure.

3-6 Following his instructions is the ultimate evidence of acquaintance with Jesus – it is attested by behavior modeled after his! 7-8 This is nothing innovative. It comes straight from Jesus. The “new” command is simply to pay attention to the original!

9-11 Love among the brotherhood is evidence of light. Hatred, on the other hand, constitutes willful blindness, and thereby envelops the hater in darkness.

12-14 John acknowledges his readers as faithful brethren: he is not writing because they have been unfaithful. He compliments their progress, *at all stages of maturity*.

15-16 Although both use the same *agapao*, clearly John has something different in mind from when he wrote of God's love for the world (Jn. 3:16). The former is aorist in form, and this is present; I am not clear about the implication of the change. The prohibition here is obviously regarding the continual focus of one's affection.

18-20 speaks of people who have deliberately deserted the brotherhood and set themselves as opponents. John assumes

that “knowing the truth” enables the group to recognize those opponents as false.

22-23 This may refer to the influence of Gnosticism or Docetism, both of which denied that Jesus was the chosen Son of God. You simply can't have it both ways. These heretical teachers were trying to conform the Christian message to local beliefs, considering the created world to be evil, and denying God's presence in Jesus.

24-25 Revisionism is not acceptable, in *any* culture or age. **True faithfulness critiques every culture**, not vice-versa. It is the promise of *Jesus* that results in “eternal life”.

26-29 The “anointing” (Holy Spirit) **among the group** (all the references are plural), is the safeguard against error. Jesus himself is the only worthy standard. He *defines* just living. Maintaining close connection with him assures our confidence.

I JOHN 3

1-- Notice the use of *tekna* (children) here, rather than *huioi*. John's emphasis here is on the mutual love of father and children, not specifically on the right to inheritance that required *huioi* (sons) in other discussions.

1-3 The fact that we belong to him, simply because of his love, is the motivation for our efforts to become like him, as a child copies the father that he loves. 4-8 The test is, whom do we copy? It couldn't be simpler.

Behavior (7) is still the key.

V.8 should lay to rest the “fallen angel” mythology about the devil. He has been “messed up” *from the beginning*. And add this to the list of the reasons for Jesus' coming : “to *destroy* his activity!”

9-10 This is not “instant perfection.” It is direction toward maturity. Note that the tenses are all present. Children are identified by family resemblance. Justice and love are the defining traits.

11-15 Evil will always hate good. That should come as no surprise. It also identifies the players.

16-18 Jesus' self-giving is to be the model for his followers. It is intensely *practical*. If we have the means to meet a need, then it is our responsibility to the brethren. I think it is to the rest of the world as well, but the focus here is on the brotherhood. See also Jas.2:15-16.

18-19 Theory doesn't cut it. Practicality does. 20-21 Confidence in God trumps a guilt complex. That the Lord knows everything is a source of *encouragement*, not threat!

22 – ok, I have a problem with this one. Trying to follow instructions has not always worked out this way. More light, please!

23-24 Mutual love, and faithfully following instructions, indicate the presence of the Holy Spirit. And that presence in turn breeds confidence.

I JOHN 4

1-3 Not everything “spiritual” comes from God! Discernment is as desperately needed now as in the first century. There is only one infallible test: the acknowledgment of Jesus. He is a real person, and he is God. **Anything else** is “anti-Christ” -- any spirit that denies him. There are lots of them. This statement is *present*, not future.

4-6 Any advocates of the world's perspective fall into this category. It is a matter of one's allegiance. This is a severe threat in any age or culture. Notice the plurals. It requires shared discernment to sort out truth from deception.

7-9 Love is the defining characteristic of those who belong to God, because Jesus is their example. We would have no life if it were not for him.

10-15 Love like this *has* to overflow into mutuality. Our union with him is confirmed by his gift of the Holy Spirit, acknowledged by our testimony to Jesus, and evidenced by faithfulness to him, and emulation of his love.

16-17 If we are “remaining” (living) in God and his love, our own love can become mature, resulting in total confidence. It is essential to recognize *teteleiotai* as referring to *maturity* or *completion*, and not the English understanding of “perfection” that grew out of earlier translations.

“Judgment”, in the context of that maturity, is nothing to be feared by the person consumed by the love of Jesus. It is rather to be *anticipated*, because it will be ultimately just. (18) Fear is reserved for people who have been trying to get away with something; to take advantage or to oppress someone.

19 People trying to follow Jesus' example of love will be obvious to all.

20-21 refers back to 3:16-18. Treatment of one's brother reveals the amount of love he has for God.

I JOHN 5

1-4 Just in case we missed the point, John re-runs it again. It's all tied up together: love of the brethren, love of God, following instructions. They are part and parcel of each other, and **none exists independent of the rest**.

His instructions are a *gift*, not a burden.

4-5 Trusting Jesus/God is the means for victory over the world. This is part of the description of the *ho pisteuon* with which the passage begins. Remember that *pisteuo* has nothing to do with the intellectual exercise commonly understood as “believing.” It is a very practical word, incorporating such concepts as loyalty, trust, honesty, and faithfulness

6-8 I'm sure that this was clear to the first readers, and just as sure that the theological gymnastics of modern writers *don't* understand it. Neither do I. (The difference is, I don't pretend to!)

9-12 But this much is clear: Life is in Jesus! and faithfulness/loyalty to him is the key to certainty about who he is.

13 -- “Eternal life” is *present tense*!

14-15 Refer to 3:22.

16-17 Our responsibility to pray for a wandering brother is clear. Apparently, there is a time to give it up. I am not sure about that. It would require extraordinary discernment to say with confidence that a person had definitively “chosen death.” I think the focus rather is upon helping one another to overcome the human failings that mar our devotion to God and to each other.

18-20 Whether v.18 refers to the careful discipline in a faithful brotherhood or the care with which a faithful disciple governs his own life (or both), I am not sure. However, the rest of the closing paragraph is addressed in the plural, and again urges mutuality in our efforts at faithfulness.

Our whole existence is in Jesus! “He *is* the genuine God, and eternal life”!

That is enough.

21 This too is a mutual responsibility: avoidance of *any kind* of idolatry. We do not take this as seriously as we should.

II JOHN

It is not known whether this letter is written to an actual woman and her family, or it is using a “coded” address to a church and its congregation. During times of severe persecution, the feminine noun *ekkllesia* lent itself well to personification. In either case, John's intent is to encourage them in mutual love and faithfulness, in the face of prevalent deceptive teachings – probably the same type as those referenced in his first letter.

1-3 The source of the deep love in the brotherhood is their having come together in recognition of the truth of Jesus' identification with God.

4-6 John compliments the faithfulness of “your children” -- actual offspring or congregational members – and urges that loving obedience continue to characterize their life.

7-8 He warns against the teaching that would deny the real humanity (and by implication, the source of their faith) of Jesus. Succumbing to such deception is a serious danger.

9-11 This paragraph leans toward the idea of the recipient being a church group, but could also apply on a personal level. No one who advocates contrary teaching should even be offered traditional hospitality. This is serious, in a culture where taking in a stranger, even an enemy, and protecting him, is obligatory.

Recognition of this cultural background highlights the seriousness with which false teaching is viewed. “Not even to greet him” -- remember, the standard greeting extended “peace” to the one greeted.

12-13 Probably John is not in prison or exile at this time, since he seems to be free to travel.

“Your chosen sister”, in the context, is probably another congregation.

III JOHN

Gaius was a common name. The people with that name mentioned elsewhere are in Macedonia (Ac.19:29), Derbe (Ac.20:24), Corinth (I Cor.14), and wherever Romans was written from (Rom.16:23), where he is identified as Paul's host. The recipient of John's letter could be any of these, or someone entirely different. I lean toward the one mentioned in Romans, since his hospitality is mentioned here too, although remember that it was mandatory in the culture. The reference to “my children” hints that he may have been a convert of John's, but the elderly apostle may also view all his younger brethren that way.

1-4 John takes great comfort in the good reports he has heard about Gaius' conduct. The faithfulness of one's children, whether actual or spiritual, is a wonderful thing, and even more so as one ages.

5-8 John has apparently heard of Gaius from some itinerant representatives of the church. He notes that these folks had accepted no support from outsiders. They were not fishing for wealth – and therefore were worthy of support from those who share their commitment. John appears to be as concerned as Paul that the work of the Gospel not be sullied by profit motives. **IT IS NOT A CAREER CHOICE!!!!**

9-10 Diotrephes, mentioned only here, viewing his leadership as a position of power, refused to receive other brethren, and expelled those who did welcome them. Autocratic domination has *no place* in a faithful brotherhood!

11-12 Demetrius, on the other hand, is commended for his faithfulness. These two are held up as a contrast.

13-15 The final greetings are much the same as in the second letter. Some manuscripts substitute “brothers” for “friends.”

JUDE

“Judas,” “Juda,” and “Jude” are all renderings of the same name, *Ioudas* which was transliterated from the Old Testament “Judah.” As with many of the other names, the reference is murky. It's easy, of course, to rule out the primary usage, as Judas Iscariot died shortly before or after Jesus. Matthew lists “James, Joses, and Judas” as (half)brothers of Jesus (13:55). This writer identifies himself as “the brother of James”, as Luke does one disciple in Ac.1:13. In John's gospel (14:22), he specifies a “Judas, not Iscariot” as one of the twelve, which has led to a traditional identification with the Thaddeus of Matthew and Mark. Acts refers to a Judas with whom Paul stayed in Damascus immediately after his conversion, and also a prophet associated with Silas, who was sent to Antioch after the Jerusalem Conference. Where any overlap may have been, is a matter of conjecture.

There is discussion as to whether this letter was addressed to a second-generation church – which is possible – but the errors addressed arose early in the history of the Christian movement, and that identification is not definitive. The reference to the apocryphal book of Enoch also has pushed some to a later date; however, the LXX was common in both Jewish and Gentile circles for centuries before the birth of Jesus. Dates have been suggested from AD 70 all the way into the second century.

1-2 The letter is quite generally addressed, specifying no location for either end of the correspondence. It sounds (3) like he started out to write general encouragement, but then realized the necessity of combating a prevalent error. This is not the denial of Jesus with which John was concerned, but more along the lines of Peter's second letter: “teachers” who interpreted “grace” as “anything goes” (4). He points out that **licentious behavior constitutes a denial of Jesus Christ.**

5-11 There follows a catalog of examples of people's turning away from faithfulness to destruction. V.9 refers to an apocryphal account, “The Assumption of Moses”. V.11 refers to Cain in Genesis 4, Balaam in Deuteronomy 23, and Korah in Numbers 16. It would be possible to see each of these as an effort at self-promotion. They are offered as illustrations of people “speaking evil of things they know nothing about (10).

12-13 Those who advocate such behavior are to be excluded from fellowship. The indictment is scathing. Utter worthlessness is the picture. These are people who have chosen their own way, and ignored sober counsel, but still hung around, corrupting the brotherhood.

14-15 is a quote from the apocryphal book of Enoch, descriptive of similar behavior, and its end result.

16 Self-centeredness indulged to the extreme reveals the deeper diagnosis: “Flattering people's vanity for their own profit.” Nearly every New Testament writer comes back to this concern. How can those who pride themselves on their “literalism” so universally ignore the prohibitions of profit? In every case, the seeking or accumulating of profit places the perpetrators on the wrong side!

17-21 Ample warning has been given, ever since the beginning. The only remedy is constant focus on faithfulness, prayer in the Spirit, and the love of God.

22-23 “Some” can be rescued – apparently not all. But we need to try.

24-25 Jesus is the only one who can keep us safe from these inroads. His is the glory, majesty, authority, and power – always. This must be the constant focus of our attention.

THE REVELATION

Far too many people have undertaken to interpret this work as a “roadmap” for the “end times.” It does indeed look forward to the Lord's coming, when everything will be sorted out according to *both* his justice and his mercy. But several things must be borne in mind as the subject is approached:

The writing is addressed to *believers*/churches, **not** to people outside. It is written for their encouragement and correction, not as a tool of the threat that is commonly (mis)labeled “evangelism.”

It is written during a time of intense persecution.

John himself is in exile (1:9), although he gives no details regarding his circumstances. In fact, even the assumption of exile stems from tradition. He himself does not come right out and say why he was on Patmos, except that it was “because of God's word and the testimony of Jesus.”

There is strong tradition that the emperor Domitian exiled John from Ephesus sometime between AD81 and 96, the charge being John's insistence that Jesus alone deserved the title “Lord and God” which the emperor's decree had applied to himself. It is known that the island, in and around the first century, was desolate, in contrast to earlier centuries, when it had been a thriving center of the worship of Artemis and Apollo. In the first century, however, it was indeed used as a place of confinement by Rome.

Hence, the central argument of the narrative is reduced to evidence on a single question: “Who is in charge?” And the answer rings clearly across the centuries: “The kingdom of the world *has become* the Kingdom of our God, and of his Christ!” And the day *will come*, when that will be clear to all.

REVELATION 1

1-3 The source of this message is Jesus Christ. It was communicated by a messenger (*angelos*) – note that he does not specify if that messenger was natural or supernatural – to John, who has recorded what he saw and heard. Responsibility is now in the hands of those who read and listen. This seems to assume a public reading of the message.

4-6 The address and greeting is loaded with testimony to the supremacy of Jesus.

(4) A great many more than seven churches had been founded by the ministry of Paul and others in the province of Asia. Is this all that had survived the years of persecution? Or are they merely the ones with which John had the closest contact, or perhaps some kind of oversight? Any answer is speculative.

A huge amount of speculation also surrounds the use of various numbers. In this case, the “seven spirits” before the throne may have some connection with the churches, as later in the chapter (19, 20), or may have some reference to the traditional assumption of the number seven being connected to God.

(5) Notice the titles ascribed to Jesus: “the faithful witness” – that's what landed John in custody; the “firstborn from the dead” -- promise of resurrection for the persecuted; “ruler of the kings of the earth” -- he has not acceded to Domitian's demand for supremacy.

(6) We belong to a different kingdom – one composed *entirely* of “priests to God!” Membership in this kingdom is solely the result of the love and provision of Jesus (5). Notice also that the reference to that love (*agaponti*) is a *present* participle. It is continuous.

7-8 This may be a snippet of a hymn of praise. Or that may be confined to v.7, with v.8 beginning a quotation from the Lord himself. In either case, there is no question about “Who's in charge here?”

9-11 Here John gives a brief introduction to the circumstances of his vision. He does not claim any merit or expertise of his own, but describes himself as “your brother and companion”, both in “the hassles” and in “the kingdom.” This is profound; indicating that at least as long as the late first century, the faithful brotherhood had not descended into a human hierarchy, although, as we have seen in several of the letters, there were already some who were trying to move that way.

10 – This may be the first recorded use of “the Lord's Day”. It is not explained, but long tradition links the term to celebration of the resurrection. “In the Spirit” probably refers to worship, although as far as we know, John was alone. He is specifically instructed to get the message to the churches listed. Ephesus, as well as being John's home, would have been the closest to Patmos, and the order would describe a roughly wedge-shaped circuit (more on each of these locations in turn.) 12-16 The description is of a rather fearsome apparition, until (17) the speaker proves himself to be Jesus, by his trademark “Don't be afraid – I AM!” Please see other notes on this in the Gospels, as the “burning bush” statement – also word Study #17.18 “Because he lives” -- everything is under control. That is often the *only* reason not to be afraid.

19 The content of the vision is *both* present and future. It's not always clearly sorted, either in the text or by its interpreters.

20 The lamps are the churches; their job is to *disperse* the light. They are not its *source*. The stars are their *messengers*.

Please see the treatment of *angelos* in *Citizens of the Kingdom*, chapter 13. Most important is the realization that the word refers to a *function* (delivering a message), and not to the status or natural/supernatural character of the *functionary*.

REVELATION 2

Ephesus was John's home. Paul's first visit there was not without controversy, and that condition never really changed. Please refer to the introductory material for the Ephesian letter.

1-3 The church is commended for its faithfulness, and for correctly recognizing and rejecting false teachers.

4-5 Nevertheless, love is lacking among them. It is not specified whether this refers to their love for the Lord, or for each other, but most places, the New Testament equates the two. There is no light to be radiated, if love is absent.

6 – I had a real wild-goose chase looking for information on the Nicolaitans, mentioned only here and in v.15. Irenaus, in the second century, refers to them as advocating promiscuity, but there are no New Testament specifics anywhere. Pagan overtones are probable, since that caused problems so many places, but we have no direct original information.

7 The promise “to the victor” may be a play on the label, which comes from *nike* – victory. There was also a goddess by that name. Etymologically, it could be a combination of the name of the goddess of victory, Nike, and *laos* “people”, and therefore could refer to a pagan cult. The reference to the tree of life may have some connection as well. Is there also a connection to groups that currently choose labels touting “Victory” and project the arrogance of “prosperity”?

Smyrna was a port city, north of Ephesus. It was reputedly founded by the Ionians before the classical era. The good-sized city of Izmir occupies the site today. It was one of the principal cities of Roman Asia, and earlier recognized as the birthplace of the poet Homer. After a period of decay, it was re-founded by Alexander the Great, and prospered under both Greek and Roman rule. Later, in the second century, Polycarp was martyred there.

8-10 refers to a period of intense persecution, perhaps both Jewish and Roman, but Jesus identifies himself with exactly the reassurance that such conditions require: “the one who was dead, but came to life.” Their suffering will be limited in duration; but even death is not the last word, because Jesus has the right to bestow life. Only Smyrna and Philadelphia do not have any criticism blended with the encouragement of their messages.

Pergamon, farther up the coast and a bit inland, although settled by Greeks in the 8th century BC, did not come into prominence until after Alexander. Its last king, Attalus, lacking a successor to his liking, had bequeathed his kingdom to Rome at his death in 133 BC. It was in dispute for several centuries, but under Roman rule, it was considered a “free city”, with attendant privileges. Known for an elaborate temple to Zeus, this is probably the source of its designation as the residence of Satan (13). The famed physician, Galen, practiced there, as well.

13 refers to intense persecution, but 14 and 15 speak of people who, for financial (Balaam) or social (Nicolaitan) reasons, compromised their loyalty, and conformed to societal demands, in both cases, forsaking the Word. The white stone indicates membership in the “in-group” -- the secrecy necessitated by the persecution. Remember the identification of the “sword” with the “Word” (Eph.6:17).

Thyatira, south and east, was on the border between Lydia and Mysia. It was famous for the indigo trade. Lydia, the dealer in purple goods who hosted Paul in Philippi, was from Thyatira. They are commended (18) for their love, faithfulness, justice, and endurance, but scolded for tolerating “Jezebel”-- a label for women that entice people into idolatry. Those who ally themselves with such people, court destruction. “Studying the enemy” is not wise. Modern “teachers” who advise otherwise are ignorant of the Word of Jesus, and should not be heeded.

24 Those who have not followed her teaching are simply instructed to hold fast.

26 Victory is defined as following Jesus' instructions “until the end.” Those who heed, are promised authority. The “morning star” is used in reference to Jesus himself (22:16).

REVELATION 3

Sardis is a bit farther south. It also dates from antiquity, before 800 BC, and was home to Croesus, of storied wealth (6th century BC). Its citizens were still wealthy, and worldly-wise. They were traders, and believed to have been the first to produce coins of guaranteed value.

1 John intimates that they have a “megachurch” reputation, but no genuine life. They, unlike any of the rest except Laodicea, receive no commendation at all. Wealth and prosperity simply are not values that the Lord approves.

2-3 They are warned to wake up and pay attention.

4 The few who have remained faithful will be preserved, and (5) acknowledged by the Lord.

Philadelphia had also been ruled by the kings of Pergamon, and consequently “willed” to Rome. All that remains of the Christian community there are a few pillars from a 4th century church, with the remains of 11th century frescoes.

7 – Jesus here offers them an opened door, which no one can lock. (8) Conceding that they have little power, he commends their refusal to disown him. They receive no criticism – just the admonition to hang on. (9) The opposition at this time must have come from the Jewish community: Jesus promises that even these will be made to acknowledge his love for those who are faithful. They are also promised safety in the coming trouble.

12 – It is ironic that the victors are to be made “a column in the temple” -- that's all that is left in Philadelphia. The building itself is gone. Actually none of these places, sadly, bears evidence of a present-day presence of believers. The guides of our tour spoke only of members of the Eastern hierarchy, and oddities of doctrine. They apparently had seen no “demonstration project” of the power of God. We had to wonder what went wrong.

Laodicea was part of a triangle with Colossae and Hierapolis. Located, like so many of the others, on the busy trade route to the east, they experienced a wide variety of cultural and religious influences, and enjoyed great prosperity. This probably contributed to their easygoing attitude, which is sharply critiqued.

15-16 The most fascinating thing we learned about Laodicea came from Pamukkale, beside ancient Hierapolis. Water from the “healing” hot springs at Pamukkale was transported by aqueduct to the nearby cities, a distance of about seven miles, so that when it arrived, it was “neither cold nor hot” and fit only to spit out! Their own likely complaints about their water supply are quoted to critique their behavior.

17 They boasted of their wealth, ignorant of its transience.

18-19 Jesus offers them true wealth and healing, in contrast to what they have been trusting. Discipline is evidence of his loving concern.

20-21 Being together with Jesus is the ultimate privilege – and available still, if the choice is made.

The refrain at the end of each of these messages is of the utmost importance in understanding. “The person with ears must listen to what the Spirit is saying (*present tense*) to the churches!” This opens the relevance of the words to every situation and age and culture. And do not forget that the address is “to the churches” -- not to individuals. That speaking continues, and the message is contemporary.

These observations were greatly enhanced when we had the privilege in March 2006 to visit Turkey for the total solar eclipse. The tour included Ephesus, Pergamon, Philadelphia, and Hierapolis, and passed near the others. Our guide was well-versed in history, and respectful of Christian faith, although not committed to any. His perspective was enormously helpful in understanding cultures, both ancient and modern. Many thanks are due to Ozgur Erdogan.

REVELATION 4

1-- Now the invitation is to a glimpse of what will happen “after these things” (*meta tauta*). That is about as ambiguous, as to time, as it's possible to be. After the fulfillment of all that goes before? The invitation is also an echo of Jesus' frequent “Come and see” recorded in John's gospel. The invitation was always to *investigate* – not blindly to “accept” any propositions.

2-- The Holy Spirit takes over, and there follows a vision of glorious praise. That always goes together.

The details are vivid, but the effect is that the scene is beyond description. John sounds like he is running out of vocabulary. *Homoios* is a part of every description – used of things that are similar, or “resembling” something else – a term used in geometry, or construction.

3-6 – The identification of the precious stones is sketchy, and subject to debate, but beauty and value are constant. The “elders” or “old men” are not identified (except by commentators!). The sound effects denote power. The lampstands, earlier identified with the churches (1:20), are now labeled the “seven spirits of God” -- and unexplained.

6-8 – The animals have likewise provoked enormous speculation. Commentators identify them with the gospel writers, but John does not. They resemble the creatures called “cherubim” in Isaiah, but not exactly. They could symbolize different characteristics or elements of creation that become subservient to God, or things that he is bringing to an end (lion – aggression, calf – sacrifice, human – human effort, eagle – the best of “soaring” speculation): but that too is conjecture. Wings could refer to mobility, and eyes to God's omniscience, but none of that is the focus. It is their purpose and activity that matters.

8-11 Constant praise and worship is the occupation of both animals and elders. “The one who is alive forever” (Jesus) is worshiped here simply as the creator of all things, which exist by and for his will and pleasure (see also Colossians 1:16-17). Can we do less?

REVELATION 5

1-4 At this point, nobody knows the contents of the “book” in question. The word is *biblios*, but the reference is probably to a scroll, since it is described as “written on the inside and on the back”, and sealed – a common practice for scrolls. No one anywhere is “worthy” (*axios*) to open it. This is the same word used in 4:11, ascribing “worthiness” of all praise, to Jesus. It refers to being deserving, to rank or high value.

5 – Here, Jesus is identified with the Jewish messianic tradition. But with a stark contrast. Where a “lion's” victory is proclaimed, a “little lamb” (*arnion*) appears. (6) There has been an enormous paradigm change. Not only is it a “little lamb”, but it has been beat-up-on. The eyes are identified – the horns are not. Eyes usually refer to God's omniscience, and horns to power.

8-10 – Now there is a “new song” for the New Creation. And it is far more specific, directed to the praise of the Lamb. The incense of worship is the prayers of his people. Here the “worthiness” is also more specific: it is attributed to the giving of his life to “buy” (as in the payment of a ransom) people from the whole earth, for God. The creation of the Kingdom, not here the world, is the impetus to praise (10), and *all* of these mentioned have been made priests for God. The priesthood and the ruling refers to *all redeemed people!*

11-14 This recognition sets off universal choruses of praise. “Worthy is the Lamb!” Not only those who are already in his actual presence (11), but (13) every created thing everywhere, joins in the praise.

Every year, when we sing these words in the Messiah chorus, I long for the Lord to come and take a bow! It would be a lovely entrance line! All there is for anyone to do at that time, is fall down and worship!

This casts a fascinating light on the classical “lion and lamb” tradition. It has been adopted by peace advocates as a symbol, for a long time, and as one of them, I have carried a little stuffed lion and lamb in my car for years. I always thought the figure came from Isaiah, but upon looking for the reference when questioned, I was surprised to discover that he wrote about a *wolf* and a lamb (11:6 and 65:25). The lion is with a calf in 11:6, and is just “eating straw” in the latter reference, with nobody to cuddle up to. It falls to John, here, to combine the lion and the lamb – not as “buddies”, but as one and the same! It is a much more far-reaching figure than just the delightful prospect of friendly critters.

In the Pentateuch, both Judah (Gen.49:9) and Dan (Deut.33:22) are described as lions – referring to their aggressive characteristics. But even more surprising, the phrase “the Lion of the Tribe of Judah” does not appear in the Old Testament at all! And this is the only New Testament reference! Isaiah speaks of “the root of Jesse” -- David's father, but the phrase “root of David” does not appear either. Both terms are unique to this passage.

Clearly, this scene describes a massive change of paradigm. The Lion is represented as being victorious, but who shows up? “A little lamb”! *Arnion* contains a diminutive suffix. The definitions of power and strength have been radically revised. It is the abused and battered Lamb that has redeemed a population for the Kingdom.

We used to delight in watching new lambs playing “king-of-the-hill” over the backs of their indulgent mothers in the pasture. *This* lamb is dancing over the back of the lion! He fears no predator, having rightly inherited “power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing!”

With all the other animals, “AMEN!” and with the elders, fall down and worship!

REVELATION 6

We are still not told the contents of the “book”. It is not opened, as the seals are removed one by one. Neither are we told the source of the things that “were given” to the riders of the horses. The animals tell them to “Come!” -- but is that a command, or permission?

1-8 These are commonly assumed to symbolize conquest, war, famine, and plague, although the summary at the end of v.8 differs slightly, and includes depredation by wild animals. None of them is unique to “end times”, but all are sad and constant realities in the world.

9-11 The sufferings and impatience of those who have been martyred is acknowledged. Living or not, all are waiting eagerly for justice. This will continue until their number is complete.

12-15 Speculation of whether this is a natural or supernatural event is futile. Volcanic or atomic explosions both cause similar symptoms.

15-17 Notice that it is the *powerful* of the world who are in panic – at least at the top of the list – although “every slave and free person” is also seeking shelter. One could say, they refused to recognize their commonality, but are finally forced by disaster to realize it. It is the powerful who attribute the disaster to “the Lamb's anger” -- not the Lamb himself, nor his people. The quotation of v.16 comes from Luke 23:30, which in turn quotes Hosea 10:8. In both cases, it is the lament of people who had refused to follow God's instructions.

REVELATION 7

This is an interlude.

Much is made of the 144,000 figure. I do not pretend to be able to sort it out. But notice a few things that have to be figured into the mix:

– They are from the tribes of Israel – of which there were twelve.

– “Thousand” (*chiliades*) or perhaps *myriad* if it is interpreted as 10,000 instead of “countless numbers”, is as high as people commonly counted. There is probably some signification of completion involved here. (cf. Rom.11:25-31?)

– It is immediately followed by the scene of a crowd “impossible to count”, from all over the world -- “from every nation and tribe and people and tongue”, with palms (signifying freedom and/or victory), singing praises and offering worship.

13-17 This crowd is described as having weathered “great troubles” because of their identification with the Lamb. This is the ultimate in-group. A grand and glorious “camp meeting” is in view.

You might expect *katoikesei* – settling down – finally – in v.15, but no, they are still “camping” (*skenoisei*). But at least this is “luxury camping”, with no hunger, thirst, or sunburn! (16). The Lamb is the shepherd – the tour guide – to the Living Water he had promised (John 4), and God himself is the drier of tears.

Note that to this point, this is the **only use** of the future tense. It is a glorious contrast to the terror of 6:15-16. These contrasts of condition are the hallmark refrains of the message. For those who are waiting, it is all joy and praise.

REVELATION 8

1-- Quietness – in contrast to the jubilant praise. It is amusing that it can only last half an hour!

“The trumpets”. Commentators have argued whether this section should be viewed as parallel or subsequent to the previous set of disasters. I choose not to take sides in that fight, as there is no internal evidence either way.

Whereas the incidents related to the opening of the seals appear to be human events, for the most part, these look mightily like environmental disasters. Perhaps they warn of the results of the former troubles. It is certainly possible to see in the destruction of land, water, and atmosphere (the darkness), some very contemporary problems. At the same time, it must be remembered that this is not really new. All the perpetrators of minute analyses of these happenings would do well to remember Jesus' statement (Mt.24 and Lk.17) that from the world's perspective, everything is “business as usual” until God finally says “Enough.” The statement in each case that one third of the earth is affected probably has significance – perhaps that “the end is not yet”?

REVELATION 9

1-12 Clearly, these locusts are no ordinary bugs! They do not kill, and they do not touch God's people. They are governed by the Destroyer, and the time of their influence is limited. They have been compared to many man-made devices, but here they seem supernatural.

13-19 This time it is people who are killed. The reference to “this third plague” is puzzling – where did they start counting? It seems like there had been more than that.

The cavalry is huge, and their mounts fearsome. “Fire, smoke, and sulfur” have understandably been related to gunfire, but I hesitate to accept the flights of fancy that make much of details, since one never knows where to stop, and often misses the real import of the message.

20-21 The real burden of this section lies here: an effort to get people to change their ways. The idolatry, expressed in “murders, sorcery, perversion, and thievery”, persists.

The lengths to which God will go, to get people to accept his deliverance, are amazing. The effort, remember, is to *save*, not to destroy. These statements are of deep sadness and disappointment, not gloating. Modern “expositors” would do well to copy the Lord's attitude.

In the early 21st century, one cannot help noting the reference to the Euphrates, and the chaos there, occasioned by the nations of the world's greed for oil. However, it must be remembered that the area has been a scene of conflict for all of recorded history – at least 10,000 years! -- so don't get carried away by the professional world-enders!

REVELATION 10

The “trumpet series” also takes a break before the seventh event.

3-4 The message of the “thunder” is not communicated.

6 – The abolition of time is announced. That should be enough to give the lie to orchestrations by men.

7 – This is the second use of the future tense. This is significant. Everything up to this point has been cast in the past or present, except the Lamb's eventual role as Shepherd (7:15-17).

“God's mystery”, defined many times as the forming of his Kingdom out of people from all over the world, “**will be brought to completion**”!

8-11 The “little book” (v.2) is not sealed, but *open*. However, it is not identified with the former book. Its contents, likewise, are not revealed, but it clearly has to do with John's commission to prophesy -- “speak for God” -- again.

I identify strongly with this little book. In my New Testament work, I am often overwhelmed with the beauty – the “sweetness” -- of the Kingdom the Lord describes. How could anyone *not* be attracted to such relationships? Yet “bitterness” comes right along with it. Where are the people who are willing to give it a try? And what's the point of perceiving the beauty, when nearly everyone who claims to belong to the Lord refuses even to consider it as a practical possibility? As this contrast becomes stronger with the years, I despair of ever finding help and encouragement in faithfulness! Lord, have mercy!

REVELATION 11

1-2 The standard by which the temple (the church Body) must be measured, is given by God. It is not subject to any worldly standard of measurement.

This is often blended by commentators with a similar incident reported by Ezekiel (ch. 40). Ezekiel only watches while the messenger does the measuring, and he records in great detail. This scene is *different*. The measuring is entrusted to John, and is restricted to the temple itself, and the worshipers inside. This is in harmony with Paul's admonition in I Cor. 5. It is not ours to try to whip those **outside** into line. But we *are* responsible for those who claim to be *inside*.

The time segments mentioned here have been variously interpreted – all, I believe, fancifully. I choose not to add to the confusion.

3-6 The episode of “the witnesses” (martyrs) is enigmatic. There are two, and they are given significant power (*exousian* -- authority). They have powers of self-defense until the time of their service is over, but it is *not human power*. Note the shift to future tense.

7-11 Their work will be finished (*telesosin* – completed) before they are conquered by the power of evil. But the apparent triumph of evil is not permanent. The world's celebration is cut short by their resurrection, accomplished by the “spirit of life from God.”

12-13 They are called to heaven in the sight of their opponents. The ensuing earthquake finally gets the attention of the onlookers.

15-19 The final trumpet blast heralds another explosion of praise, acknowledging the true King! Opposing powers are destroyed, as are “those who have been destroying the earth” (18).

God's people, the citizens of his Kingdom, have nothing more to do than to celebrate, and honor their King!

REVELATION 12

1-6 This woman has been variously identified as the nation of Israel, the virgin Mary, and the faithful church, among other suggestions. The dragon is identified as either the Roman empire, Satan, or the rulers of whatever political entity the writer views as the enemy of faithfulness. I do not consider this a fruitful argument. The point is found in v.6 – the woman, representative in some sense of God's people, is protected and nourished, even in the desert, during a period of severe persecution (of which, historically, there have been many – and several during the first century of that approximate duration.) This protection is afforded despite the fact that some are caused to fall (4) by the prevalence of evil.

7-9 Elaborate mythologies have been created out of the scant information in this reference, to which the only other New Testament reference is Jesus' passing comment, at the time of his apostles' return from their mission recorded in Luke 10:18. He does not say when this took place.

10-12 John is told that this expulsion signified the arrival of the Kingdom, the Accuser having been deposed by the faithful testimony of “our brothers”, even in death. Even now, the power of evil is strictly limited “He knows that his time is short.”

13-18 Even though defeated, the dragon remains active on earth. He is apparently identified with the serpent of Genesis, a deceptive opponent of the faithful. (17) “The rest of (the woman's) offspring” are identified as “those who keep God's commands and have the witness of Jesus.” Even the forces of nature are now called upon for the protection of those faithful ones. There have never been promises that the people of God will be immune to either the vicissitudes of life or the perils of persecution – only the assurance of the presence of the Spirit and his enablement to endure faithfully.

REVELATION 13

1-4 It is generally agreed that the original reference of this animal was the Roman Empire, widely viewed by both Christians and Jews as inspired and empowered by the forces of evil. Of course, through subsequent centuries, it has been identified with all manner of repressive regimes, and maybe that's ok, as long as it remains an "equal opportunity" label, and is applied to *any and every* political entity that threatens or opposes faithfulness. Note that all the animals represented are predators, and this "beast" is worshiped because everyone is afraid to do anything else. Fear is the weapon of evil, not of the gracious God.

5-6 The charge of "blasphemy" applies equally well to *any* nation, leader, or other entity that demands greater loyalty than what is owed to God.

7-10 Their power and authority is real, and pervasive. And it is widely worshiped, by those who lack or deny a higher loyalty. Even the faithful are "conquered". Captivity and execution are assumed. "Endurance and faithfulness" are tested to the extreme. God's people can only endure all this with determined faithfulness. Notice the interplay of singular and plural. It seems that even the essential support of the brotherhood will not always be available.

11-15 The second animal is **more dangerous than the first, because it looks like a lamb**. Posing as a representative of the church, it leads people into idolatry, and thereby into the worship of the first beast. It is not hard to see this as the deceptiveness of nationalistic "religion" -- in *any* country or age-- and the persecution that comes to any who refuse its domination.

16-17 The powers of the world have a *right* to demand obedience in exchange for the right to participate in their system. The people of God need to find ways to operate *outside* that system. Where are the faithful who will develop an alternative?

REVELATION 14

1-5 Whether or not these are identified with the group from Israel in chapter 7 is not clear. Their song of praise is not quoted, either. Their most outstanding qualification is that "They follow the Lamb wherever he goes."

It is interesting (and commendable) that the commentators of the Catholic *New American Bible* connect the moral purity and "virginity" of v.4 with never having succumbed to idolatry, and not with their doctrine of celibacy.

6-13 seems to be a sort of "last chance" scenario. It includes:

7-- a call to worship and glorify God

8 – announcement of the fall of Babylon (elaborated in chapter 18)

9-11 – warning against false worship

But the message to God's people is one of encouragement:

12 – following God's instructions as Jesus did

13 – rest for "those who die in the Lord from now on." Assurance that their deeds are not forgotten.

14-19 Both the grain field and the vineyard are harvested. There's a discrepancy here in the vineyard figure. Always before it has represented God's people, but here the connection is to "wrath" – *thumos*, not *orge*. This needs to be explored. "Anger" is indeed one meaning, but more common is the life vs. breath, spirit vs. strength, or ideas of desire or inclination, mind, temper, or will (Liddell/Scott). Verse 10 uses *orge* so there must be some reason for the change. Normally, *thumos* refers to a more transient anger, and *orge* to a settled, constant opposition, but that would not fit here at all. The implication needs the careful study of a disciplined brotherhood.

It would be contrary to the tenor of the whole Revelation – indeed, the whole New Testament – to see in this picture a vindictive and vengeful God. Something – and I do not know what – is improperly understood. It is poor hermeneutics to alter an entire message because of one isolated passage.

REVELATION 15

1-4 The messengers carrying the "last plagues" are greeted by the faithful with another song of *praise!*

(3) It is identified as "the song of Moses" and "of the Lamb" -- both genitive cases without preposition. Moses is identified with songs on several occasions: Ex.15:1 celebrating the deliverance of Israel and the destruction of the pursuing Egyptians; Deut.31:19 where shortly before his death, he is instructed to teach the people a song recounting their history; and Deut.32:44 which is also a part of his farewell.

In each case the song makes reference to God's deliverance, but none of them are directly quoted, although the themes are certainly parallel. Unlike the earlier understanding, however, this one speaks of "*all nations*" coming to worship, because they see the Lord's justice. This, of course, was the work of the Lamb. His justice becomes so obvious as to be universally acknowledged.

The genitive cases, therefore, probably refer to the source (inspiration) or content of the song, rather than as a simple possessive. We have only one reference to Jesus singing – as his group left the upper room after their last meal together.

5-8 The revealing of the plagues in this context, then, must be seen as a demonstration of God's justice. Having been given every possible chance to choose his ways (14:6-13), there is only one just outcome for those who continue to refuse. At this point (8) – it does not say exactly when – the “temple”, previously identified with God's dwelling with his people, is closed to further entry, until the end of the plagues.

REVELATION 16

1 – *Thumos* is used here also, as in 14:19. This needs illumination. The target of all these “woes” is those who have chosen to worship the animal that opposes God, and actively persecutes his people (6).

7 – The source of the voice from the altar is not identified, but it acknowledges the justice of God.

8-9 – The affected people, however, curse God for their suffering. v.9 implies that they could have still changed sides, if they were willing.

10-11 – They still blame God and refuse to change.

12-16 – ***Unclean spirits are behind the alliances preparing for war!*** How many “Christian” politicians recognize that fact? The spirits come from the dragon, the evil animal, and his prophet. And the intended enemy is not any nation or people, but God himself.

Despite many convoluted theses to the contrary, this is the *only* appearance of the word “Armageddon” in Scripture. Even if it is correct to connect it with Megiddo, where Josiah the king arrogantly met his fate (II Chron.35:22), *there are no other references.*

17 -- “It has happened!” is a perfect tense. Effects will be felt in the present and future, but the event has already occurred.

17-21 – The devastating earthquake and hail, also, inspire nothing but cursing. It is abundantly clear that these individuals have passed beyond the ability for repentance. In that light, though, the admonition in v.15 implying that there are still faithful people around is very puzzling.

19 -- “The great city” and “Babylon” have both been used in reference both to Rome and to the unfaithful element of Jerusalem. It is not sorted here. Both are devastated.

Perhaps by this time it is neither possible nor necessary to distinguish between civil and religious powers that have aligned themselves in opposition to God and his people.

REVELATION 17

1-6 The “harlot” is here identified with Babylon – the charges of adultery/idolatry (a frequent combination in both the Old and New Testaments), and of the slaughter of God's people, could be applied to either city. The flaunting of riches would lean toward Rome this time, but one cannot rule out the possibility that it was also intended to refer to *any* entity that behaves as described.

7-8 The seeming “reincarnation” of the animal could lend weight to the possibility of multiple specific references.

9-13 All these potentates have a single purpose: to allow the wild animal to use their power in opposition to the Lamb. So really, specific ID's are irrelevant. We need only to look at the demonstrations of their intentions, to know which so-called “world leaders” fall into that category.

14 – But the Lamb wins! Interestingly, for two reasons: because of who he *is* – King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and because of the faithfulness of his chosen companions! An awesome responsibility!

15-18 must refer to these forces of evil turning against one another, as eventually, they all do.

v.17 is another strange one: “*God* put it into their hearts?”

The supremacy of these oppressive powers, though it seems overwhelming, is *limited*, and will end when the words (*logoi* is plural, and so must refer to his purposes and messages, not to Jesus) of God are “complete” (*telesthesontai*), or “fully accomplished.”

18 -- “The woman”, also, may refer to civic or religious dominance – or both.

REVELATION 18

The demise of Babylon

This announcement results in mourning for the people of the world, and rejoicing for Kingdom folks.

How do we react to an economic crash? This may reveal a lot about which side we are cheering for.

1-3 Luxury and perversion are inextricably intertwined. (3) No “nation” is exempt from this judgment. This alone should

be enough to define our allegiance. (2) Their chosen “refuge” becomes their prison.

4-8 Here luxury is paired with injustice. No surprise there. Self-glorification and indifference to the suffering of people are the indictment.

9-10 Fear and mourning are the reaction of those who shared in her excess.

11-13 Economic collapse hits those that deal in *luxury*. Very few “necessities” are on this list. Grain, maybe, and a few livestock. 14 is the key: “the fruits of your selfish passions” are what is lost.

15-19 There's no sympathy from those who had made a profit from the luxury trade – only feeling sorry for themselves, and their loss of revenue. Note that in verses 10, 15, and 17 the mourners are “standing far off” or “at a great distance.” But no one offers support; there is no *koinonia*.

20 – But God's people are invited to **celebrate!** It is “for you all” that the judgment has come. Another reading is equally valid: “God has exacted judgment on *her* judgment of *you all!*” Compare Lk.21:25-28.

Many of Jeremiah's charges are repeated here (7,16,25), as are those of other prophets. The reasons for the destruction are enumerated (23,24): the dominance of their luxury merchants, their leading other nations astray by “sorceries” (or, to transliterate, “pharmacology”!), and the slaughter of faithful people.

22 and 23 list celebrative activities of daily life – these too will no longer be found there. This is the end result of injustice.

REVELATION 19

1-5 The faithful praise God's justice in the destruction of “Babylon”, who “polluted the earth” and “shed the blood of his people.” Connected? There is ample place for both charges today. And “those who respect him” (5) will praise the evidence of his justice.

5-8 A combination of the coronation of the King and the wedding of the Lamb.

Notice that (7) the Bride has “prepared *herself*” (*heauten*) – this is *active*, not passive. It is finished now, but the aorist is in the active voice. Even her festal garments, which “are given” (passive), are composed of the “just deeds” (*behavior*) of God's people.

9-10 The messenger flatly rejects worship, even though delivering a message directly from God! How sad that so few follow his example!

11-16 This is the *only* “just war.” Carrying the name “The Word of God”, this can only be Jesus. The Word is elsewhere spoken-of as a sword, as well (Eph.6:17, Heb.4:12, Rev.1:16 and 2:16) – the *only legitimate offensive weapon*. Whatever the particulars, the King and Lord are finally recognized.

17-21 The worldly alliances gather, but there is no real battle. Their organizers are destroyed. There is repeated identification of the sword with the Word. I do not pretend to analyze how the rest of the image fits together!

REVELATION 20

1-3 Here, the dragon/serpent/devil/Satan are all identified together, and temporarily prevented from their deception.

4-6 These are people who were martyred for their faithfulness. Who or what they rule *over* is not stated. Attempts to fill in the blanks can only be pure fiction.

Remember that throughout Scripture, a thousand years signifies a long, but limited, time. In most cases, nobody is counting.

7-10 speaks of another (?) military assembly. Whether these (19:14-20 and 20:7-10) are one event or two, is not clear. The attack on the “fortress” or “city” of God's people, usually referencing the church, has been going on for a long time. Again this time, there is no war. The opponents are consumed by an act of God.

11-15 Earth and heaven (?) fled this scene?

12 – Do these books include the one the Lamb unsealed at the beginning? We never learned its contents. Some connect it with the “Book of Life”, but the text does not. No one knows. There is no internal evidence. The Book of Life is the final criterion of judgment. The only information we have about the books is the record of people's deeds. The scene Jesus describes in Mt.25 concurs.

REVELATION 21

The consummation of the New Creation.

1-4 Everything is new. Death, grief, and pain no longer exist, but we are all still camping! (*he skene tou theou*) – God's tent – is among us, but he is still on the move.

5-8 Jesus has finally assumed his throne, and hands out the “living water” he had promised. The list of those who are excluded is pretty explicit, and the mix gives pause. It is far too easy to forget that *none* of these inherit the Kingdom. We

don't get to edit the list. The use of "son" in v.7 is *essential*. Please refer to the discussion in Galatians 3:26. Inheritance is in view here as well.

9-14 The "holy city" -- the Bride -- "comes down *out of heaven*", presumably to the re-created earth. Why, then, all the hype about "going to heaven?" Do you really want to go anywhere else, if the Lord's celebration is on earth?

Gates face in all directions. The tribes were originally supposed to be the means by which the world would be included. Now their names adorn the gates (or is it the *messengers* that carry their names?) It is not clear from the statement who "them" refers to -- "name" and "gate" are both neuter nouns.

The foundations of the walls carry the apostles' names. I am curious which ones!

15-21 The description communicates simply dazzling beauty and glory.

22-27 No temple is needed, and no artificial light. There is no need for symbols or shadows. The real thing is available!

24 – Where do these nations/Gentiles, kings, etc. come from? Some must not have been among the overtly opponent groups that met destruction. The city is open to all, but to nothing unclean.

REVELATION 22

Living water – the tree of life – things intended for God's people from the beginning. (2) The healing leaves of the tree must have been involved in the presence of the nations in 21:24.

The only thing that matters is that we will see him and live in his light.

8 – Another messenger refuses worship.

10-11 People have sorted *themselves* into these categories: don't blame God!

17 – The invitation is open to whoever wants to come!

John must have been aware, or have been warned, how people in years (or centuries) to come would try to revise and manipulate what he had written. His warning (18-19) is the ultimate copyright, and not to be taken lightly.

I will conclude with a simple assent to his prayer: "Come, Lord Jesus!"

AMEN!!!

Appendix

**Grammatical notes to aid in your understanding
of the language**

DECLENSION OF NOUNS

As in German, Latin, and many other languages, Greek nouns have varying forms, depending on their function in a sentence. These forms are called "cases", and the list of all the forms in which a given noun may be found is called the "declension" or "inflection". Each noun also has masculine, feminine, or neuter "gender". This is simply the form of the word: it has nothing to do with actual fact (a word, for example, is neither male nor female, but the *form* of the word is masculine.) Specific endings are attached to the stem of each noun to denote its *case*, *number* (singular or plural), and *gender*. There are many different patterns or declensions: these are summarized in the front of your Analytical Lexicon. Adjectives and pronouns follow similar patterns, and must always match, or "agree", with the form of the noun to which they refer. Adjectives and pronouns are also summarized in the front of the Lexicon.

The definite article ("the"), which frequently, but not always, appears with a word, is always regular in form, and can give you a clue to the case, number, and gender of the word. It will be to your advantage if you learn to recognize these.

	Singular			Plural		
	Masc.	Fem.	Neut.	Masc,	Fem.	Neut.
Nom.	ο	η	το	οι	αι	τα
Gen.	του	της	του	των	των	των
Dat.	τω	τη	τω	τοις	ταις	τοις
Acc.	τον	την	το	τους	τας	τα

Examples of the most common (and easiest to recognize) declensions are given below. Remember, there are many exceptions. You will likely get most of this information from your analytical lexicon in the beginning.

ο φιλος the friend

ο φιλος	οι φιλοι
του φιλου	των φιλων
τω φιλω	τοις φιλοις
τον φιλον	τους φιλους

η γραφη the scripture

η γραφη	αι γραφαι
της γραφης	των γραφων
τη γραφη	ταις γραφαις
την γραφην	τας γραφας

το δωρον the gift

το δωρον	τα δωρα
του δωρου	των δωρων
τω δωρω	τοις δωροις
το δωρον	τα δωρα

MOST BASIC USES OF CASES

In each case, the most common use is the first listed. The rest are not in any particular order, but each may be considered as a possibility. Notice that most *do not* use a Greek preposition, though in English, a prepositional phrase or even a clause may be needed to convey the meaning. We will look at New Testament examples of each of these. Remember that the translator's choice will be governed in part by what he *thinks* is intended, but these choices should *always* be open to discussion and challenge.

NOMINATIVE: invariably the subject or a predicate noun.

GENITIVE: "of"

1. possession. Eph.1:1 χριστου ιησου; θεου
2. source. Heb.1:3, Col.1:5 της δυναμεως ; του ευαγγελιου
3. price or value. Ac.19:19, Ac.5:8 αργυριου ; τοσουτου
4. material or content. ("made of") Col.1:5 της αληθειας
5. comparison. Lk. 7:26 περισσοτερον προφητου
6. partitive. Jn.12:4 εις των μαθητων
7. measure of space or time. Eph. 1:10 του πληρωματος των καιρων
8. separation. Mt. 13:49 εκ μεσου των δικαιων
9. with certain prepositions

DATIVE: "to, with, by"

1. indirect object. Eph. 1:1 τοις αγιοις
2. reference or agency. Eph. 1:13 τω πνευματιτω αγιω
3. manner or with respect to. Ac. 7:60; Rom. 12:10,11 φωνη μεγαλη ; τιμη
4. means. (how something happens) Eph.2:8 τη χαριτι
5. cause. (why it happens) Eph. 2:1 τοις παραπτωμασιν
6. with adjectives of friendly or hostile association. Ac.6:9 τω Στεφανω, Ac.7:60 αυτοις
7. degree of difference. Heb. 1:4 τοσουτω
8. with certain prepositions -- idea of location. Static, not dynamic.
9. location: time (Lk.24:1 τη μια) or place (Jn.19:2 τη κεφαλη)

ACCUSATIVE; "for, through, into"

1. direct object. Eph.1:13 τον λογον
2. subject of an infinitive (purpose construction). Eph. 1:4 ειναι ημας
3. subject in indirect discourse. Mt. 28:20 διδασκοντες αυτους
4. extent of space or duration of time. Mt. 12:40 τρεις ημερας , Lk.24:13 σταδιους εξηκοντα
5. With certain prepositions – idea of direction toward, or purpose

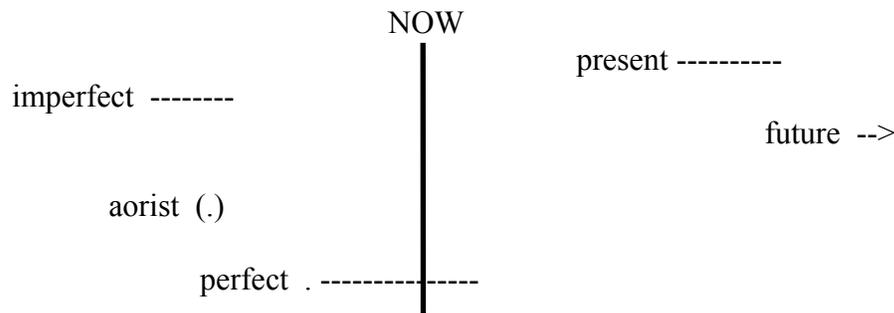
CONJUGATIONS OF VERBS

The many forms of Greek verbs are summarized in the front of your Analytical Lexicon. In a single word, a verb can provide you with a tremendous amount of information. You will often need to consult the Analytical Lexicon the stem from which a given form is derived. Endings are used to denote person, number, tense, voice, and mood.

PERSON may be viewed as expressing the distance from the speaker: thus, first person, (the speaker) "I", or plural " we"; second person, (the one spoken to) "you"*; third person, (the one spoken about) "he, she, it, they." No separate word is required for the subject; the subject is resident in the form of the verb. If the subject is expressed, it is for emphasis. * English has a problem here, as we have no "official" plural form of "you". This presents serious translation problems.

NUMBER refers to whether the subject is singular or plural.

TENSE in Greek denotes more frequently the *type* of action, rather than its *time*. There is some flavor of time in ordinary narrative, but not as strongly as the duration. Some students have found this chart helpful.



Present implies continuous, or progressive action.

Imperfect implies continuous action no longer taking place.

Future (the familiar one!) implies anticipated action.

Aorist implies a punctiliar, one-time action, often, but not necessarily past. It is a snapshot, not a motion picture. It is accomplished, finished.

Perfect implies action that began in the past, but either the action itself or at least its effect, continues to the present and perhaps beyond.

Pluperfect, seldom used in the NT, is the same type of idea as the perfect, but entirely in the past.

As in most languages, the verb "to be" is irregular, and lacks many of these forms.

FURTHER NOTES ON VERBS

VOICE tells us the involvement of the subject in the action of the sentence. In English, we have only two: active, and passive. In Greek there are three.

Active: the subject is the doer of the action. "He hit the ball."

Passive: the subject is acted upon. "The ball was hit."

Middle: the subject both acts and is affected by the action. "I take a bath."

Some languages call this "reflexive."

Some verbs have only middle forms. These are called "deponent".

Some tenses may not occur in these deponent verbs.

MOOD has nothing to do with whether you "had a nice day". It is a broader classification, and all moods also have tense and voice.

INDICATIVE mood is used for any simple narrative or statement.

SUBJUNCTIVE mood, requiring different forms, is often connected with purpose constructions, prohibitions, or exhortations.

OPTATIVE mood is used for statements of past purpose, potential, a wish, or some conditional statements.

INFINITIVE is a verb form that is used similarly to a noun. It may be the object of a verb, the subject in an indirect quote, the subject of a sentence, or express a probable result. If it has a subject of its own, that subject is usually accusative in form.

IMPERATIVES, or commands, are very important to understand. Here more than anywhere else, the tense indicates not time, but the *type* of action expected. Imperatives may be present or aorist; indicating continuous or single acts. In English, we expect an imperative to have an implied subject, the second person, "you." In Greek they may be either second or third person. the third person imperative is difficult to translate. It is often rendered "Let it be....." but that is really far too weak. It is a command, not a request. No one has done this well -- help work on it!

PARTICIPLES are extremely common in New Testament writings. They have adjective endings on the verb stem, and may be used as simple modifiers, or as an entire clause. They may also be a part of a clause. It is especially important here, too, to distinguish between the tenses. As with imperatives and infinitives, tense bears no relation to time, but rather to the type of action. Participles will also have middle and passive forms.

PREPOSITIONS

Prepositions in the Greek language can be very significant. Some of them always have their object in the same case. Others are translated differently, depending on the case of their object. They may also appear as prefixes, altering the meaning of a noun or verb. This list is by no means complete: these are simply some of the most common meanings of the most common prepositions. Consulting one of the major lexicons will give you a better idea of the range of possible meanings.

ανα	Acc	in, through, between, again	
αντι	Gen	against, instead of	
απο	Gen	away from	
δια	Gen	through	
δια	Acc	on account of, because of	(purpose)
εις	Acc	into, for, against	(purpose)
εκ, εξ	Gen	out of, out from	
εν	Dat	in (location)	
ενεκα	Gen	for the sake of	
επι	Gen	on top of, over (position)	
επι	Dat	by, at, on (location)	
επι	Acc	toward, against, upon (motion)	
κατα	Gen	down from, against	
κατα	Acc	according to, direction toward	
μετα	Gen	with	
μετα	Acc	after, behind	
παρα	Gen	from	
παρα	Dat	with, by, near (location)	
παρα	Acc	toward, along, beside (motion)	
περι	Gen	about, around, concerning	
περι	Acc	about or around a place	
προ	Gen	before (time)	
προς	Gen	from	
προς	Dat	near, at, beside	
προς	Acc	toward	
συν	Dat	with	
υπερ	Gen	in behalf of, instead of	
υπερ	Acc	over, beyond	
υπο	Gen	from under, by	
υπο	Dat	under, beneath (location)	
υπο	Acc	under (motion)	

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